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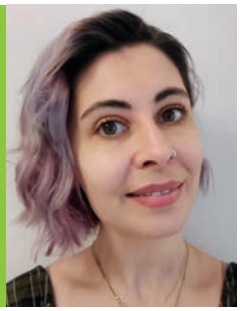


It seems that spring is slowly inching its way out from under the frost, and it's almost possible to imagine warmer days ahead. The promise of being able to get some fresh air and exercise outside without bundling up in so many layers we can barely move is a dreamy one. Conversely, the thought of heading outside with your class can sometimes feel like ripping the lid from a can of worms. But it can be both fun and fruitful, and no, you don't have to spend months planning for it. Try some of the simple yet robust ideas from Zana Wood on page 32 and see what you think. You never know, you might be a convert!

For Year 6, summer also means SATs. But don't panic just yet – these controversial assessments won't necessarily have to take over your classroom for the next few weeks; luckily for us, Sarah Farrell has shared her last-minute SATs saviours to help pupils prepare without being overwhelmed. Check them out on page 21.

Another area we're focusing on for this issue is special education needs and disabilities; the news is ablaze at the moment with dissatisfaction and questions about the UK's SEND system – and this will likely be of no surprise to those of you on the front lines. We might wish we had all the answers, but of course, we don't. What we can do, though, is share practical insight from teachers and experts who have solved some of the problems they've come up against. One such teacher is Aaron King, who shares his ideas on writing SEN plans that families and carers can actually read and understand (page 42); while Marie Difolco talks about how we can better support children with colourblindness using some basic but impactful tweaks (page 49).

As always, thank you for reading, and I hope you find plenty in these pages to inspire you.

Charley

Charley Rogers, editor
@TeachPrimaryEd1 @charleytp.bsky.social

Don't miss our next issue, available from 12th May

POWERED BY...

GARETH METCALFE
Breaks down how to help pupils to carefully read – and understand – maths word questions

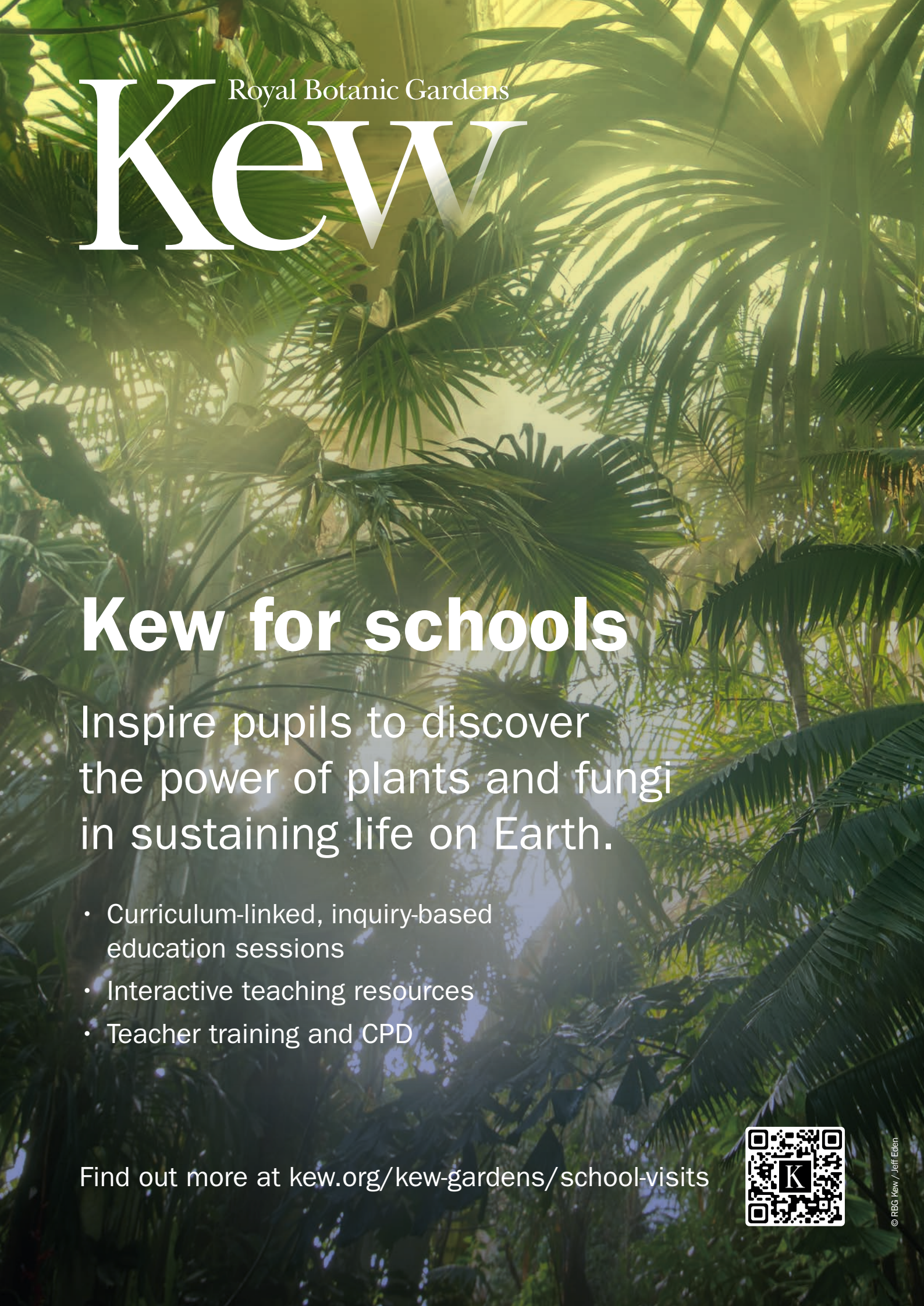
"Children can still find answering word questions in maths so difficult"
p36

CONFUCIUS MC
Explains how rap can bring Shakespeare into the 21st century, and the power of the artform

"There are crucial overlaps between rap and the work of Shakespeare"
p54

JON BIDDLE
Shares his tried-and-tested activities for teaching *The Wrong Shoes* by Tom Percival

"I hope this helps reduce the shame around poverty that many children feel"
p63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ISSUE 19.3

REGULARS

VOICES

SPECIAL SECTION

SEND SPECIAL

We're all *ears!*

We want to make sure our magazine is a brilliant resource for teachers and are always striving to improve. We love hearing from real teachers about what they liked and what they would change. Got feedback about this issue? Contact us via the details in the yellow box below – we'd love to hear from you!

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PUBLISHERS:
Joe Carter
Sam Reubin
Richard Stebbing

EDITOR:
Charley Rogers
charley.rogers@artichokehq.com

GROUP ADVERTISING MANAGERS:
Samantha Law
01206 505499
Samantha.law@artichokehq.com

Hayley Rackham
01206 505928
Hayley.rackham@artichokehq.com

ADVERTISING MANAGER:
Demi Maynard
demi.maynard@artichokehq.com
01206 505962

ACCOUNT MANAGER:
Kim Richards
kim.richards@artichokehq.com
01206 505420

ART EDITORS:
Richard Allen & Sarah Barajas

ACCOUNTS:
artichokemedialtd@integral2.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS:
subscriptions@artichokeHQ.com

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APRIL

Breaktime

News | Interviews | Ideas | Resources | Research

Listen up!

A new study from the National Literacy Trust, of over 37,000 eight to 18-year-olds, indicates that listening to audiobooks and podcasts could provide a crucial gateway into reading and reading enjoyment for many children and young people.

The findings come just months after the charity revealed that children and young people's enjoyment of reading had reached its lowest level in 19 years, with just one in three (34.6 per cent) eight to 18-year-olds saying they enjoy reading in their free time – the consequences of which could see vast numbers missing out on associated benefits for their wellbeing, confidence and academic success.

Half of pupils also said that listening to an audiobook or podcast enabled them to better understand a story or subject (48.4 per cent); made them use their imagination more than when watching videos (52.9 per cent); and helped them relax or feel better when they were stressed or anxious (52 per cent). Read the full report at **tinyurl.com/tp-LTaudio**

3 INSTANT LESSONS...
(You're welcome)

TED-ED X KAHOOT!
TED's education and youth initiative TED-Ed has joined forces with Kahoot! to host TED-Ed's popular Animations. These original animated videos are developed by leading experts, and cover topics such as the life of Rosa Parks, and how the human heart works. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-TEDkahoot**

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NATURE
'Human Nature, Human Potential', is a new animation from Understanding Humanism, ft. Alice Roberts, exploring a non- religious approach to life. Part of a wider education programme, the video supports teaching about humanism in RE. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-HUKpotential**

HELICOPTER HERO
North West Air Ambulance has created the Helicopter Hero badge to upskill children in safety and first aid. Pupils will learn about a lifesaving skill, raise awareness, and fundraise for NWAA, and then will get their very own badge and certificate. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-HeliHero**

TODAY'S TOP RESOURCES

Hone those grammar skills
Real Grammar provides you with everything you need to teach and embed all objectives from the grammar curriculum for Years 1-6. Its five-step TEACH, PRACTISE, REVISIT, APPLY, REVISE approach has been designed to support teachers to deliver quality-first lessons and ensure consistent progress for all pupils.
Visit **plazoom.com/real-grammar**

Safe in translation

In an attempt to break down language barriers, and ensure all staff have the tools and knowledge needed to uphold safeguarding principles, edtech charity LGfL – The National Grid for Learning – has commissioned translations of the Department for Education's (DFE's) statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education, Part 1, into 13 widely-spoken community languages. These free translations are now available to all schools as open-access resources. The translations include: Arabic, Bengali, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Gujarati, Polish, Portuguese (Brazilian), Punjabi, Romanian, Somali, Spanish (Latin American), Ukrainian and Urdu. All are now available to view, download, and print for free from **kcsietranslate.lgfl.net**

Mental health qualifications

Social enterprise Minds Ahead has announced the launch of a School Mental Health Qualifications Framework. The tool is designed to help education professionals find the right qualification to make a lasting impact on school mental health. With growing concerns about student and staff wellbeing, schools are searching for practical, high-quality training that equips educators with the skills and confidence to support mental health. The framework maps out a range of school mental health qualifications tailored to different school roles – from teaching staff to senior leaders – ensuring every educator can find the perfect fit for their needs and aspirations. The framework also supports career progression, allowing educators to plan their long-term career development in school mental health. For more information and to find the right school mental health qualification for you, visit **tinyurl.com/tp-MentalHealthQual**

54% of primary school children find maths the hardest subject to learn*

*Oxford University Press

Look ahead | Book ahead

EARTH DAY
Celebrate the power of nature and raise awareness of environmental concerns on 22 April, with a variety of expert (and free) resources at **tinyurl.com/tp-EarthDay25**

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK
Explore how you can support your students' wellbeing and promote adaptability, helping them to thrive. Happening from 12-18 May. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-MHAW25**

Q & A

Naomi Wilkinson

TV presenter

1. What was primary school like for you?
I was fortunate to go to a lovely primary school that nurtured our academic needs as well as our artistic and sporting abilities. I was at my happiest taking part in music lessons or rehearsing for any kind of performance.

2. Tell us about the new BBC Teach Live Lesson for Earth Day
This lesson is all about the water cycle, and is curriculum linked for KS2 science and geography. Children will solve riddles as they are challenged to put the different stages of the cycle in order while learning about the endless movement of this precious resource. We filmed this one against the beautiful backdrop of the Rainforest Biome at the Eden Project – which, can you believe, contains over 1,000 varieties of plants! It's pretty special.

3. What's one thing you think primary school children should know about the water cycle?
Hopefully, children will come away from this lesson understanding how crucial water is to our planet and feeling inspired to look after it. We'll touch on ideas to help them save water and energy at the end of the lesson – which all helps protect our planet. They could collect water in their own gardens or at school and then reuse it to water plants, wash windows, cars, or bikes – and so much more.

The BBC Earth Day Live Lesson will be broadcast at 11am on Tuesday 22 April. See bbc.in/4k7u9uC for more.

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6 ways to help pupils with feelings of jealousy

Face up to the green-eyed monster and help children work through those envious moments

1 | ENCOURAGE EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Using book characters creates safe ground in class discussions, because children's own circumstances are not the focus. Highlight moments when characters in stories have strong feelings such as jealousy, confusion or anger. Do we all agree about what the character is feeling? Create your own feelings bank as a class, and try colour coding it. We talk about *seeing red* or being *green with envy*, so find out how many of these expressions the children are familiar with and discuss them. You can also write simple poems where feelings are represented in colours, e.g. 'When I feel blue…' Emphasise that strong feelings are normal, and that we all experience them.

2 | EXPLORE JEALOUS FEELINGS

Jealousy and envy are slightly different. Envy is wanting what someone else has, whereas jealousy is worrying that what you already have will be taken away. Divide the class into small groups of four or five. Ask each child to draw a cat. Give one member of each group much better materials than the others, for example pens and coloured pencils, while the rest have scrap paper and a simple pencil. No sharing allowed. Then come back together and ask what the children felt during the task. Encourage them to describe the feelings, and then discuss them as a class.

3 | DISSECT CHARACTER CHOICES

In my middle-grade books, the main characters often doubt and compare themselves to others. In *My Life on Fire*, Ren has lost everything in a house fire. When she sees all the small precious things belonging to classmates, she feels a yawning sense of hurt inside and begins to take things and hide them. But jealousy can be very damaging. Ren knows what she is doing is wrong, and her shame grows. Ask the class to write Ren a letter or message at a key moment in the story, giving her advice on how to deal with her loss and the resultant jealous feelings.

CATH HOWE

Cath Howe is a children's author and teaches creative writing in London primary schools. Her book series, *Call the Puffins!* (£7.99, Hachette Children's), all about bravery and resilience, is out now.

4 | CREATE CLASS RULES

Ask your pupils to discuss the following statements with a partner and add any others they think are relevant:
Think differently: you could be wrong about that other person having a better life.
Look around you: watch and listen. Other people may be struggling with complicated feelings, too.
Share how you are feeling with someone you trust: in *My Life on Fire*, Ren makes a friend she can confide in and everything changes. We are all different and important in our own ways. What is special about you? What are you good at?
Display the rules in the classroom.

5 | USE DRAMA

Drama is a great way to explore character choices and the impact of decisions they make.
Why not try hot-seating a character who is feeling jealous, or create a Conscience Alley where children interact with a character during a moment of crisis? One child represents the fictional character and they walk down a 'corridor' of others, who each offer advice or ask questions. Encourage pupils to write monologues exploring the viewpoints and worries of story characters and perform them.

6 | BUILD SELF ESTEEM

To limit comparisons with others, always avoid valuables in school, and be wary of overpraising some children. Always offer Golden Time or house points for a very wide range of 'achievements', including kindness and thoughtful actions. Embrace the work of EmpathyLab and take a look at their excellent resources available to schools, including their annual Read for Empathy booklists (**tinyurl.com/tp-Empathy**). Another self-esteem-boosting activity I like is to ask the children to create a squiggle character and fill the spaces with the things that make them who they are (people and things they love, sports and favourite foods). Get them to decorate their drawings with their favourite colours.

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‘The whole thing is a complete dog’s breakfast’

If Ofsted’s latest ridiculous framework weren’t so indescribably stupid and frustrating, it might just be funny...

Simplicity and clarity are wonderful things aren’t they? In an attempt to simplify their punitive system – no, honestly – Ofsted are suggesting eight or nine judgements (or possibly 10 or 11, I lost count) with five possible ratings for each. So many judgements, so little time.

The ratings are colour-coded and based on a simple model – traffic lights. Hang on though, there are five colours in Ofsted’s ‘traffic light’ system. Last time I looked there were only three colours at my local junction but, hey, what do I know? Ofsted’s version begins with red (bad) and amber (attention needed). So far, so familiar. Then – get this! – light green, green, and dark green for secure, strong and exemplary. Whichever genius came up with this system is definitely red. At the very least they could have Farrow-and-Ball-ed the different shades with school-appropriate names: ‘This school’s assessment system is very much Overboiled Cabbage’ (light green), ‘teaching is Runny Nose’ (green), and ‘behaviour is Norovirus Nights’ (dark green). They say that a camel is ‘a horse designed by a committee’ and this proposed new framework has been designed by a less skilled committee than the camel one.

Now that *The Traitors* has finished and there’s not much to watch on telly, I can heartily recommend the YouTube videos in which Sir Michael Oliver, HMCI, outlines the proposals and Lee Owston (national director for education) discusses how it works for teachers. Reader, neither convinced this viewer that this isn’t a complete dog’s breakfast, where the dog is bewildered and angry and the morning foodstuffs are previously digested stinking mush. In fact, if you watch the videos, you’ll agree they don’t seem very convinced themselves.

They unveil a proposed ‘toolkit’ for teachers to prepare for inspection. To my mind ‘toolkits’ (and ‘workshops’) should only exist in light engineering. In schools, they just mean lots more paper and more stuff to do that stops teachers teaching the kids. An HMI explains, ’what we want to make sure with these toolkits is that we’re not adding further burden to providers by making them do something extra for Ofsted’. And then, without any irony or self-awareness, produces reams of paper densely typed over five columns. *Voila!* A kit by tools for tools!

But if the proposals are bad for teachers, they are no better for inspectors. According to *Schools Week*, an anonymous Ofsted employee has written saying the proposals are ‘rushed and botched’ (coincidentally, the name of the law firm that will be suing Ofsted) while the consultation period is the shortest ever for a new framework and ‘will be a sham’.

At least there will be no time for unloved Deep Dives, because inspectors will be engaged racing round the school building, possibly on rocket-powered e-scooters, to place ticks in the gazillion boxes the new system demands. It will be a veritable Supermarket Sweep of evidence-gathering, with inspectors racing against the clock, sparks and flames exploding from their overheating scooters, chucking bits of haphazard evidence into their inspectorial shopping trolley and then realising, too late, they’ve missed the best items.

I once suggested to HMI that there should be just two simple categories – Good or Not Yet Good, with the ‘yet’ doing a lot of the heavy lifting; making schools feel slightly less wretched and possibly avoiding the sort of cataclysmic tragedy that befell Ruth Perry. After all, the proposals for safeguarding judgement are simply ‘met’ or ‘not met’. Most parents don’t read much beyond the first page of a report and just want to know whether their child is happy and safe and learning, and that teachers are more or less pretty ok at what they teach most of the time.

This proposed framework is far too convoluted and will not survive contact with reality. Parents and schools deserve much better – hell, even the poor inspectors deserve better. It’s a ‘plan’, but only in the same way a bundle of papers is a ‘toolkit’. As a wise old boxer once sagely observed, “Everybody has a plan – till they get punched on the nose”. And with this proposal? Ofsted has smashed itself right on the hooter. TP

Kevin Harcombe is former headteacher of Redlands Primary, Fareham.

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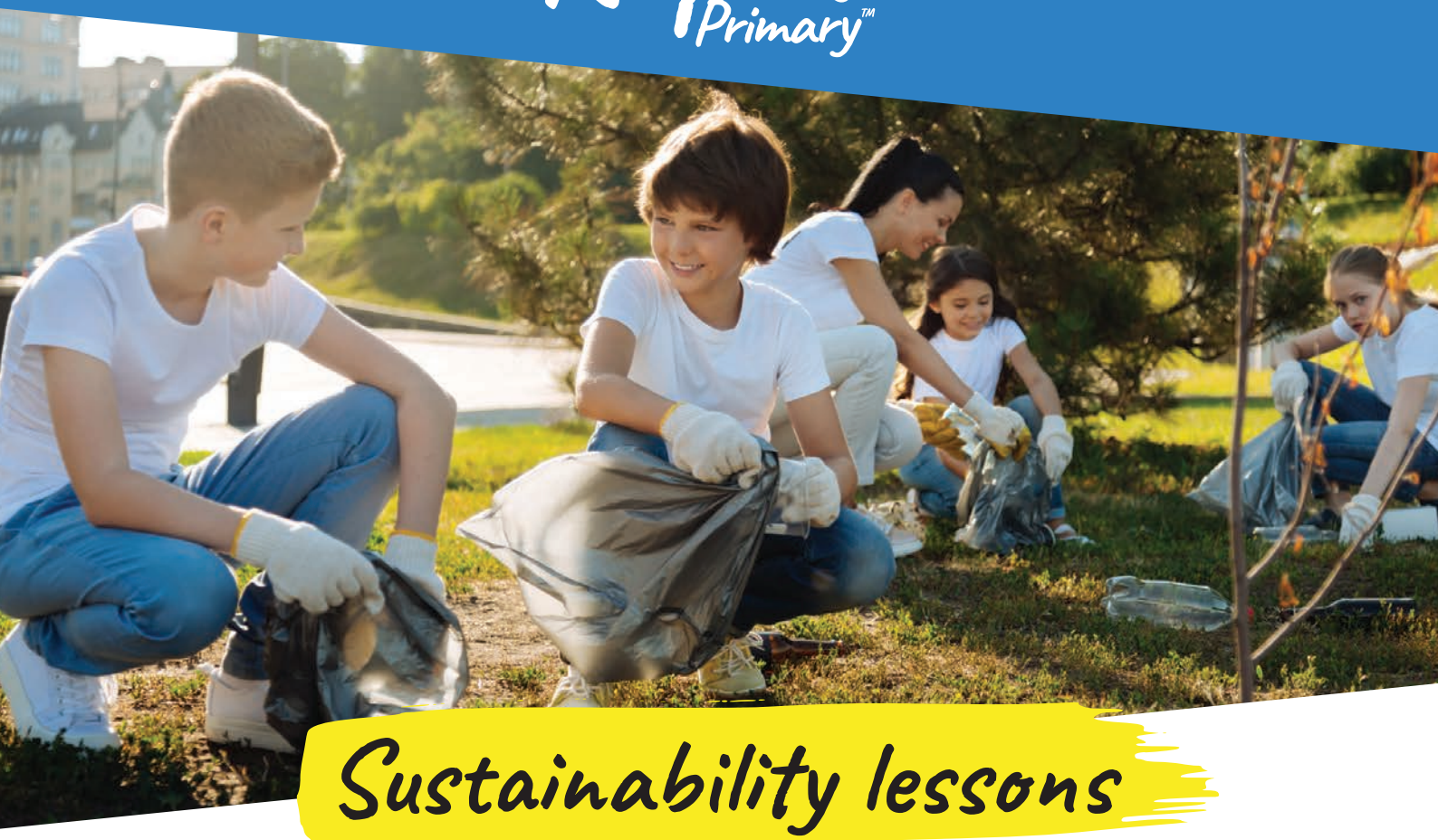

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Forget vague CPD; help us teach reading

Why bother with useless courses, when there are still functionally illiterate children in our classrooms?

@honestliteracylead.bsky.social linkedin.com/in/jennie-shearer-539076332

If I have to sit through another vague CPD session designed by an outside agency, telling me something I already know and do every day, pretending to find something revolutionary in it, I might scream. Teachers know how to adapt teaching using feedback; we know a multitude of ways to get that feedback; and we know about 'I do, we do, you do'… please stop patronising us for the sake of ticking a box.

Leaders need to stop pandering to the latest pedagogical hero figure, or buzzing about being into 'the next big thing'. All these trends pass. What doesn't? The need to be able to read. Instead, then, leaders desperately need to put teaching children to read at the forefront of CPD. We need to equip every teacher (primary *and* secondary) with the knowledge, skills and strategies to effectively teach our pupils essential literacy skills. As professionals, we're itching to take part in truly worthwhile training.

As an English teacher, I see first-hand the startling lack of ability when it comes to reading. And I'm not talking about a lack of understanding of vocabulary, or even oracy, but the actual foundations of putting together phonemes and graphemes to create sounds, and recognise words. This might be a small proportion of pupils in your school, but you still have the responsibility to address it – if it's your job to teach children anything, it's your job to teach them to read.

We see headlines all the time, too: 'Reading for pleasure drops!'; 'Eighteen per cent of adults display functional illiteracy' **(tinyurl.com/tp-AdultLiteracy)**. Is it any surprise that children don't find pleasure in reading, when so many of them find it such a struggle? No wonder they then grow into adults who avoid reading. We should be striving for better. How can we do this? Two words: proper training.

The results of effective literacy teaching reach far, far beyond your English lessons, too. How many times have you had to call a senior member of staff to deal with a disruptive pupil? Did you ever think to check whether they could understand the work in front of them? Literacy levels and behaviour are linked **(tinyurl.com/tp-Literacy-Behaviour)**, and if a child can't digest text, they can't properly participate in learning. This frustration is then often expressed in ways that are likely to distract from the core issue – that they can't read.

How many of your staff point out that they have so much content to get through? What if we gave them the tools to develop the reading skills of their class, allowing more time and access to the knowledge they are trying to teach, in the long term? If the children can be more independent in their reading, they become more independent in their thinking, leading to stronger connections with what is being taught (and more time for that teaching).

If pupils can read texts, instructions, and questions, then they can be successful. If our children can be successful, our society can be successful. It sounds wonderfully simple to me. To take steps in achieving this goal, we need to:

- Spend CPD time with real experts (look at your EYFS teachers) to learn the best ways to teach reading. It's not part of teacher training, but really should be considered pedagogy 101.
- Create an approach with common language and strategies to support pupils who need extra help. This consistency shows you're on the same page, and can maintain clarity for children across subjects.
- Promote decoding and pattern-finding skills, including with pupils who might be more confident. This is an essential life skill; it doesn't stop when school does.
- If you want that shining star, try extending some of this training to the other adults in your children's lives. They may benefit from it, and be able to help. It's a win-win.

So, for the sake of future generations, and for the sake of our society, and the sanity of the whole teaching staff, let's drop the vague and useless 'development courses', and train every teacher in one of life's most important and foundational skills: how to teach reading. TP

Jennie Shearer has over 15 years of teaching experience, and has run initiatives to close attainment gaps and improve standards of education.

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Each issue we ask a contributor to pen a note they would love to send

A letter to... Class teachers

With budget cuts eating away at our lunchtimes, we need to reclaim time for ourselves as well as for our pupils, says **Laura McInerney**

Ask pupils about their thoughts on school, and the same three things will come up every time: friends, toilets, and lunchtime. Not lessons. Not homework. Not the quality of teaching, safeguarding, or other Ofsted tick-boxes. Just three simple things about their daily experience.

But let's think for a moment; in your school, who is *actually* in charge of each of these things? Maybe friendships fall under pastoral leadership. Toilets, if they are overseen at all, are typically the responsibility of cleaners or facilities managers.

And then there's lunchtime. Who is truly in charge of that? Not just overseeing duty rotas or monitoring queues, but actually making sure lunchtime works as it should. Is there enough time to eat? Are children getting the chance to run, play, and talk?

At Teacher Tapp, we've been tracking lunchtimes for years, and the picture is clear: lunchtime is shrinking. The Raising the Nation Play Commission found that school playtimes have reduced by an average of 19 minutes over the past two decades. And it's worst in the poorest areas – 56 per cent of schools with the highest proportion of free school meals offer a lunch break of under 45 minutes, with 16 per cent giving just 30 minutes or less.

School leaders often cite budget cuts, making it harder to pay for lunchtime supervisors. Which might explain why only nine per cent of primary teachers believe there is enough supervision during lunchtimes and why, when asked about the worst time for pupil behaviour, 66 per cent of primary teachers say lunchtime.

So yes, cuts make financial sense. But when lunchtime disappears, so does something much bigger.

For many children, lunchtime is the only part of the day where they get to choose. They decide where to sit, whom to talk to, what to do. For those who struggle in the classroom, it can be the one moment they feel free. And for children who don't 'play out' after school, it might be their only chance to run, climb, or just be a kid.

Sadly, play is disappearing, too. Teachers tell us that the playground games they remember from childhood – skipping ropes, tag, hopscotch – are fading fast. Eighty-seven per cent of primary teachers say traditional playground games have declined. Nearly 40 per cent say they've disappeared altogether.

> *"Lunchtime isn't just important for pupils. It matters for you, too"*

When we ask why, the answers are bleak. Screens have replaced street games, and fewer children 'play out' at home. Schools, stretched thin, can't afford to replace broken equipment or train lunchtime staff to lead games. One teacher told us that without playground markings or equipment, their pupils stand around, unsure of what to do. Another said their pupils struggle with games because they've never learned the rules.

And when children don't get a proper break, the effects ripple through the school. On a typical day, 60 per cent of primary teachers say they end up using lesson time to resolve lunchtime conflicts.

If you think I'm about to tell you to solve this by grabbing a rope and rushing out to teach skipping games in the playground, I'll stop you there.

Lunchtime isn't just important for pupils. Teacher, it matters for you, too.

One of the biggest predictors of whether or not you are likely to stay in your job is whether or not you have friends at work. And friendships don't grow in rushed corridor chats or frantic emails. They happen in small, unstructured moments – over a sandwich, a cup of tea, or a shared grumble about Year 4's new obsession with rolling down the corridor.

A perfect opportunity for this is lunchtime. And yet, when we've asked teachers where they ate lunch that day, the most common answer is alone, in their classroom.

So I have to ask again: who in your school is in charge of lunchtime? And is it working – not just for pupils, but for teachers, too?

Maybe today's the day to reclaim a little bit of lunchtime for yourself. Eat in the staffroom. Invite someone to sit down. Start a new habit.

Because lunchtime is disappearing. But it doesn't have to.

From Laura

Laura McInerney is an education journalist, public speaker, and co-founder of Teacher Tapp.

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UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our anonymous educator gets something off their chest

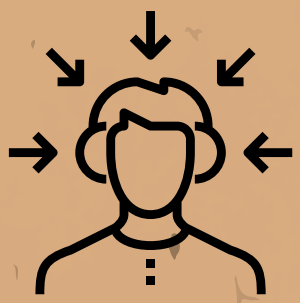
The stresses of being a headteacher have left me with panic attacks and depression. No wonder we have a retention crisis...

I feel the buzz in my pocket. It's 7:55 am. The scheduled emails land from the day before, and I feel my stomach lurch. I appreciate them not coming through out of hours, but the collection of messages that awaits each morning still causes a physical reaction; the problem is just shifted a few hours down the line. I snatch a glimpse at my phone screen while the motorway traffic is at a standstill. A sigh of relief, and my heart rate slows down; nothing too bad has come in overnight to start the day on a sour note.

When I finally get to school, I give a few brief and rushed greetings to people as I dash through to my office. I'm just able to put my bag down and have a quick catch-up with the deputy head before heading out for gate duty. This is one of the best bits of the day; checking in with everyone, hearing about their evenings, sharing a smile. After that, the bell goes, the gate swings shut, and the rest of the day begins. Today's diary is a pretty full one – open morning, meeting with the class reps, a governors' meeting.

Three tours and a presentation later, I sit down at my desk to 36 new emails. Most are not a problem, but two relate to the formal complaint currently being handled by the governors. The subject lines form an instant ball of panic in my stomach. Deep down I know I didn't get it as wrong as is being made out, but the problem is, that is a rationale. Emotions aren't rational. This is the stuff that affects me most; the personal things. The thought of someone being upset because of me, or my actions – that's what keeps me awake at night. That is what causes the catastrophising, the endless chain of events in my mind that always ends up with me resigning, getting fired, or at worst, being found criminally responsible for something. I know that is ridiculous, but that is where my mind takes me.

The thing is, the class reps meeting was OK. The usual gripes and groans, but, looking at it rationally (that word again), if that is the extent of the problems the parent body has at the moment, we are probably doing pretty well. Open morning brings another opportunity to show off the school, and every time I do it makes me proud. Proud of the staff, and proud of the children. Proud of everything we work for and the reaction we get from parents who look around.



"It's the personal stuff that's led to the fear of walking out of the door in the morning"

But it's the complaint that's led to the panic attacks and the fear of walking out the front door in the morning. That's what has led to the talking therapy and the anti-depressant medication. Those things have helped. I have been in a better place, but I can feel things sliding downwards again recently, affected by the complaint in particular.

There is a knock on the door. An LSA needs to chat to me about something. "Of course," I say, "come and sit down". The world outside my head wouldn't know what's going on underneath. The smile masks it, and I become what people need me to be. That's my job. The thing is, I know that what I experience is nothing different to thousands of others, and not just thousands of others in teaching, but in professions everywhere. But that is the worrying part. It's. Not. Just. Me.

And people at every level of school staff feel this way. It's not sustainable and is a driving factor behind the recruitment and retention issues our profession is facing. I try to do everything I can to make the staff in our school not feel the way I do, not have to experience that knot in the stomach every morning, and I hope I manage to do that, at least some of the time.

I don't know how it gets better, I don't know what needs to change, but for now, I have a governors' meeting to get to, and policies to approve. Let's see what tomorrow brings. TP

The writer is a headteacher in England.

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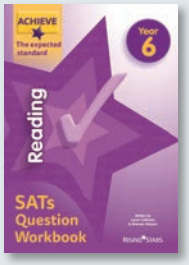

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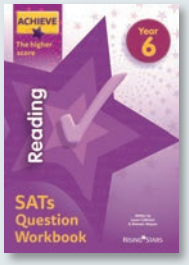

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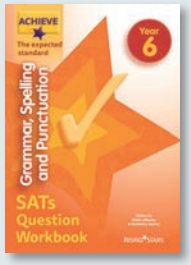

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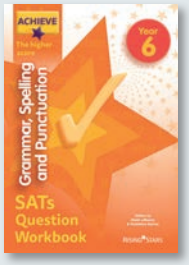

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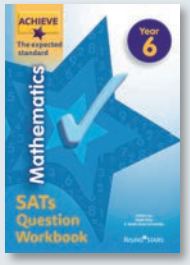

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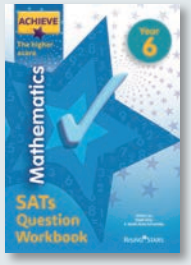

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Best PRACTICE

Preparing for SATs doesn't need to take over the whole of Year 6, says **Sarah Farrell**. Dipping in little and often is much easier to digest...

As the days slowly start getting warmer, the thoughts of many Year 6 teachers will be on one thing: the KS2 SATs. While we don't want SATs to dominate our children's last year of school, we do want them to feel prepared and to be as successful as they can. While it can be tempting to restrict a Year 6 timetable to be as SATs-focused as possible over the next few weeks, there are better ways to make sure both you and your class feel ready by the time May comes around.

Practise

Rather than packing your timetable with lots of extra full-length maths and reading lessons, consider shorter, sharper sessions. A ten-minute speed-reading practice or quick refresh on multiplying pairs of fractions is likely to be more effective than replacing an afternoon of wider curriculum lessons. You could also include activities such as online quizzes and games to keep it interesting and avoid too much repetitive written practice.

Target

Identify any whole-class, group or individual areas of weakness that your class may have and build in time to directly target them. If the majority of the class finds it tricky to calculate a fraction of an amount, for example, make that a part of the beginning of every maths lesson for a week. For small group or individual areas, providing some targeted questions as morning work can close gaps and help children to feel more confident.

"Children love finding mistakes! Show them questions you've completed badly"

Model

Modelling how to approach the papers is a great way to show children what to expect and how to avoid common pitfalls. For example, you might display a question from the reading test and model your thinking aloud like this: "The question says that I need to look at paragraph four, so I'm going to find paragraph four first of all. It then asks me to identify how Ben knew there was a dolphin nearby before he could see it, so I'm looking for clues in the text that might relate to his other senses or maybe to the water rippling. I'm then going to check that the evidence I've found is definitely in paragraph four, as that's where I was told to look. It's asked me for two examples, so I'm going to make sure I write two pieces of evidence down." While this may seem like a lot, explaining your thinking helps children know how to approach similar questions. With maths questions, model underlining key information, drawing bar models or diagrams, or writing out the steps you'll take when answering a reasoning question.

Discuss

When presented with a wordy problem with several large numbers, some children may panic and not try it at all, or just add all the numbers together and hope for the best. A great way to recap key facts and help children to develop their ability to answer tricky questions is to initially hide key information. For example, display a multi-step reasoning problem with the numbers covered. Ask children to discuss in pairs how they might approach the question, then share strategies together. As a class, agree on a set of steps that will be completed when the numbers are shown. When you have a plan, share the numbers and set the class off to complete the question. The benefit of this approach is that it slows children down a bit and encourages them to really think about what's being asked in order to help them to select the right operations needed.

Find

Children love finding mistakes! Present them with some questions that you have completed badly and task the children with finding out what mistakes you have made. Try to use mistakes that your class commonly make themselves, as this is a great way to tackle persistent errors. You could then create a class list of common mistakes to prevent them from making them again when they next come to take a test.

Remember: SATs are a whole-school responsibility. The tests cover content from the whole of Key Stage 2, so it is not solely down to you to get the children to achieve 100 per cent. Best of luck! TP

Sarah Farrell is a KS2 teacher in Bristol who makes and shares resources online.

@SarahFarrellKS2

tinyurl.com/tp-SarahFarrell

MEDIUM TERM PLAN

KS2 HISTORY

FORGING FOUNDATIONS

LINDSEY RAWES

Teaching about the changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age might not have the instant appeal of the glamours of Ancient Egypt or Rome. However, this topic can be highly engaging – both pupils and teachers might be surprised at how diverse this period actually was. It provides children with essential knowledge of how the earliest human life was shaped and the impact it had on future civilisations, showing how the very foundations of history were created. As well as covering important concepts like citing sources and explaining how environmental factors affect behaviour, pupils will be able to investigate the mysteries surrounding Stonehenge, and that when we refer to 'technology' in history, we might be talking about a lump of metal rather than an iPhone…

WEEK 1

Learning objective

- When were the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages?

Begin this lesson by showing children a timeline with BCE and CE **(slide 3)**. Explain that BCE (Before Common Era) is all the time before 1 CE when people believe Jesus was born, and that CE (Common Era) is all the time since 1 CE up to the present. This can be a tricky concept, particularly if you're teaching it to Year 3 pupils who won't necessarily have come across it before. Explain that the numbers from 1 BCE go backwards, and demonstrate using the timeline.

Introduce the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages and show pupils the dates for these periods **(slide 4)**. Explain that we're going to work out just how long each period lasted, using base 10 rods and cubes to represent the blocks of time (pupils should use a scale of one block of 10 for each thousand years. You could also use unifix cubes or different coloured sticky notes. See the L1 resource sheet to see how this activity works). Split the children into groups and get them to represent each period using base 10 – at this point they do not need to place it on a timeline. Once pupils have completed this task, ask what they notice. Which period lasted for the longest duration? Can the children work out how long each period lasted for? This is a great visual way of getting pupils to understand that the Stone Age lasted for a much longer time than either the Bronze or Iron Ages – pupils may even run out of blocks for it! Explain that they have only represented part of the Stone Age and it actually went back as far as 800,000 BCE!

Show pupils the timeline showing how the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages fit in with each other **(slide 5)**. Ask them why they think the periods on the timeline overlap, then explain that this is because each period happened gradually over time. Depending on prior study, you could ask the children what other periods they know about that were also happening during this time.

Assessment

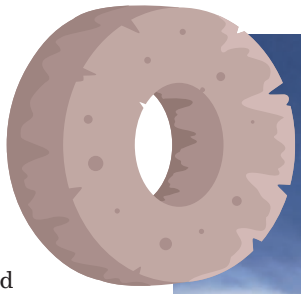
Do pupils understand the duration of each period and are they able to say which was the longest?
Do pupils understand the terms BCE/CE (you can also use BC/AD)?

WEEK 2

Learning objective

- How did Stone Age people live?

Begin the lesson by asking pupils what they think life in the Stone Age was like. How did people survive? What kind of houses did they live in? After some discussion, write down some of the children's ideas and misconceptions on a flipchart (for example, they might think Stone Age people existed alongside dinosaurs or lived in caves). After some discussion, introduce the vocabulary for the lesson, explaining that there were three periods that made up the Stone



Age – the Palaeolithic, the Mesolithic and the Neolithic eras **(slide 8)**. Tell the children that we are going to find out what life was actually like during the Mesolithic era using a range of sources. Clarify the word *source*, and explain that it means evidence that tells us about the past.

Show the children a video clip of what Star Carr in Yorkshire might have looked like in 9,000 BCE **(slide 9)**. Ask pupils to make notes on mini whiteboards: how are the houses constructed? Why do you think people settled here? What might have been nearby that they needed to survive? How and where did they get their food? Pupils might mention that Star Carr is near a river for food/water – you could use this opportunity to make links to other civilisations they have studied that settled next to a river (i.e. Ancient Egyptians). Discuss pupils' answers together and note down their ideas.

Ask the children to examine sources showing aspects of Mesolithic life using images of tools and homes **(slides 10-13)**. If possible, use pages 2-3 from *A Street Through Time* by Anne Millard, and ask pupils to discuss what they can see.

Get pupils to work in pairs, using the sources to complete a table outlining what houses, food, and tools and weapons looked like in the Mesolithic era **(slide 14)**. Finish the lesson by getting pupils to report back on what they found out and discuss each area of Stone Age life together. You might discuss that the arrowheads and fishing hooks show they hunted for their food, for example.

Assessment

Can pupils explain what homes were like and how Mesolithic people found food? Can children use a range of sources and make notes of their findings?

WEEK 3

Learning objective

- What were homes like at Skara Brae?

Begin the lesson by introducing the settlement of Skara Brae, which dates from the Neolithic era. Show pupils the virtual tour of Skara Brae **(slide 17)**. Show the plan of Skara Brae **(slide 18)** and give pupils time to discuss it – explain that many of the houses in the settlement were connected by tunnels. Ask pupils why they think this might have been useful.

Ask the children to look in pairs at the images of Skara Brae **(slides 19-21)** and to note down what they can see in each house including any furnishings and decorations. Pupils should then discuss how these houses are similar to and different from the homes of Mesolithic hunter-gathers at Starr Carr. After discussing together and as a class, get the children to draw and label a plan of one of the houses, using photos of Skara Brae to help them with as much detail as possible. Next, ask them to create a detailed plan of a house, including what they can see inside.

Finish by asking pupils to report back on what they found out using the sources. How do they know that people in Skara Brae had become more advanced during the Neolithic period? Pupils could write a short response using stem sentences **(slide 22)**.

Assessment

Can children identify what homes were like in Skara Brae?
Can they compare homes in Skara Brae with Mesolithic houses and explain why these were more advanced?

WEEK 4

Learning objective

- Why was the discovery of bronze so important?

Begin the lesson by recapping what types of tools people used during the Stone Age. Ask the children to explain what materials were used, and how they were used. Pupils should be able to recall that stone and flint were the main materials used for tools and weapons, and that these things helped early hunter-gatherers provide food.

Show pupils examples of artefacts that were made during the Bronze Age **(slide 25)**. Discuss what the objects have in common and what each one would have been used for. After discussing together, explain that they are made of bronze, a metal alloy that is produced by melding copper and tin ore. Explain that bronze was first brought from Europe to the UK by the Beaker people, who were good at metalworking, and that this helped to change what life was like.

Watch the video about the Bronze Age **(slide 26)** and ask the children to note down why they think the production of bronze was so important. Emphasise that bronze didn't just allow people to make better tools and weapons, but also enabled people to produce luxury goods, which meant they could trade with other places.

Pupils should then work to create a poster about why bronze was such a beneficial material, thinking about: why was bronze such a useful material? How did it change society in Britain? What could people living in the Bronze Age now do that they couldn't before?

Assessment

Can children explain why the discovery of bronze was so important and some of the ways it changed life in Britain during the Bronze Age?

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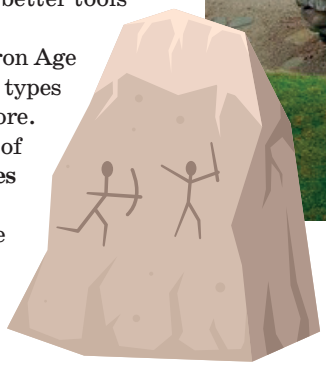
WEEK 5

Learning objective

- Why did Iron Age people build hill forts?

Start by recapping what settlements were like in the Stone Age. Explain that in the Iron Age people began to become more technologically advanced and were able to smelt iron – this meant they could make better tools and weapons.

Next, explain that Iron Age people lived in different types of settlements from before. Show the pupils images of different hill forts **(slides 29-31)** and ask them to discuss what they notice about these. Draw pupils' attention to the type of landscape they are looking at (this is a great opportunity to make links with possible geography work) and the ridges carved into the landscape.



Explain that these settlements were called hill forts and were built at the top of hills, on the highest part of the landscape. Tell the children that people lived in tribes, but that there could often be battles between neighbouring tribes. Show pupils images of reconstructions of hill forts (if possible, look at pages 6-7 of *A Street Through Time*) and discuss what is different about hill forts compared with earlier settlements. Draw attention to the fact that houses are grouped together centrally, that there is a wooden palisade to protect people inside the hill fort from attack, and that the forts are made from stronger materials than previous settlements. Watch the video about hill forts and look at images of reconstructions **(slides 32-34)**.

Ask pupils to discuss the following questions: what would be the advantages of living in a hill fort? What might the disadvantages be? Ask pupils to discuss these together, and create a list of advantages and disadvantages of living in a hill fort. When they have had time to discuss, compile a class list. Children could then create a written response, using stem sentences to explain their ideas **(slides 35-36)**.

Assessment

Can pupils summarise why people built hill forts in the Iron Age?

WEEK 6

Learning objective

- What was Stonehenge and what might it have been used for?

Begin this lesson by explaining that Stonehenge is one of the world's most famous monuments that can be still visited today. People began building it around 3,000BCE, in the late Neolithic era, but it took hundreds of years to finish. Show the pupils images of Stonehenge **(slides 39-42)** and look at the virtual tour from English Heritage website **(tinyurl.com/tp-VirtualStonehenge)**.

After discussing some initial ideas, show pupils the plan of the site as it would have been in the Iron Age **(slide 43)** and explain that Stonehenge is made up of a circular ditch with a six-foot-high bank. Later, the circle of Sarsen stones and smaller bluestones was added. Draw pupils' attention to the Altar stone and the Heel Stone. Explain to the children that historians have different theories about what Stonehenge might have been built for and no one knows for certain its real purpose. Ask pupils if they have any theories of their own about what it might have been used for based on the images they've looked at so far, and the plan of its layout. After discussing their ideas together, give pupils the resource sheet with different theories about Stonehenge's purpose and read through them together **(L6)**.

Introduce the Diamond Nine task from the L6 resources sheets – children should work in pairs or threes to order what they think Stonehenge was used for from the most likely to least likely. Explain that they should take it in turns to rank one of the possibilities on the diamond grid – they are allowed to disagree and move one of their partner's ideas, but they need to explain why they are changing it. Emphasise that there is no right or wrong answer, but that they must explain their choices based on what they have learnt so far this lesson – get them to think about the layout of the site.

At the end of the session, ask the children to report back on which reasons they thought were most and least likely, and to explain why they think this. Get pupils to explain their ideas using the stem sentences **(slide 44)**. They could follow this up by writing a short response in their books using the same stem sentences.

Assessment

Can pupils explain what Stonehenge is, and what it might have been used for? TP

Lindsey Rawes is a primary teacher and history lead. She is also a chartered teacher of history for the Historical Association.

theprimaryhistorian.substack.com

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Ready, STEADY...

To develop brilliant listening skills, introduce your littlest pupils to drama games, says **Alison Chaplin**

Drama is a brilliant subject for building essential life skills like self-confidence, developing communication skills, teaching children to listen well and respond to instructions. It's also a really fun way to help them to think creatively and to work well with others.

Start simple

Many basic activities support children in learning to listen and respond to instructions. For example, Fruitbowl (see explanation below) is excellent for teaching interpersonal skills, including concentration, listening, teamwork, self-control, and spatial awareness.

Use movement

Simple movement activities, such as freezes and mime, will develop creative concentration skills. Grandmother's Footsteps (below) is great for working on controlled movement. For less confident children, follow-my-leader and copying activities – with the teacher at the front of the class – are good for building confidence in a non-threatening way. You can also adapt party games, such as musical statues, by asking pupils to freeze as characters from a book, film, or story. An activity like Objects (see below), encourages children to respond creatively – and quickly.

Explore stories

Traditional stories and rhymes work really well when used as a stimulus for drama in the classroom. In Year 1 children will happily act out stories and poems as a whole group and will fully engage with, for example, creating whole-group mimes of different scenes.

Act creatively

To encourage creativity, teacher-in-role is a great technique. Pretend to be, for example, Goldilocks, and allow yourself to be interviewed about your behaviour. Become Cinderella and ask the children what you need to fetch to create the golden carriage. Add a prop or costume item and become a bullied child looking for advice, a Roman soldier, an Aztec, a Victorian child – the list is endless!

Build skills

Finally, combine all skills to create whole-class drama. Read the beginning of a story, for example *The Giant Turnip*, and ask children what they would like to explore, then allocate roles and work to develop their ideas. Use freezes, mime, improvisation and teacher-in-role to explore character and story.

Drama is unique in the freedom it allows teachers and the wide range of learning development it engenders. It's the creative thread that links structured play, learning, and personal and social development – invaluable for children in KS1. TP

3 GAMES TO TRY

Fruitbowl

Sit in a circle on chairs. Give everyone the name of a fruit in turn, e.g. apple, pear, banana, apple, pear, banana. One player stands in the middle of the circle and their chair is taken away. The player in the middle calls out one of the fruit names. All players with that fruit name must leave their seat and run to another chair. While the 'fruits' are changing places, the player in the middle also tries to find a seat. When everyone has swapped seats, one player will be left in the middle again. This player calls out a fruit name, and the process is repeated. If the player in the middle calls out 'FRUITBOWL!' every player must change places and move to a new seat.

Grandmother's Footsteps

A player stands at the end of the room with their back to the rest of the group. Place a beanbag or small object between their feet. Everyone tries to creep up to steal the beanbag. The player turns around at regular intervals and, when they turn, everyone freezes. Anyone moving when the player turns around goes back to the beginning. The winner is the person who steals the beanbag. They become the new 'It' and the game begins again.

Objects

Divide into groups of four to six players. Call out the name of an object and the groups have 10 seconds to make the shape of that object using their own bodies, joining together in different ways. Count down slowly from 10 to zero then shout 'Freeze!' Try: car, clock, television, bed, or volcano.

Alison Chaplin runs Arts on the Move, providing drama teaching resources and information.

artsonthemove.co.uk

Talking THE TALK

To really see a boost in oracy skills in your classroom, be the change you want to see, says **Tamsin Duckett**...

We all know that oracy skills are crucial for children's academic and personal development; not only do they promote academic achievement, and help close the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, but they also play an important role in bridging cultural and linguistic divides. Being able to articulate their feelings and meaningfully engage with their peers also improves pupils' mental health and wellbeing. All of these factors are hugely important to ensure children flourish and thrive.

Employers also rank communication as one of the most important skills for employability **(tinyurl.com/tp-SkillsDemand)**. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the amount of time pupils (and teachers!) have been able to spend with one another, there has been an increased emphasis on developing the 'lost' communication skills for a generation of children.

While the government reviews the national curriculum and promises to embed oracy as a vital component, at the Chelmsford Learning Partnership, we have already taken steps to guarantee that all our teachers have a strong understanding of the strategies they need to develop pupils' oracy skills, and have dedicated our Trust-wide Continuous Personal Development (CPD) sessions this year to oracy.

On the same page

As a teacher, you know that oracy is more than the ability to speak; it encompasses the physical, linguistic, cognitive and social aspects of communication. At our Trust, we have began the journey of using the Oracy Skills Framework **(tinyurl.com/tp-OSF)** to provide a comprehensive roadmap for how all our teachers can support pupils across the Trust to develop their oracy skills. Designed as a tool to support the explicit teaching of oracy, the framework – which is broken down into

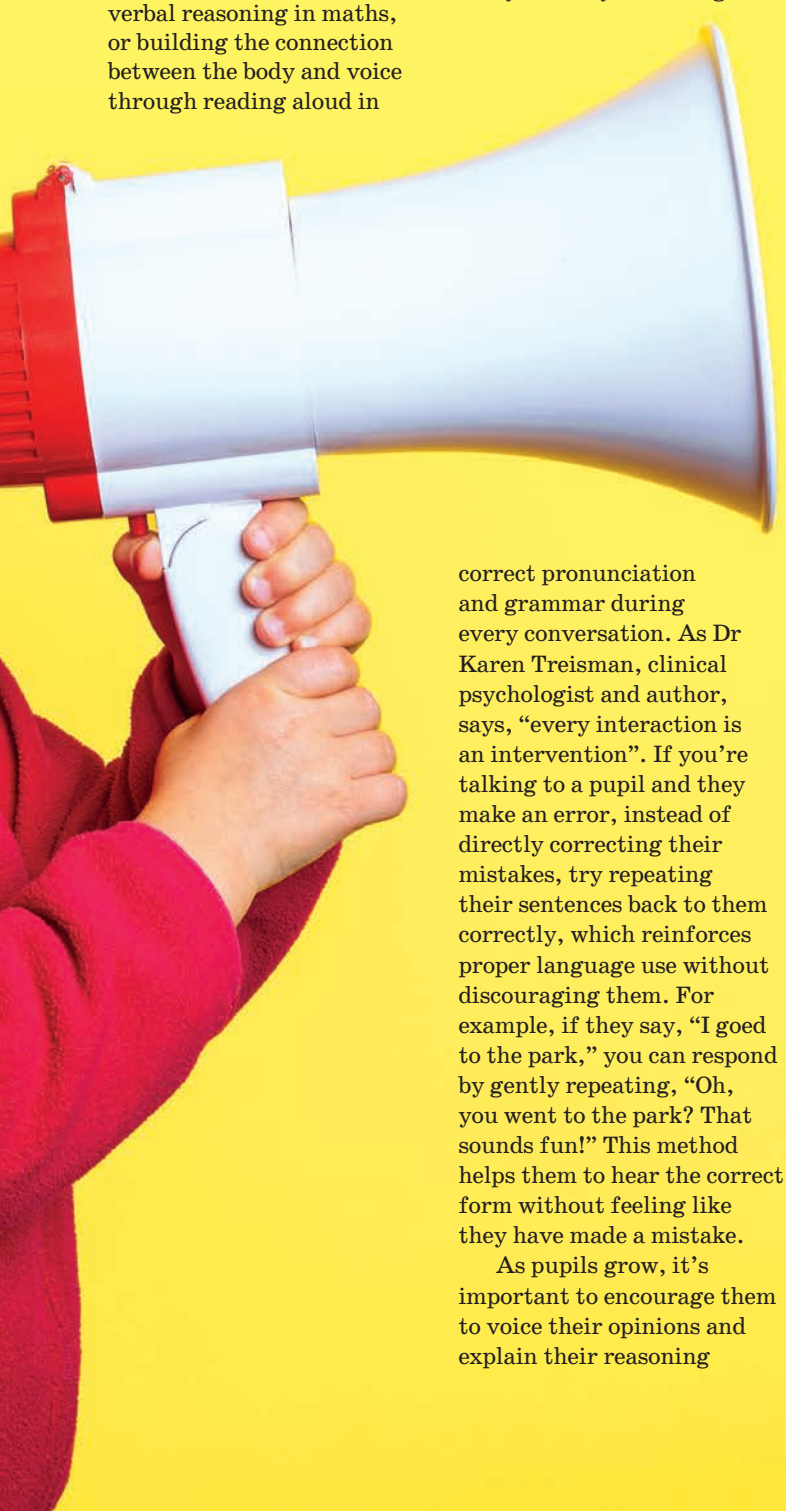
"Oracy encompasses the physical, linguistic, cognitive and social aspects of communication"

four pillars: cognitive, social and emotional, physical and linguistic – provides you with a shared language to use within your classroom and wider setting. It also helps you to identify gaps in your pupils' knowledge of oracy skills and plan how to address them.

We have used the tool as part of our approach to evaluating oracy across the Trust and sharing effective practice. Whether this is promoting cognitive oracy through the discussion of complex issues in PSHE, verbal reasoning in maths, or building the connection between the body and voice through reading aloud in English, encouraging our pupils to listen and express themselves is fundamental to their learning.

Oracy in practice

Giving children regular opportunities to speak in front of an audience, whether this is storytelling, poetry reading or presentations, can build their confidence and improve their tone, pace and fluency. As a teacher, you are an expert communicator and can also help improve your pupil's oracy skills by modelling correct pronunciation and grammar during every conversation. As Dr Karen Treisman, clinical psychologist and author, says, "every interaction is an intervention". If you're talking to a pupil and they make an error, instead of directly correcting their mistakes, try repeating their sentences back to them correctly, which reinforces proper language use without discouraging them. For example, if they say, "I goed to the park," you can respond by gently repeating, "Oh, you went to the park? That sounds fun!" This method helps them to hear the correct form without feeling like they have made a mistake.



As pupils grow, it's important to encourage them to voice their opinions and explain their reasoning within their dialogue. You can scaffold this learning by providing sentence starters that support pupils to build on and link to the ideas of others. For example: "My opinion is similar to Rose's because..." or "Whilst I can see Tim's point of view, I wonder if he's considered....". In science lessons, you could try making group predictions using prompts such as "To challenge you, I think the force of gravity might act differently depending on the object's shape, not just its mass." Using reasoning and problem solving to clarify understanding works well in mathematics lessons, too. For example, a good question could be "Are you saying that a square is also a rectangle because it has four sides and right angles?"

Read the room

As a Trust, we have an advantage in that we can draw on the variety of techniques and strategies from across our schools through knowledge-sharing during CPD sessions. However, while we are lucky to have so many different schools within our Trust, it is important to be mindful of their individual contexts – we firmly believe, as educationalist Dylan Williams states, that "everything works somewhere, nothing works everywhere". By taking your individual school context and pupils' needs into consideration, you will be able to identify the approach that works best for your setting. This may be subscribing to a professional programme that provides training, support and resources, or simply applying some of the recommendations from the Oracy Commission and Oracy Cambridge, depending on the capabilities and knowledge that already exist in your school.

Building your understanding of oracy, and drawing on the tools and resources available to support your pupils' development, means that you will help to equip them with the critical thinking, clear communication, and confident self-expression skills needed to strengthen their oracy alongside their reading, writing, and arithmetic. **TP**

5 STEPS TO FLUENCY

1. Try making your own vocab cards, and play the guessing game Taboo to help your pupils learn new vocabulary. You can find instructions at **tinyurl.com/tp-Taboo**
2. Try echo reading (**tinyurl.com/tp-echoreading**) to model fluency, expression and the impact of punctuation.
3. Create knowledge organisers, outlining the key vocabulary that pupils will learn for each of the topics you're teaching. Provide concise definitions of key words, including Tier 2 and 3 words.
4. Use talk tasks: most schools in the UK use 'talk partners' to some extent, but now is the time to review and refine your approach to ensure that the tasks are well-suited, appropriately challenging, engaging and have clear outcomes.
5. Give your pupils the language to articulate their emotions. Many children will struggle to progress academically if their emotional needs are not met, so supporting them to identify and articulate their emotional state helps them to regulate their behaviour and leads to improved wellbeing.

Tamsin Duckett is deputy director of standards and school improvement at Chelmsford Learning Partnership.

clptrust.com

How I do it

Introduce concrete representations of time to develop a deeper understanding of chronology

KARL MCGRATH

In Year 6, we've been exploring early civilisations, and it was clear the children didn't have a strong sense of chronology. I wanted them to understand how civilisations coexisted and weren't all completely isolated from one another. To achieve this, we constructed timelines using multi-link cubes, with each civilisation represented by a different colour. This activity is inspired by the work of Stuart Tiffany, who is a self-professed chronology geek (and regular *Teach Primary* contributor!). This is the second time I have used it, and I've found it really helps the children visualise historical scale and overlap.

1

Start by discussing the word *chronology* and what it means. Talk about how you might have already used conventional timelines, and why they're useful when studying history. To make this concept concrete, introduce multi-link cubes as physical representations of time. We decided that each block equalled 100 years, but you can divide them up however works best for your unit. Each civilisation is also assigned a specific colour. Before starting, explore historical misconceptions, including that civilisations appear one after another in a rigid sequence.

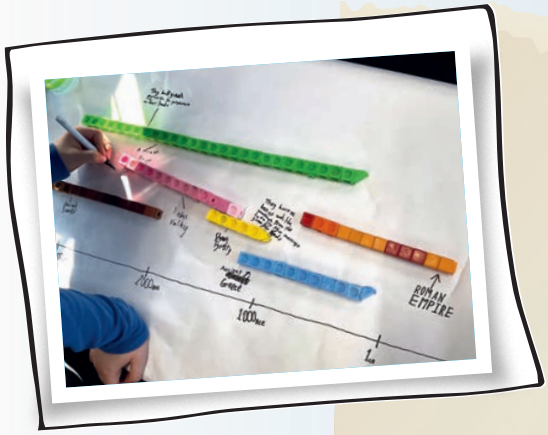
2

Now you can start constructing your multi-link timeline. Use a long roll of paper, as well as a selection of different coloured multi-link cubes. add civilisations one at at a time so you can talk through them. As the children build their timelines, encourage them to work together, making observations and questioning overlaps. You can stop periodically to encourage critical thinking.

3

Once you have constructed your timelines, you can reflect on the patterns the children have noticed, and talk about any misconceptions they might have. For example, that civilisation didn't necessarily have to end before another could begin; that overlap didn't have to mean that civilisations rose or fell, and some existed independently; and that although the cubes were useful tools to help visualise trends, that the models weren't exactly to scale.

4



While the cubes are a useful representation, it's important to emphasise proportional differences between time periods. For example, the Ancient Egyptian civilisation lasted over 3,000 years, significantly longer than many others, so try and use proportional scaling where possible to improve pupils' accuracy.

5

You can link this activity to wider learning by discussing things like trade and technological exchange between civilisations that overlapped. This can come in handy for future lessons, as I found that children improved in confidence in using timelines as an analytical tool, rather than just as a reference point. This approach can spark some fantastic discussions, particularly around the complexity of history and how civilisations interact. I also recommend that each year group does this, to embed true chronological understanding at each stage of their learning.

Karl McGrath, a Year 6 teacher and curriculum task design lead at Benton Park Primary, develops curriculum-driven, engaging task design models.

@MRMICT

Should I stay or SHOULD I GO?

Embarking on al fresco learning might sound like a real headache, but once you've got the essentials down, you won't think twice about taking the kids outside

ZANA WOOD

As the cold wind whistles around the school building and your class sits quietly on task, it is easy to understand why teachers may be reluctant to take pupils outside. But when the days are short, spending an hour outdoors can do you the world of good, not to mention your class.

Some of the barriers are obvious, such as the weather and children's inadequate clothing – watching them run around at playtime with no coat and wearing light fabric trainers or ballet pumps can feel uninspiring. A lack of green space – or, conversely, a big expanse of playing field with no trees – can feel equally challenging. Staff confidence and time are an issue. With so many obstacles it can make you wonder how anyone teaches outside easily and with joy; yet they do.

Before I delve into overcoming the barriers, it is important to be clear. I am not talking about forest school. Forest school is child-led, but the outdoor learning I am referring to here is teacher-led. One whole class outdoors, meeting the curriculum through a lesson they would have traditionally done inside.

When it rains...

The adage 'there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing' is true. But this applies to us as much, if not more, than the children. Children, whether through cost, or fashion, are often inappropriately dressed. Reminders to bring warmer clothing in winter and suitable footwear often go unheeded. On outdoor learning days, some schools opt for wearing PE clothes, others have non uniform days. Spare wellies are useful – ask parents to donate them. Keeping children active to keep warm and limiting time spent outside makes all the difference. The most important person here is YOU. If you are not wearing appropriate clothing, you will hate it outside. If you hate it, so will your class.

FIVE, four, three...

I cannot emphasise enough that the easiest way to overcome behavioural issues outside is through regular – ideally weekly – outdoor sessions. It might sound counterintuitive, but honestly, it works. When starting out, use the same behaviour control methods you use inside (counting down, clapping, using a gong, etc). Limit the space you work in to roughly the size of your classroom, and show the children where they can and can't go. Start the lesson with a clear expectation of what you would like to achieve. I favour Paul Dix's three rules – ready, respectful, and safe –reminding them of this at the beginning of each session (learn more at **tinyurl.com/tp-PaulDix**).

We always work in teams, and using the same teams each week also helps everyone to settle. Children with higher needs might have to have shorter lessons outside to begin with, as they can become overstimulated, and when we are outside, I often keep them close to me with extra jobs if needed – taking photos is always a good one. I also have a soft toy rat, who is invaluable at keeping children comforted and occupied when all else fails.

You got this

I'm a firm believer that if you can take PE outside you already have all the skills to take your class out for other learning. For a successful outdoor lesson, research before you go out. There are thousands of ideas out there, but if you are stuck, a simple place to start is to explain to your children you are going to take an English lesson outside. Read them a passage from a book and explain they are going to make a collage picture based on the passage (you can always take visual prompts, such as illustrations from the book, if they're new to this).

We always use white plastic sheets as 'paper'. This gives a clear background, which makes it easier to see. Encourage the teams to collect some materials – grass, twigs, stones, etc. Then guide them to make their picture. Stragglers can be given more collecting jobs. Don't forget to take photos at the end. You can use this method for science diagrams, too. Younger children can start with self-portraits to get them used to creating pictures using natural materials.

Clock watching

Even for a teacher who loves going out with their class, time is a huge stumbling block. As teachers' roles and responsibilities grow beyond the curriculum and teaching assistants become few and far between, simply finding the time and motivation to do more than the mammoth amount already on your plate is nigh on impossible. Decision fatigue is very real in education. It is one of the reasons why bought-in schemes and curriculums are so appealing. For anyone to overcome this barrier it is better for the change to come from the top. If outdoor learning is timetabled into weekly learning, teachers are more likely to take their class out.

"The easiest way by far to overcome behaviour issues outside is to have regular – ideally weekly – sessions"

Some schools allocate PPA cover with the task of running outdoor lessons across the school. One of our schools uses their weekly outdoor learning lessons as part of their science curriculum, and all lessons from living things and their habitats through to electricity have been adapted for outdoors. Other schools we work with use active lessons and tie in some PE lessons with outdoor learning as curriculum-based physical education. **TP**

Zana Wood is director and co-founder of Grow to School

growtoschool.co.uk

Outdoor prep kit

- Expect excited behaviour the first few times outside, so plan lessons that allow for letting off steam – there are lots of spotter sheets available online and collecting in numbers keeps everyone engaged e.g. 10 blades of grass, 20 tiny stones, 1 fallen leaf. Even a tarmacked playground offers up a surprising amount of options.
- Make use of natural materials for creating 2D and 3D diagrams. Get the children involved in collecting a store of sticks, stones, leaves, pinecones, etc to save time when you next go out. These can be kept In boxes or buckets. If you don't have any available at school, ask the children to bring in sticks and stones or collect them on your own weekend walks. You'll be surprised how quickly you can fill a bag.
- Create investigation stations – use benches, tables, or trays. This encourages scientific language and reasoning.
- Cut up cheap white shower curtains into 1m squares. These are great to use as sheets to lay on the ground outside. They provide a good backdrop to see the work more clearly for taking evidence photos, too.
- Don't be afraid to let some children work on their own or with a partner if they struggle within a team, but keep them close to you so you can guide them when needed.
- Enjoy yourself and your class will enjoy themselves, too! If you are unsure how to start your outdoor learning adventure, choose a warm sunny day and a good book and read to your class outside.

Please read the question CAREFULLY

Take a leaf out of scientific experimentation's book and conquer the Everest of maths teaching...

GARETH METCALFE

I believe that great progress has been made in the last 10 years in maths teaching: we represent concepts using the CPA approach (concrete, pictorial, abstract); retrieval practice helps to consolidate learning and improve recall; and we have different strategies for building reasoning into daily lessons. Maths leaders promote consistent approaches to teaching and learning, helping children to make progress.

However, there is one aspect of maths that children can still find so difficult – answering word questions. Despite our reminders to read the *question carefully*, children often choose the incorrect operation, misunderstand an important word, or forget part of a two-step question.

In the Ofsted report 'Coordinating mathematical success' **(tinyurl.com/tp-OfstedMathsSuccess)**, point 92 stated that, 'In some schools... children's only exposure to solving mathematical problems was through answering the final few questions of a predominantly procedure-focused exercise. Often, many pupils did not reach this stage of the exercise.'

It is important, therefore, that we dedicate time to teaching our pupils to answer word questions. Just as we have a clear vision for how children become mathematically fluent, I believe it is important to have the same clarity about how we teach pupils to answer these kinds of problems. What does it mean for children to read the *question carefully*? And how can we teach them so that they learn to do so?

Spot the difference

One tool that can be extremely powerful is to use pairs of 'minimally different questions', where children answer a pair of questions that have minor but important differences. First, pupils spot the differences between the questions. Then, their attention will be drawn to the significance of these differences.

> *"Pairs of mininmally different questions can be powerful"*

Consider this pair of 'minimally different' questions:

(a) Jen has 6 grapes. Amy has 4 more grapes than Jen. **How many grapes does Amy have?**

(b) Jen has 6 sweets. Jen has 4 more sweets than Amy. **How many sweets does Amy have?**

We note the similarities: the names are the same, the numbers are the same, and even the word 'more' is the same. However, the questions have different answers! How can this be?

When we read question (b) carefully, we see that Jen has more sweets than Amy. This means that Amy has *less than Jen*. We subtract, even though the word 'more' is used. This highlights why we have to read *all* the information in a question, rather than focusing too narrowly on what we consider to be the 'key words'. The solutions to both questions can be shown with counters or with a bar model.

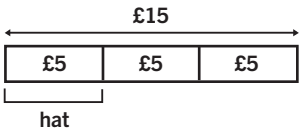
Look to science

There is a parallel between the use of minimally different questions and how we carry out a science experiment. In a science experiment, we change one variable and keep all the other variables constant. This places a spotlight on the effect of changing this one variable. The same principle applies here.

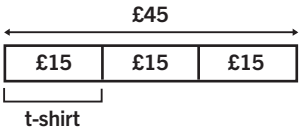
Similarly, consider this pair of questions, deliberately used together to highlight the key differences in wording:

(a) Zack had £15. Then, he spent 1/3 of his money on a hat. **How much did the hat cost?**
(b) Kam spent 1/3 of his money on a t-shirt. The t-shirt cost £15. **How much money did Kam have?**

For (a), the correct method is to calculate 1/3 of £15, as shown by this bar model:



However, for (b) £15 represents 1/3 of Kam's money. This means that Kam must have 3 × £15 originally, as shown by this bar model:



To get the maximum benefit from using these pairs of questions, we need to train children to spot the difference(s) between questions. Then, when the answers are found, we want pupils to identify why the answers to the questions are different. Visual representations like bar models can be especially helpful for illustrating the differences.

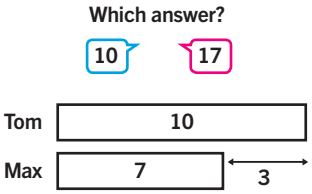
I have found minimally different questions particularly effective for showing children the difference between one-step and a two-step questions. It can really help the pupils to see that second step! Consider this question:

Max has 7 pencils. Tom has 3 more pencils than Max. **How many pencils do Max and Tom have altogether?**

Children are often drawn to the numbers and the 'key words', such as the word *more*. Children are highly likely, though, to overlook the second step: the questions asks for the number of pencils Max and Tom have *altogether*. The pair of minimally different questions below address this, drawing our attention to the difference between a one-step and a two-step question:

(a) Max has 7 pens. Tom has 3 more pens than Max. **How many pens does Max have?**
(b) Max has 7 pencils. Tom has 3 more pencils than Max. **How many pencils do Max and Tom have altogether?**

For question (b), we could show children this bar model and ask them to identify the correct answer (and, for the incorrect answer, explain the mistake):



The spice of life

Variation is one of the NCETM 5 big ideas in teaching for mastery. They describe variation as making 'Purposeful changes… in order that pupils' attention is drawn to key features of the mathematics… enabling them to reason logically and make connections.' I hope that this article shows how variation can be applied to answering word questions, too.

The next time you see a word question that would normally be given in isolation, think about the potential misconceptions that might arise. It could be that writing a minimally different 'partner question' could unlock the important understanding for your class. And in doing so, you will have climbed the Everest of maths teaching – getting children to read their word questions carefully! **TP**

Gareth Metcalfe is the director of I See Maths and the author of the* Deconstructing Word Questions, I See Reasoning *and* I See Problem-Solving *eBooks.

iseemaths.com
@gareth_metcalfe
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TEA AD 0085 03/25

THIS WAY!

School improvement advice for headteachers and SLT

MIDDLE LEADERS | CPD | SUBJECT LEADERSHIP

So much content, SO LITTLE TIME

Among the most common complaints about the national curriculum are that there are too many subjects, too much content, and not enough time to teach it all. Debating the first two complaints will likely form an important part of the government's curriculum review. But whatever the form of the next national curriculum, schools will still face the challenges and limitations imposed by the length of the school day, weeks, terms, and years. However, by pursuing Tim Oates' initial aim of teaching "fewer things in greater depth" and using principles of cognitive science for curriculum design, we are presented with a wonderful opportunity to refine the national curriculum and improve outcomes for all our children.

There is a stark irony that the national curriculum in England has too much content, despite most subjects' programmes of study covering less than two sides of A4. Whilst the lack of specificity has offered important opportunities for curriculum innovation, in many cases it has perpetuated the use of a topic-based approach to curriculum planning. Children 'do' the Romans in history, or volcanoes in geography, but what they learn is not always easily connected to existing schema, reducing both the content's relevance and its ability to stick. When content struggles to be more than a list of facts related to a topic's name, curriculum sequences can yield poor returns on the time and resources invested in teaching and learning; children can quickly become overloaded with seemingly disconnected information and, consequently, fail to commit the content to long-term memory.

Opportunity knocks

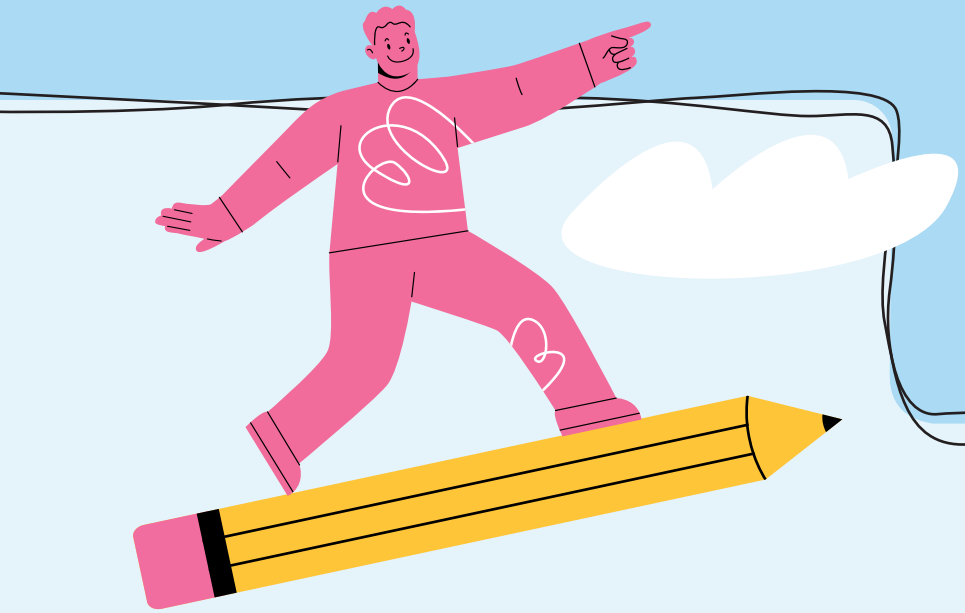
Reforming the national curriculum presents an opportunity to specify the key content and concepts that children should learn to make progress in each subject. The vagueness of the current programmes of study can easily cause schools to overload their individual curriculums. Although spaced repetition is widely considered a powerful pedagogical tool, it is difficult to put its potential into effect when teaching sequences – with all good intentions to deliver progress and ensure coverage – that continuously introduce new content. Curriculum reform is an opportunity to identify which concepts are critical at specific points in children's learning, and to suggest how they can be revisited in different contexts in each subject.

The sequencing of the curriculum also makes a huge difference to children's learning. When we talk about conceptual development, we are describing how children's schema grows over time. Multiple examples of the same concept in different contexts, such as the water cycle in geography or nutrition in science, have the potential to grow deep and interconnected schemata when new learning is deliberately connected to prior understanding. Reforming the curriculum to prioritise content linked to the essential concepts of each subject would provide teachers with increased clarity about what to teach; guidance on the examples to use and the order in which to introduce them would support pupils in making significant and ambitious progress.

Quality over quantity

Identifying the building blocks of each subject, and designing the roadmap from novice to expert, requires substantial subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge from curriculum designers; it requires an understanding of the content, its connections, and the way knowledge is constructed. This poses an incredible – and often insurmountable – burden on primary teachers that is felt strongly across the sector. Whilst retaining some opportunity for curriculum innovation is important, so too is the need to collaborate with subject experts, so that any reforms to the national curriculum are evidence-informed and ensure that specifications focus on the key concepts in each subject.

The government also has an opportunity to support primary teachers by investing in high-quality curriculum materials to accompany the implementation of any reforms.



Be the change

Our school ethos is 'a place everyone loves to be', and in 2018 we used this as a lens through which to look at our curriculum. Did children love learning it? Did teachers love teaching it? It was OK but… no. There was also a question bugging us – is this content the best use of the limited time we have with the children? So much of the 'best bits' seemed to sit outside the day-to-day curriculum. And then there was the amount of time (60 per cent? 70 per cent? More?) dedicated to maths and English. Was this really what our children needed to thrive in the 21st century? This was pre-Covid, and even then the figures around physical and mental health were stark. Not to mention the unique qualities of our community – 97 per cent of whom are multilingual.

Making the decision to entirely overhaul your curriculum is not one to take lightly. It is fair to say there were more than a few raised eyebrows. But we were convinced it was the key to helping us reach our goals. If I were to do it all again, I'm not sure I'd change much, but we certainly learned a lot along the way, including…

- Culture and ethos: we had spent time creating a culture of innovation at the school. One of our strategic goals was, 'innovate' and one of our guiding principles was, 'thinking about what we do and why'. These mindsets being part of the fabric of the organisation meant people were on board with the changes from day one.
- Time: I was fortunate to be able to free up one of my assistant heads for two years. One to research and one to implement. It is unthinkable now but, seven years ago, it was just possible. However you resource it, putting sufficient time into understanding what needs to change and then into implementing it is key.
- Implementation: we staggered the introduction of different elements of the curriculum – starting with physical health. This allowed time to test and refine. It also meant time to invest in professional development.
- Professional development: changing what we teach takes time. For us, we were moving away from the traditional curriculum and so there weren't ready-made resources out there. We had to – and continue to have to – prioritise professional development to support curriculum knowledge.
- Workload and wellbeing: making these changes and enacting them successfully in classrooms takes time and energy. We stripped away workload that had minimal impact on children to create space for teachers to focus on getting this right.
- Storytelling: as with any successful change process, telling the right stories to bring people along with you is a game changer. Why are you making these changes? And what are the stories that bring it to life?

Ben Levinson OBE is headteacher at Kensington Primary School (Primary School of the Year 2020), and chair of the Well Schools initiative.

@mrlev

tinyurl.com/tp-WellSchools

"A badly structured curriculum can yield poor returns on the time and resources invested"

Non-statutory textbooks, crafted in consultation with both subject experts and primary specialists (and with the principles of cognitive science in mind) could provide a minimum offering for pupils across the country, especially in schools that may lack the necessary tools or expertise. Such a resource would save significant time across the sector, reducing teacher workload while enhancing teaching and learning.

By the book

Another opportunity to support teachers would be the commissioning of high-quality picture books to reinforce curriculum knowledge. Dan Willingham speaks of the psychological privilege of stories, and there is an increasing number of wonderful texts, such as Sabina Rodeva's *On the Origin of Species*, which present complex information in accessible and appealing narratives. Whilst this collection is growing, such resources can be difficult to source and do not always align with the programmes of study. Specially commissioned texts, which harness the power of story and are directly linked to statutory outcomes, would be a gift not only for primary subject leaders and teachers, but for children across the country.

As part of any reform of the national curriculum, the government has an important opportunity to raise outcomes for children across England. We can never be certain what our pupils' futures will look like, but we can be absolutely sure that their ability to respond to the challenges they face will be based on the knowledge they acquire at school. For this knowledge to be secure, children need clear, structured curriculum sequences that focus on the critical content of each subject. With strong foundations in this core knowledge, we can empower all our children to construct the deep, rich, and interconnected schema to which they are all entitled.

Marc Hayes is the newly appointed headteacher at Horsforth Newlaithes in Leeds, starting in September 2025.

@mrmarchayes

marcrhayes.com

YOUTH SHADOW PANEL

The front lines

The Youth Shadow Panel, a group of young people and youth organisations, is leading its own version of the government's curriculum and assessment review. The panel released its interim report in February this year, summarising its call for evidence and outlining young people's thoughts on the education system.

The findings from Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) highlight the need for a more engaging, interactive, and student-centred approach to education.

KS1

Whilst responses from KS1 were fewer, it was emphasised that children want more breaks and fewer lessons. This was reflected in comments from older children, who want more interactive learning and more time outdoors.

KS2

KS2 pupils expressed enjoyment in creativity and practical learning, particularly in subjects where they could develop useful skills, with a call for learning to be more fun, practical, and engaging.

KS2 pupils also shared that they found teacher feedback helpful in assessments. However, concerns were raised about the stress and anxiety caused by these assessments, particularly exams. It was felt that more time outdoors and in nature would help reduce stress levels.

KS2 pupils, as well as children and young people across all key stages, mentioned that they enjoy "helping the community" and want to be "changemakers" and a part of improving society, but feel that the education system does not prepare them for this.

Climate change and the environment was also mentioned as a topic that pupils want to learn more about. You can see the full interim report, and find out what the panel is planning next, at **shadowpanel.uk**

The Youth Shadow Panel is supporting the inclusion of children's and youth perspectives in the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review.

@YouthShadowPanel

ASK THE EXPERT

“It’s no longer a niche”

Richard Clutterbuck explains why the adoption of AI tech within schools shouldn’t be seen as a threat, but as an opportunity to change things for the better

What’s your response to those who argue that AI technology is just a passing fad?

We’re always seeing new technologies fail to live up to their hype, so it’s understandable some people see the obsession with AI as a passing fad. But AI is already having a dramatic impact across industries – whether it’s streaming platforms recommending TV shows based on what you like to watch, or automation of admin tasks. AI isn’t just a new solution; it’s fundamentally a new way of working with computers.

Should schools be worried about the possibility of AI systems acting in biased or unfair ways?

It’s true that AI can make biased decisions. If an AI model is designed to mimic the decisions of biased humans, then it will reflect those biases in the decisions it makes. Choosing systems that are carefully designed and vetted, inputting high quality data and incorporating human intervention can minimise unfair bias.

What would you say to schools concerned about the prospect of sensitive data being shared with AI models?

Since AI depends on our data to deliver its responses and learn over time, it’s understandable that teachers and staff are concerned about how secure their sensitive data is when working with AI. Thankfully, there are plenty of regulations requiring companies to use data in a responsible manner, such as GDPR. At Bromcom, we take the matter of protecting your data very seriously. If, for example, you run any queries on your MIS data, that data will be kept confidential and secure within the Bromcom cloud network.

EXPERT PROFILE

NAME:
Richard Clutterbuck

JOB TITLE:
Head of Strategic Relations at Bromcom

AREA OF EXPERTISE:
Leadership, teaching and learning pedagogy, curriculum design and AI

BEST PART OF MY JOB:
Working with schools and MATs to help them use Bromcom to get better outcomes for their young people

Won’t it just be larger schools and MATs that can actually afford AI?

AI is no longer an expensive, niche technology reserved only for those companies with the funds to invest in it. There’s a huge range of AI tools available at a range of prices – including free ones, like ChatGPT! As AI models have become more commoditised and better optimised, they’ve also become cheaper and more effective. Plenty of educators now use technologies like Bromcom AI daily, to save themselves time and then dedicate more of that time to their students.

Should anyone currently working in a school be worried about AI taking their job?

Many people assume that AI will mainly be used by companies as a cheap replacement for human workers. While it’s true that AI can carry out *some* activities – like data entry and sorting tasks – more quickly and cheaply than humans, most jobs entail cognitive tasks that humans are better at. Like all technological breakthroughs, AI may unfortunately make some jobs redundant, but it should also allow industries to flourish and unlock new employment opportunities. What this means for education, we don’t yet know.

SEND SPECIAL

Personalised SEND support

SNAP

SNAP is a group of online, diagnostic profilers that focus on specific learning difficulties (SpLD), behavioural needs (SEMH), and maths learning difficulties. With three options (SNAP-SpLD, SNAP-B, and SNAP Maths), SNAP generates personalised reports for SENCos, learning resources and strategies, and further supporting materials.
SNAP's triangulated approach involves parents/carers in their pupil's support with a parent questionnaire and personalised reports. It also covers the biggest range of specific learning difficulties (20) and behavioural needs (17), including maths-specific learning difficulties. The Core Profile makes identifying areas of need quick and easy. See **snap.rsassessment.com** for more.

INSIDE THIS SECTION

Permission to DREAM BIG

Allow yourself to take a journey from your classroom, and plan for your pupils' very own 'Mambo No. 5' moment...

AARON KING

It was quite a while coming, but eventually, it happened. That moment.

It was in a town centre bar one night. I was with friends, when a bloke aged 20ish approached…

"Are you Mr King? You used to be my teacher."

We chatted a little. He was a pupil with SEND whom I'd taught early in my career, and he spoke about how, alongside a brilliant teaching assistant, I'd helped him with his severe stammer. He'd moved away from home, he was working and was pretty happy with life. I couldn't make out everything he said, but that was only because 'Mambo No. 5' was blasting out of the speakers. His stammer was no longer evident, and he spoke with fluency and confidence. He was a walking, talking, living, dancing reminder of the importance of great SEND provision. And that all started with a plan.

The good, the bad and the lengthy

There are many templates for SEN plans – some that are keenly focused and some that are so long and complex that they risk being ineffective. Whether your template is great or grisly, you want to give every child the best shot at success. So where do you start?

Daydream and wonder

One problem that's been highlighted by many national reports about SEND is that, too often, there isn't enough ambition for pupils. So, let's start with your biggest dreams and not your current assessments of attainment.

Imagine that it's 3:50pm, and you've got an empty classroom. Lean back in your chair and think about what adult life could be like for one of your pupils who has SEND. Envision them in the workplace, living independently, successfully raising a family and being fit and healthy.

Now you've done that, pause. What are four areas that they should be better at so they could achieve those dreams? Jot them on a sticky note. Next, imagine what it would look like if that child left your class in July, and you could say, "We're so proud. They couldn't have done any better." What leaps would they have made in their reading? Concentration? Friendships? Managing feelings? Monitoring their own hearing aid? Jot your thoughts down. Even if your ideas feel unrealistic, don't worry. You have permission to dream big.

Back to earth

Once you've processed your ambitions, only then can you really reflect on your current assessments of the child. Most schools assess English and maths well, but to assess SEND more holistically, don't be afraid to ask your SENCo, stick your nose in the SEND cupboard, or Google for reliable downloadable tools, (e.g. Northamptonshire SALT's

resources and links pages have a useful Speech Screen pdf). Sometimes a child is working below the level at which you'd like to see them. Have the confidence to chat to teachers and support staff in younger year groups, and ask them, "What would be your top tips for closing the gap?" or, "What would you see as the next big leap?"

Once you've reflected on your ambitions and assessments, only now should you draft the child's targeted outcomes by answering the question, 'What new thing will they be able to do in 13 weeks?' Aim high, but please do not litter ambitious outcomes with teacher-speak (e.g. *digraphs*, *common exception words*, *WT3*). Jargon makes your plans harder to understand for most families. Straightforward language is also quicker to write (and I can almost guarantee you have more than one of these plans on your to-do list).

Finally, say what provision you will provide to make the outcomes a reality. If you cannot realistically provide something, don't include it, or you risk undermining parental trust in both you and your school.

A family matter

If you've haven't done so before, ask parents what their dreams are for their child once they're grown up. This doesn't have to mean a meeting; it might just be a three-minute chat at pick up time. Chat to them about the draft of your plan, too. Do they have any questions or concerns about anything you've put down? Just because you've started it, doesn't mean it can't alter after hearing parent views. Having a draft plan simply avoids discussions starting with a blank page.

In an ideal world, your draft is perfect. In which case, everyone can start working towards the outcomes immediately. But if you need to redraft, that's ok – it's better to lose a few days amending the plan and have good parental engagement, than push on and alienate a crucial part of the child's support network.

Safe hands

How successfully would you meet your appraisal targets if your headteacher didn't tell you what they were? Humans perform better when they know their goals. You could even include some children in choosing their own outcomes but, either way, you should normally share goals with pupils. If you've used straightforward language, you might not even need to simplify the wording. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. For a young child who has autism or another need that results in hitting others, for example, you might just share a version of 'safe hands when playing with others'. It's also always best to ask, 'Is it in the child's best interests for me to discuss their outcomes with them?'.

> *"Start with your biggest dreams and ambitions for your pupils, rather than assessments of their attainment at present"*

And finally...

Share the plan with other staff who work with the child so you can all crack on with moving towards the outcomes. And keep driving towards that dream because, before you know it, a 20-year-old will approach you in a bar as walking, talking, living, dancing proof of how you got on. **TP**

6 MISTAKES TO AVOID

1 Over-focusing on English or maths. Targets probably shouldn't just be academic. You can prioritise social skills, flexible thinking, self-regulation, etc.

2 Adding too many targets. Three or four is normally fine. SEN plans need a laser-like focus on the top priorities.

3 Not sharing the plan with parents. This robs you of their feedback and robs them of a chance to engage in their child's success.

4 Not having SEN targets easily available in your classroom. Make it as easy as possible for you, teaching assistants, trainee teachers and supply staff to check how you want to boost the child's learning. Yes – that means printing the plan.

5 Tautology. This is that grisly teacher habit of adding words that add little extra meaning but that make everything harder to understand (e.g. *as relevant/appropriate/required*).

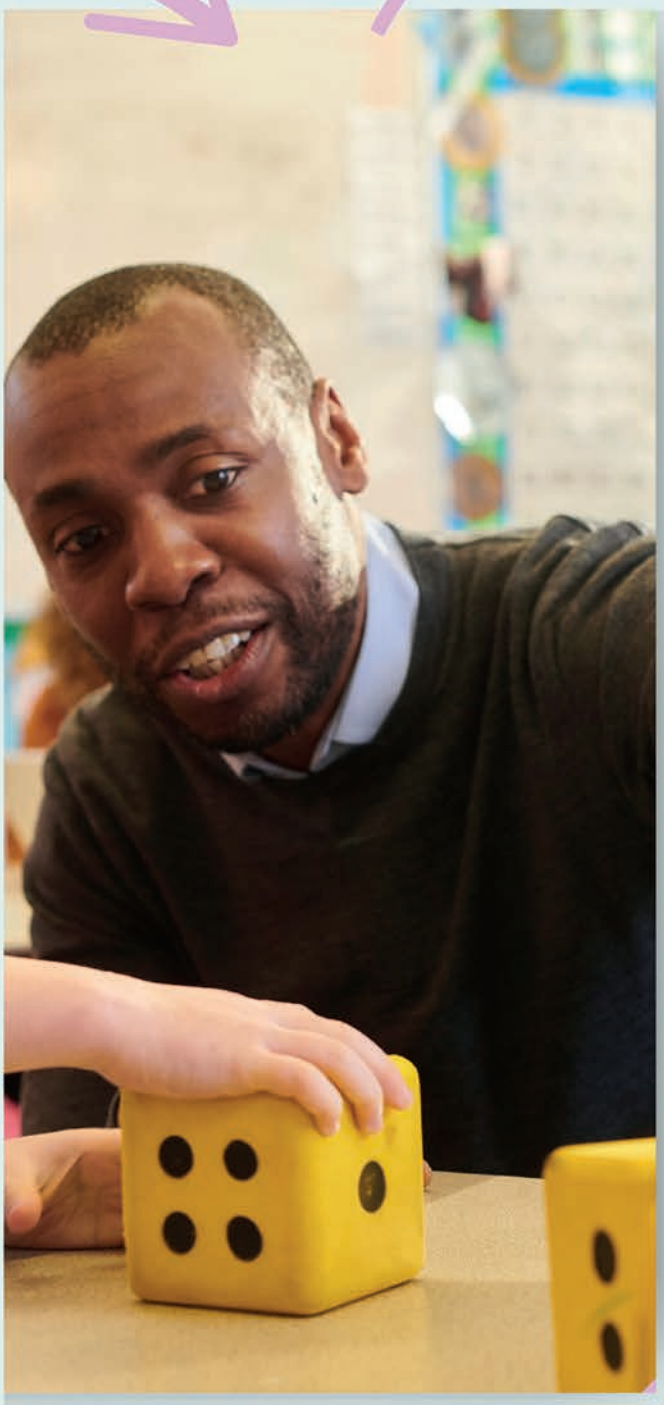
6 Too much use of '80 per cent of the time'. For some skills, we need pupils to do it 100 per cent of the time – for example, when it comes to using finger spaces. Youalwaysneedfingerspaces!

Aaron King is a SEND advisor who now supports schools, trusts and councils to improve the lives of SEND children. He also teaches Y6 on Thursdays.

9000Lives.org

HODDER Education is now > hachette LEARNING

SNAP



The Digital Toolkit For SENCOs

SNAP builds a learner profile by talking to the learner, their teacher and their parents before generating personalised reports, learning resources and strategies you'll actually use.

SpLD • Behaviour • Maths

Out of REACH?

The idea that metacognition is beyond our SEN pupils is absolute rubbish, says **Nathan Burns**. We just need to make sure we're using it properly...

Metacognition is not only a hard thing to define, but it's also very difficult to actually realise in the classroom. Metacognitive thoughts are often not spoken about, but rather, left to be subconscious and hidden away. When metacognition does eventually come to the surface, it can be messy, hard to communicate and complex. And for this reason, SEN students couldn't possibly be metacognitive, could they? It'd be too overwhelming. Too overloading. Too difficult. Rubbish.

Let's backtrack a second, to understand what metacognition actually is. Though I've said it's hard to define above, let me take a crack at it. I usually define metacognition as the little voice inside your head that is constantly informing and evaluating your actions (Burns, 2023). In effect, metacognition is the constant cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluation through which we work to continuously improve our output. The more metacognitive we are, the better we get and the quicker those improvements are made.

But it was only a few years ago (2019) that the EEF concluded that of all the interventions, approaches, and programmes that we can utilise in our schools, metacognition is the one which is most likely to turbocharge pupil progress **(tinyurl.com/tp-EEFmetacognition)**. It was only a year before that when Ofsted concluded much the same. Evidence shows us that where individuals improve their metacognitive skills, their outcomes will also improve.

Six pillars

As to why this happens, first we need to better understand the six pillars of the metacognitive process:

- knowledge of task (what we've been asked to do)
- knowledge of self (how we learn, and what content knowledge we have)
- strategies (how we can tackle the task)
- planning (what tools to use, and in what order to tackle the task)
- monitoring (how our strategies are going as we complete the task)
- evaluation (what worked and what didn't)

If an individual can excel in all six of those areas, then they will do excellently in their education, and make swift and deep progress.

If metacognition covers all this, it is clearly as fundamental as clear modelling, effective questioning and actionable feedback. And we wouldn't argue that those areas aren't for SEN students, would we? So why would we argue that metacognition isn't, either? I often challenge the notion that metacognition is too complicated or overwhelming for SEN students by suggesting that it isn't a pupil problem, but rather the way that the metacognitive strategies are being introduced and fostered. If the children are being overwhelmed by the metacognitive strategies that we are using, then we need to reflect on what we are doing and why.

Do as I do

But how exactly can we go about embedding this approach? I think the best place to start is through the illumination of our own thinking. We are experts, well versed in the content that we're teaching, with a deep understanding of the curriculum and assessment

Fig 1.

Knowledge of task	Knowledge of self	Knowledge of strategies
What must I do?	*What information do I know, that I must include?*	What approach will allow me to successfully complete the given task?

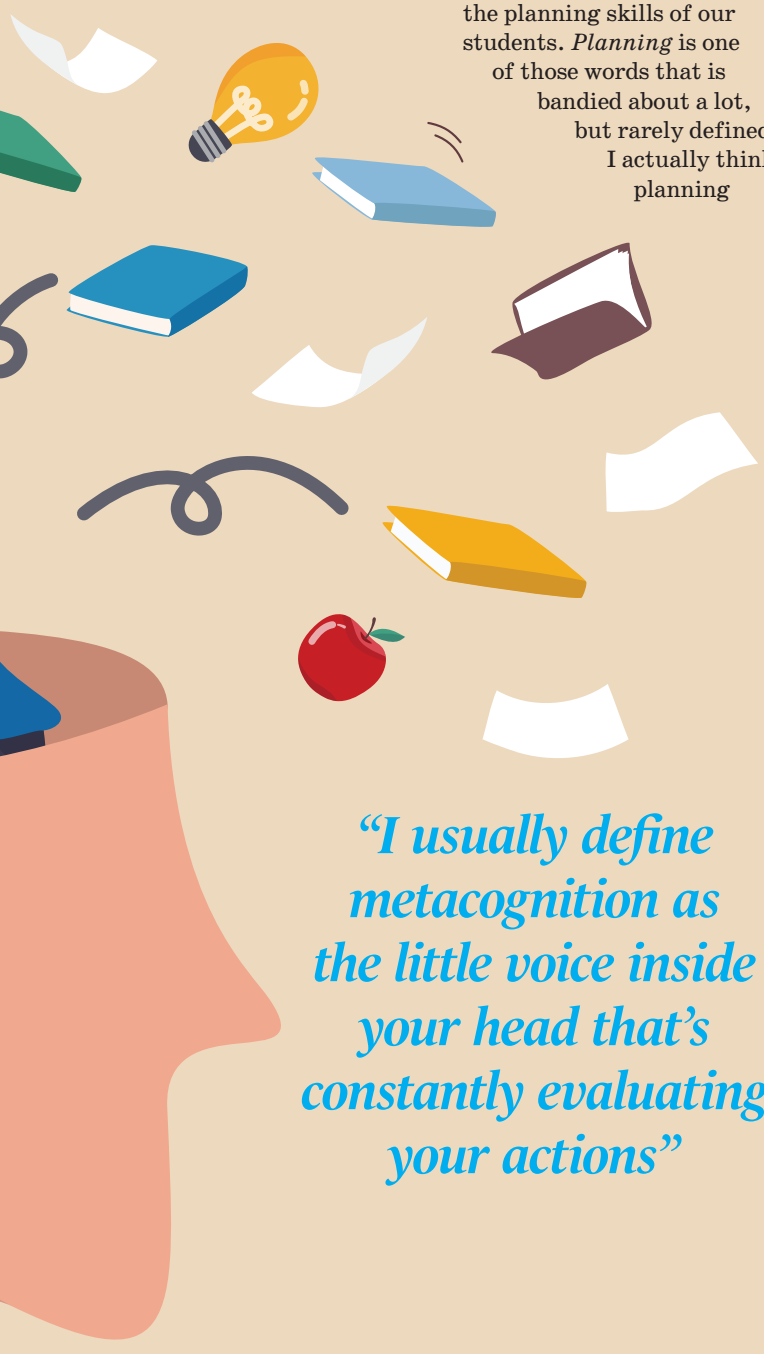
expectations. Our pupils, meanwhile, are not. And so the very first thing that we can do to support the children's metacognitive development is to highlight our own metacognition, through what I like to call explicit justifications. Whenever we are modelling, and we make a choice – perhaps over the strategy that we use, the key word upon which we fixate, or the evidence source that we draw upon – we should make a point of talking about why and how we made these choices; why one word requires far more focus than another, or why one piece of information better supports the argument we are making than others. Very quickly, our expert metacognition goes from being invisible to visible, showing not just the choices we make, but why.

Master planning

I also think it wise to consider how we can develop the planning skills of our students. *Planning* is one of those words that is bandied about a lot, but rarely defined. I actually think planning is quite simple, made up of an understanding of what we need to do, what information we need to include, and how we will go about doing it. Or, in metacognitive language, our knowledge of task, self and strategies. These thoughts led to the birth of my 'Knowledge of' planning grid (see *Fig. 1*), a clear template to support student planning, which directed them to consider these key elements.

Next, how to develop pupils' monitoring skills is a slightly more straightforward issue to solve. Using some form of checklist, we can ensure that students note down all the information that they need to include in the answer to their task, and then tick it off as they add it in. The advantages of this are huge, the greatest one being the freeing up of cognitive load. If children have already determined all the information that they need to include in a question, their brain is then freed up to consider the actual completion of the task. Those checklists can be varied, too. Some can include all pre- and post-question tasks, such as tidying up, others may just focus on the core content, whilst still others may actually break a larger question up into smaller sub-questions that can be answered one at a time.

How we evaluate our work at the end can vary. There are so many different approaches, right? One of my favourites, although arguably one of the cruellest, is the strategy of 'Do It Again'. What do pupils have to do? The same work, again. Why? Well, on the second attempt, the children need to complete the work using a different technique or approach, and not just rinse and repeat from the first attempt. This is a brilliant way to safely push pupils out of their comfort zone, getting them to explore different strategies, and becoming more flexible in their approaches to a range of tasks. The more flexibility our pupils have, the better they will then become at problem solving. TP



"I usually define metacognition as the little voice inside your head that's constantly evaluating your actions"

Further reading

To learn more about metacognition and its impact on learning, check out these reports and articles:

- Metacognition and self-regulation, EEF: **tinyurl.com/tp-EEFmeta**
- What is metacognition? Chartered College of Teaching: **tinyurl.com/tp-CCTmeta**
- Metacognition in progress, Geographical Association: **tinyurl.com/tp-GAmeta**
- Explainer video, EEF (via YouTube): **tinyurl.com/tp-EEFmetaVid**
- Strategies for maths (lesson plan), Teachwire: **tinyurl.com/tp-MetaMaths**

Nathan Burns is a metacognitive trainer and researcher. He is also a former head of maths, and author of **Inspiring Deep Learning with Metacognition** *and* **Teaching Hacks: Fixing Everyday Classroom Issues with Metacognition** *(both £20.99, SAGE).*

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Support for all

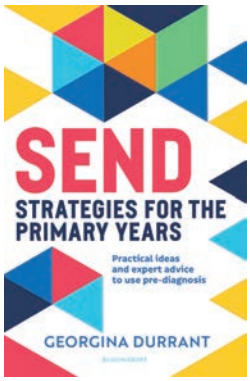
Resources to help you make your classroom as inclusive as possible

1 SEND consultancy

Ann Arbor Publishers is well known to psychologists, health and behavioural specialists, teachers, specialist assessors, speech and language and occupational therapists, allied professionals, researchers and parents. With a reputation for personal and prompt service, AAP boasts an extensive product range covering ability, attainment, exam access arrangements, behaviour, mental health, social and communication differences, lifespan development and visuomotor difficulties. It offers a free all-year-round customer consultancy service and a variety of free, downloadable checklists/info-sheets. Its Price Match Promise guarantees the lowest UK price when comparing VAT-inclusive prices and delivery. Delivery is free for orders over £100. Visit **annarbor.co.uk**, email **enquiries@annarbor.co.uk**, or call **01668 214460**.

2 Super Movers for Every Body

Super Movers for Every Body is an accessible sports campaign partnership between BBC Teach, the Premier League and Paralympics GB. All UK primary schools are eligible to apply for a free school para sports pack including kit for blind football, boccia and para athletics. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-BBCsupermovers**



3 SEND Strategies for the Primary Years *by Georgina Durrant*

SEND Strategies for the Primary Years stands out in the realm of educational resources due to its exceptional blend of practicality, accessibility, and comprehensive coverage of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Its suitability for both teachers and parents navigating the complexities of supporting children with diverse needs is unparalleled. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-Strategies**

4 BSL for beginners

Learning British Sign Language is fun, fast and effective with our online course. We offer a comprehensive introduction to BSL that covers a wide range of topics, beginning with the basics – such as fingerspelling, greetings, and colours – before moving through subjects such as food, time, money, animals, weather, feelings, and occupations, including education. Learners find out about the unique grammar and syntax of BSL along the way, and by the end of the course should feel comfortable holding basic conversations in BSL – even in topics that haven't been covered in the content. **british-sign.co.uk/learn**

5 Learning village

An interactive, game-based online programme that will engage and motivate your EAL, pre-literate and SEND learners of any mother tongue, Learning Village has inclusivity at its core. It not only caters for EAL learners with SEND, but also supports learners with English as a first language who may have language delays and difficulties. Visit **learningvillage.net**

Is this orange, or is THIS ORANGE?

Teachers need to rethink colour in the classroom to ensure accessibility for all, argues **Marie Difolco**

It started on a typical afternoon. My son, who was almost seven years old at the time, was sitting at the table drawing, when he suddenly held up two felt-tip pens. "Is this orange, or is this orange?" he asked innocently. I looked at his hands – one held an orange pen, the other, lime green.

That was the moment I realised he was colour blind. It was such a shock. He'd previously had a school eye test and a follow-up with an optician, so it was hard to understand how something like this could have been missed.

The realisation hit even harder when I discovered that in every average classroom across the UK, at least one child is colour blind (via colourblindawareness.org). Staggering, isn't it? Right now, there are around 450,000 colour blind children in our education system, and each year around 27,000 more will start school.

Yet, despite colour blindness being one of the most common genetic conditions in the world, most schools aren't able to identify many of their children who live with it.

Hidden disadvantage

In 2009, screening for colour blindness was removed from the Healthy Child Screening Programme, based on a review that relied on faulty and outdated evidence. Today, 80 per cent of children reach secondary school without ever having been tested for this common SEND, despite the fact 75 per cent of them will have had an NHS eye test. Opticians in England often don't check for it unless specifically asked, meaning even children who wear glasses may never have been tested (colourblindawareness.org).

This leaves schools in the dark and children to struggle in silence. Through no fault of their own, teachers receive no training on how to spot the signs of this visual impairment or how to support affected pupils. The consequence? Pupils miss vital detail across the whole curriculum. Any information reliant on differentiating between colours is likely to be inaccessible to them. They lose confidence, they can become frustrated and disengaged, and often their struggle is mistaken for something else.

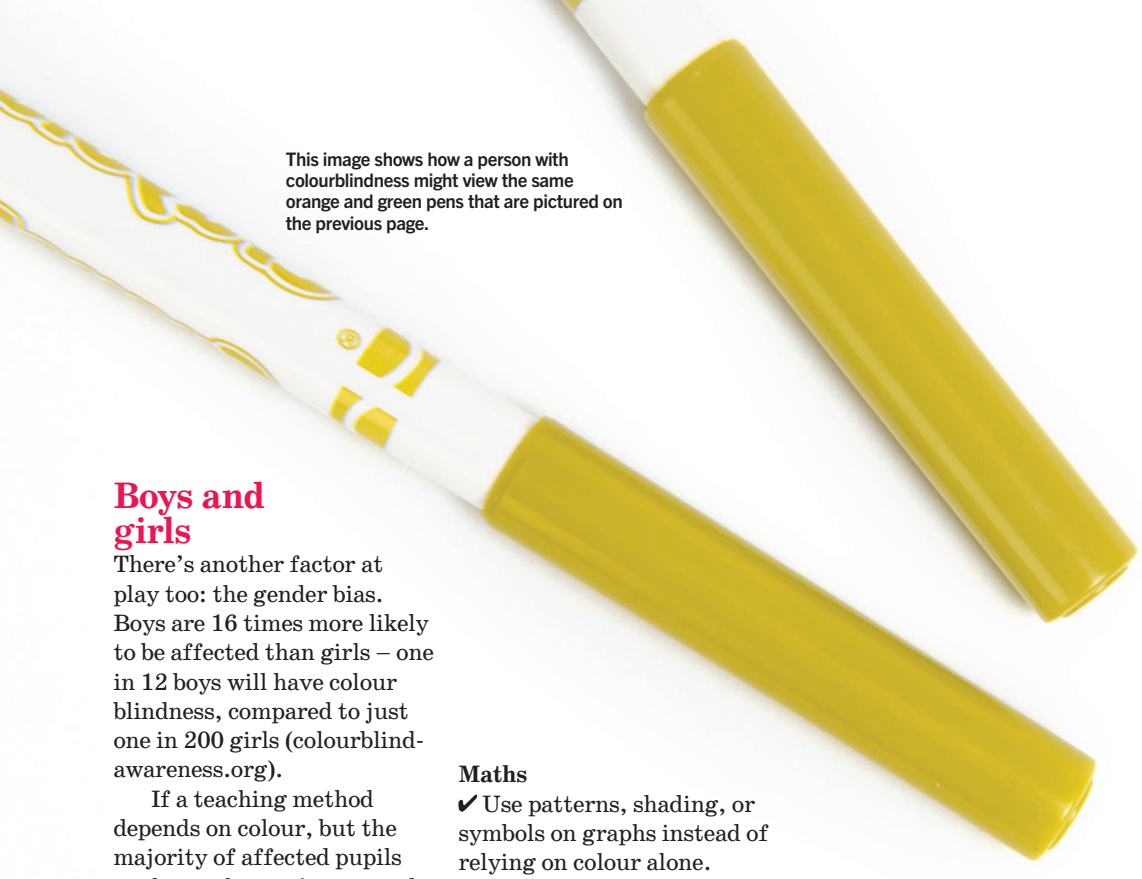
"80 per cent of children reach secondary school without ever having been tested for colour blindness"

Have you ever thought of a child as inattentive or slow to grasp instructions? Have you ever wondered why a pupil doesn't seem to engage with certain classroom tasks? There's a chance they're not being difficult – they're just not seeing what you think they are.

The impact of undiagnosed colour blindness extends far beyond the art supplies cupboard. In science, a child might misinterpret pH charts or electrical circuit diagrams. In maths, they might not be able to understand colour-coded graphs or number blocks. In geography, they could be struggling with maps or flags. In sport, they might pass a ball to the other team because, to them, their own kit looks the same as their opponents'.

And not only does colour blindness affect understanding, it can also impact safety, wellbeing, and quality of life.

This image shows how a person without colourblindness views one orange pen, and one green pen. The image on the following page shows the perspective of a person with colourblindness.



This image shows how a person with colourblindness might view the same orange and green pens that are pictured on the previous page.

Boys and girls

There's another factor at play too: the gender bias. Boys are 16 times more likely to be affected than girls – one in 12 boys will have colour blindness, compared to just one in 200 girls (colourblind-awareness.org).

If a teaching method depends on colour, but the majority of affected pupils are boys, then we've created a persistent situation of indirect sex discrimination. Colour blindness isn't just an access issue – it's an equality issue.

And it's not just children who are impacted. Thousands of teachers will be colour blind too. Yet, they're unlikely to receive reasonable adjustments in their workplace, even though colour blindness, by definition, is a disability.

What can you do?

The good news is small changes can make a huge difference – and they often cost little to nothing. First, start looking for the signs. Does a pupil use colour inappropriately? Do they colour skies and seas purple instead of blue? Do they copy a friend when the task requires selecting colour? Can they continue a colour pattern easily? A colour-blind child might develop some coping strategies, but they won't always be effective.

Next, make sure colour isn't the only way you communicate information. Use patterns, labels, or symbols, too, so that all pupils can access the material. Some ideas to get you started:

Maths

✔ Use patterns, shading, or symbols on graphs instead of relying on colour alone.
✔ Ensure number blocks or counters have numbers or symbols on them.
✔ If you use colour-by-number worksheets, make sure they are only used where labelled pens and pencils are provided (label each with its colour name in a simple form – e.g. dark red, light pink, etc).

Geography

✔ Use symbols or patterns on maps to differentiate regions.
✔ Ensure flags are identified by name, not just by appearance, as colour blind students may not be able to distinguish them accurately – a surprising amount of flags can look the same when you can't distinguish their colours!
✔ Avoid using traffic light colour coding to indicate economic or climate data—use patterns, grayscale shading, or labels instead.

"Thousands of teachers are also colour blind, but are unlikely to receive reasonable adjustments in their workplaces"

Science

✔ Allow a colour-blind child to work with a colour buddy who can help them (make sure you are certain the buddy does not have colour blindness themselves!).
✔ Label pH charts, diagrams, and results clearly instead of using colour as the only distinguishing feature.
✔ Highlight plant structures using written labels or different textures.
✔ Explain biological slides by discussing contrast differences instead of referring to colours alone.

Finally, talk about it. Colour blindness is common, but it's rarely discussed. Simply raising awareness can help schools become more inclusive. **TP**

A QUICK COLOUR AUDIT

Want to check if your classroom is accessible to colour blind pupils? Ask yourself these questions:

Are my teaching resources colour-reliant? If I took away the colours, would the meaning still be clear?

Do I use colour-coded marking or feedback? Can all pupils differentiate between comments? If not, should I add symbols, too?

Are my displays accessible? Do colour blind children struggle with charts, behaviour traffic lights, or subject-specific colour schemes?

What about sports? Could bib colours be causing problems?

Have I ever checked? Have I ever actively looked for signs of colour blindness in my pupils? Have I ever had a conversation with other staff about it?

How many colour-blind children can we identify across the school? Do the numbers reflect the statistics?

Do I know how my classroom looks through the eyes of a colour-blind child? Have I ever used a colour vision app to check (e.g. Chromatic Vision Simulator)?

Marie Difolco is the author of **Supporting Colour Blindness in Education and Beyond** *(£19.99, Routledge) and works voluntarily alongside Newcastle University to raise awareness of colour blindness.*

"Could you JUST...?"

Time is at a premium for a busy SENDCo, but there are ways and means to make the most of the hours at your disposal, says **Ginny Bootman**

Have you ever actually managed to get to the toilet at work without someone saying, "I just need to talk to you about Brian..."? Do you try and sneak out of school at the end of the day, to avoid the inevitable "Have you got a minute?"? I thought so. These are daily occurrences for busy SENDCos.

I've often found myself trying to be invisible. But that's not sustainable. Instead, we need ways to help save us time, while remaining visible to those that need us.

Throughout my career, I've come to find that there are, in fact, quite a few ways to be able to save time and get the job done properly. I'll share them with you here, in the hopes that you find them useful, too.

Gatekeepers

One of the best ways I find to help me manage workload is to check in with my gatekeeper. Your gatekeeper is the person who will back you when you're not in the room; who will say what is – and isn't – your responsibility. This could be the headteacher, your line manager, or really any member of staff who knows you well and 'gets' what you do.

Flexibility

There's no harm in asking if you could work from home sometimes. When you've got particular jobs to do – like *that* referral – you need to make sure you won't be interrupted, and can focus completely on the task at hand. Not sure how to approach your SLT about it? Chat to your gatekeeper, first.

Meetings

Ah, the universal time-suck. Meetings can run out of control really easily, and become just another thing you can't wait to tick off your list, rather than useful ideas-sharing vehicles, which is what they're meant to be. Early on in my career, a parent asked me for a meeting, and in preparation I overmarked books, and did lots of extra assessments. I laid everything out on the table, and when the parent came in, it turned out they just wanted to let me know they'd be pulling their child out of school to go to a family wedding. All that work, and time, and I needn't have bothered. What I'm trying to say is, make sure you know the reason for and scope of the meeting before going in – I really learned a lesson about wasting time on this one!

Control your time

On that note, make sure everyone in the meeting knows when it will start and finish, too.

If you don't put a cap on a meeting's length, it can go on and on – we always manage to fill time we don't actually have to spare! Ringfencing a certain time will also mean that the other members of the meeting can plan their schedules effectively.

Get up

At the end of a meeting, stand up. I know, it can feel rude, but I promise it's not. It's professional, and it is a really good physical reminder to everyone – especially you – that the meeting has finished.

Go digital

Why not consider virtual meetings, too? Not every conversation has to be in person, and if working through a pandemic has taught us anything, it's that we can collaborate in a variety of ways (and that not commuting saves bags of time!). If a parent or carer doesn't have access to a computer with video, you could use smartphones or even the regular old landline.

> *"I've often found myself trying to be invisible, but that's not sustainable"*

Diaries

The idea may fill you with trepidation, but bear with me – consider an electronic diary. It's always on your phone, so you don't have to worry about another thing to forget; you can access online calendars (like those from Apple or Google) from any device, so even if you leave your work laptop behind, you can still check your schedule; you can easily share it with others, so they can see when you're available (or not!); and you can combine your personal and work diaries to show up on the same calendar (just make sure to turn off the personal function on your work devices – nobody needs to know when you have that dentist appointment).

Do they need you?

Sometimes you'll be invited to meetings or other congregations because you're The SENDCo. But do you really need to be there? Make sure anything to which you RSVP 'yes' is a good use of your time. Again, it's not rude, it's just good practice.

Live in the moment

Have you ever used 'live' minutes for meetings? Honestly, they're a game changer. Instead of taking copious written notes, which are then forgotten in the flurry of other work and never typed up, take your laptop with you and type as you go. You can use a shared online document like Google Docs or Word Online, and then you don't even need to disseminate notes – they'll be available for all participants immediately following the meeting.

Look twice

I'm not quite sure how I managed before I had a second monitor on my desk! If you can get a second screen, I highly recommend it. That smugness you'll feel as you copy and paste across them is something to celebrate. If you can't get another monitor, the split screen facility available on most laptops is a good second best.

Snip it

The snipping tool is a life saver for busy SENDCos. You know that PDF you have that you can't change into a Word document, but from which you really need the information? Fear not – just use the snipping tool to take a snapshot of whatever you need, and copy and paste it into your word doc. Not sure where to start? There's a good step-by step at **tinyurl.com/tp-WindowsSnip** (for Windows) and **tinyurl.com/tp-AppleSnip** (for Mac). TP

5 questions for SENDCos

- Should I be doing this? Is it my job?
- Will the time it takes to find out about this supposed time-saving tip actually save me more time in the long run? (I refer back to this a lot)
- Who is my gatekeeper?
- Am I prepared for the fact that there is a 50/50 chance the change I have requested (e.g. for more resources, time allocation, or training) won't happen?
- Who can be my tech buddy? (If you're not 100 per cent comfortable with the tech tools at your disposal, find someone who is, and won't judge you for needing help.)

Ginny Bootman is SENCo at four primary schools in Northants, a keynote speaker, and the author of **Independent Thinking on Being a SENDCo** *(£11.99, Independent Thinking Press).*

@sencogirl

ginnybootman.com

tinyurl.com/tp-IToBaS

Learner's PARADISE

Can rap make Shakespeare cool? Absolutely, says **Confucius MC**, and it'll boost your pupils' writing skills, too...

In my life I've been fortunate enough to share stages with some of the most celebrated artists of our times, but without a doubt some of my most prized and precious experiences took place watching children tap into their creative potential.

I spent 15 years working in a community-based primary school (which also happened to be the school I went to as a child). I worked in a number of different roles from LSA to TA, running workshops with small groups and leading sessions with entire classes. I worked in the after-school club, I took Y6 kids on residential trips, and eventually became a children and families support worker.

This multifaceted remit became incredibly valuable in my delivery of creative sessions; I was able to feed into the curriculum-based topics as well as extracting points of interest to develop creative work. I also had an insight into things that were affecting the social dynamic in the school. A big part of my work was writing bespoke rap songs, which would be performed in weekly year group class assemblies. Originally, this started as something I would do with specific groups and classes, but it soon became evident that there was a demand from the children throughout the entire school to take part. I wrote raps about the water cycle, the Tudors, the seasons, and the Mayans to name only a few, and where possible I would run a carpet session with an entire year group, where we collaboratively wrote a rap for their assembly. These sessions were particularly powerful, because they offered a different model for producing creative writing, more reliant on the quality of personal expression as opposed to the replication or regurgitation of form (both of which are incredibly valuable).

Poetry in motion

I was part of a few theatre companies as a young person, and developed a real connection to and appreciation of Shakespeare (particularly after studying *Macbeth* in secondary school). I think part of the allure was knowing that at the time of writing he was breaking all the rules, not just for the sake of being rebellious, but because he believed in the power of what he was doing. Reminding kids that one of the most celebrated writers of all time was breaking lots of conventions and inventing words that didn't exist yet always seemed to plant a seed of both inspiration and determination in the young creatives I taught.

There are also crucial overlaps between rap and the work of Shakespeare. For example, in both cases,

"There are crucial overlaps between rap and the work of Shakespeare"

the words are written to a specific metre, which not only adds a pleasant aesthetic but heightens the meaning behind the words. The other crucial overlap is that, as pleasing as Shakespearean plays and poems are to read, the words were written to be spoken.

With that said, I want to take this opportunity to point out how sophisticated rap is. It borrows from many literary devices – metaphor, simile, allegory, personification, etc – and is also very conscious of and deliberate with time, and placing poetry to a metre.

Fig 1.

1st bar			
Humpty 1	Dumpty 2	sat on a 3	wall, 4
No. of syllables: 2	No. of syllables: 2	No. of syllables: 3	No. of syllables: 1

2nd bar			
Humpty 1	Dumpty 2	had a great 3	fall 4
No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:

3rd bar			
All the king's 1	horses and 2	all the king's 3	men 4
No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:

4th bar			
Couldn't put 1	Humpty to 2	-gether 3	again 4
No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:	No. of syllables:

Take a beat

If the rise of social media has taught us anything, it's that people crave an outlet for their opinions, and can experience anxiety when they feel they're not being heard. But where social media platforms in many instances encourage knee-jerk, reactionary expressions, the process of sitting down to write a rap is contemplative and reflective. There's an emphasis on choosing your words carefully and understanding their power, finding a way to refine exactly what it is you want to say. There's something about writing a rap that places you at the forefront of expression, too – from the minute you start committing words to the page, you're part of a lineage of powerful expressions of identity.

I think part of its appeal as an artistic discipline is that it exists outside the tropes of mainstream literary academia, and positions itself as a subculture, whilst simultaneously transcending written artforms.

DIY

Want to write raps with your class? You could start by introducing the idea of a mission statement. This could apply to the pupils themselves, their class/year group, the school, or perhaps all three. Encourage a conversation and reflection on the meaning of identity and gather a list of the values and goals that contribute to that identity and make up the contents of your mission statement. You can then use this list to shape the contents of your raps. I always found this can be a great way of unifying a class by creating a rap that almost serves as a mantra for the school year.

In terms of teaching structure, let's begin with one of the most universally known rhymes of them all – Humpty Dumpty! Use Fig. 1 to understand the structures, and then you can use the blank templates in the downloadable resources (link in the panel above) to create your own.

At first glance, this may all seem a bit simplistic, but much like musicians, even the most seasoned rapper still has to count and keep time! The key thing to notice is the pattern of where the rhyming sounds land in relation to the numbers, and the way the number of syllables match. In a carpet session you could ask half the class to hold the count of four, while the other half recites the words, and then swap. Remember, one bar = four counts. A standard rap verse is usually eight or 16 bars long, so groups of two or four pupils could work together to create a verse using four or eight bars each.

The real beauty of this process comes when you add music to the equation (you can find plenty of child-friendly rap instrumentals on YouTube). If you can hold the count of four to the music, the connection of all these things becomes instantly apparent as the count naturally houses the rap on top. Give it a go. You won't be disappointed. **TP**

Confucius MC spent 15 years working in a primary school in Lambeth using rap as a tool for creativity and personal development. His new album, Songs for Lost Travellers, is out now.

@confuciusmc

@confuciusmc

Transformative CPD

Discover how the Japanese model of Lesson Study can open up a whole new facet of writing, while demolishing harmful hierarchies

ROB DRANE AND AIMEE DURNING

INTRODUCING LESSON STUDY

Our school has research at its heart. Our founding associate headteacher, Luke Rolls, recognised the potential of Lesson Study **(tinyurl.com/tp-tdtLessonStudy)** – a powerful form of professional learning developed in Japan – to unite research with teacher development. While Lesson Study has transformed education in its country of origin, its potential in UK schools is largely untapped.

Working alongside Pete Dudley, a Lesson Study expert from the University of Cambridge who now leads Camtree, Cambridge's Teacher Research Exchange, Luke spent years establishing the foundations of our approach. Lesson Study is collaborative professional development, involving a cycle of identifying a research focus, jointly planning a lesson, teaching with colleagues observing, and conducting a non-judgemental group discussion to uncover how pupils are learning.

The approach emphasises incremental improvement, with all participants considered equal in the learning process, regardless of experience or seniority.

TRANSFORM PRACTICE

Our unique position as a University Training School means we can pilot approaches that could benefit all schools. By developing a scalable model of CPD through Lesson Study, we aim to show how schools can create sustainable communities of enquiry.

GETTING STARTED

We've also developed an innovative 80/20 model that shifts the focus onto teachers having genuine autonomy in driving their own professional development, supported by guidance from education experts. The majority (80 per cent) consists of internal collaborative research, where our teachers and learning coaches (TAs) work together in small research groups, with Pete Dudley providing expert guidance throughout the process. The remaining 20 per cent involves partnerships with external experts including Charlotte Hacking, formerly of the CLPE, English consultant Nicola Izibili, David Reedy from UKLA, and Ross Young and Felicity Ferguson from the Writing for Pleasure Centre. They each join us for three days spread throughout the year, focusing on the collaborative research lesson approach.

While we're fortunate to work with experts, the model is designed to be adaptable. Schools could create similar partnerships with teachers from neighbouring schools. We've deliberately included teachers at all career stages as lesson leads, too, ensuring we benefit from diverse perspectives.

80/20

By breaking down hierarchies and emphasising collaboration between teachers and learning coaches, this approach could transform how schools across the country tackle professional development.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

We've been trying to implement a fundamentally different approach to teaching writing, and Lesson Study has proven to be the perfect framework for this. We've adopted the Writing for Pleasure pedagogy **(tinyurl.com/tp-W4P)**, which requires a significant shift away from traditional, structured approaches, to one that gives children greater autonomy over their writing choices. Teachers now observe children's responses to new pedagogy in real time, allowing us to collectively analyse what works and why.

This enables us to make adjustments to our writing sessions based on direct classroom observations rather than theory alone. For example, we noticed some pupils were hesitant to make independent writing choices.

Our post-lesson discussions helped us develop gradual release strategies that built children's confidence and autonomy, whilst ensuring they developed their authentic voice and identity as writers. This iterative, collaborative approach has helped teachers feel more confident in embracing pedagogical change, as they're supported by colleagues who are observing and reflecting on the same challenges. Non-judgemental observations also mean that teachers are more at ease, and willing to take greater pedagogical risks.

GENUINE COLLABORATION

Our experience shows how this approach could help schools across England transform their entire professional development culture.

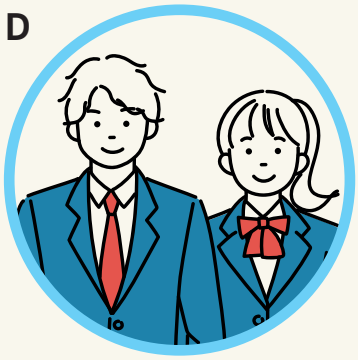
"We now make adjustments to our writing sessions based on direct classroom obeservation"

ONWARD AND OUTWARD

At the end of each Lesson Study cycle, teachers come together to disseminate their learning. This becomes a powerful platform where educators can share their discoveries, challenges, and insights. Teachers have reported significant shifts in their practice as a result, and our learning coaches provide particularly valuable insights about our most vulnerable learners. For example, they've identified how traditional 45-minute writing lessons can overwhelm children who engage best for only 5-8 minutes (which links with the Writing for Pleasure findings). Through their observations and participation in post-lesson discussions, coaches have helped develop adaptations such as flexible writing goals, prioritising quality over quantity, and allowing pupils to write about topics of personal interest (like Arsenal FC or Sonic the Hedgehog). They've also embraced Ross Young's suggestion that adults position themselves as writers within the classroom community, modeling their own writing processes alongside children; a significant shift from their traditional role of micro-managing teacher-led writing tasks.

BEYOND WRITING

We use Lesson Study across subjects including maths, science and humanities. Each subject offers unique opportunities for teachers to explore specific pedagogical challenges and pupil learning approaches.



S, YEAR 5

"I love choosing what to write about. Sometimes I write stories for Reception children, other times I create information books about topics I'm interested in. Writing feels more purposeful now."

M, YEAR 4

"Writing is exciting because we think about who we're writing for. Last week I created a guide for my little brother about how to care for his first bike!"

A, YEAR 6

"Before, I just wrote what teachers told us to write. Now I pick my topics and my audience. It makes me want to make my writing really good."

Rob Drane (associate headteacher) and Aimee Durning (director of inclusion) lead the writing Lesson Study initiative at the University of Cambridge Primary School.

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THE WOW FACTOR

Create the ultimate end-of-term film project with HUE Animation Studio

Step into the wonderful world of HUE Animation Studio, where imagination meets technology to inspire the next generation of writers, artists, and filmmakers. Recommended by teachers, child development experts, and loved by kids, this hands-on, minds-on tech tool enables the creation of stop motion movies like *Wallace & Gromit*, *Shaun the Sheep* and those cool LEGO® movies on YouTube! At just £49.95+VAT, each kit includes a three-year warranty and a perpetual software licence, ensuring years of creativity in the classroom.
And best of all? No prior experience is needed. Just unpack and kickstart your creative journey.

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A complete movie-making solution

Everything your pupils need to create stop-motion movies including: a flexible HUE HD camera available in a choice of colours; a protective shockproof carry case; animation software (for Windows and macOS); the full-colour, 64-page, HUE Book of Animation; downloadable storyboards; activity sheets and sound effects.

Recommended by experts

Recommended by child development expert Dr. Amanda Gummer, HUE Animation Studio fosters creativity, collaboration and critical thinking. Also featured in *Newsweek*'s 'Best in STEM' list, it's used worldwide for homeschooling, after-school clubs and makerspaces for digital storytelling and creative project-based learning.

No experience required

Animation promotes a balanced use of technology, inspiring children to step away from screens to create models, write scripts and record soundtracks. With step-by-step instructions, software tutorial videos, educational activity guides and film-making resources, the children are guided through the animation process, no prior experience needed!

Cross-curricular

Pupils can animate science experiments, retell historical events, bring creative writing to life, or visualise mathematical concepts through engaging stop-motion projects. Whether crafting claymation adaptations of classic literature, or capturing the life cycle of a butterfly with time-lapse; from English and STEM to history and art, the possibilities are endless.

WAGOLL

Hunt for the Golden Scarab, by MG Leonard

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to produce their own enchanting portal story

Have you ever seen a door that seems to resonate with power, as if it would open into another world? I spot them all over the place. Odd, small, shabby doors, with peeling paint and a rusty lock, are as appealing to my imagination as grand doors with ornate carvings. Books started my fascination with doors, namely *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. A door is thing of mystery. You never know what or who is going to be on the other side...

Hunt for the Golden Scarab, by MG Leonard, ill. Manuel Šumberac (£7.99, Macmillan Children's Books), is out now

I grew up loving *Indiana Jones*, *Back to the Future*, and *Dr Who*. I also enjoyed history at school, and all of this has contributed to me eventually imagining that there are special doors that can open into the time in which they were made. I call them Time Doors. Of course, not anyone can open a Time Door. Only a Time Key can spot one and will be able to open it. In my Time Keys series, only young people with a musical gift are capable of being Time Keys. It's a fact that children usually have superior hearing to adults. This is important, because it is music that opens a Time Door. The Time Key can tune into the frequency of a Time Door and play the music required to open it. In *Hunt for the Golden Scarab*, my heroes open a Time Door back to Ancient Egypt, because they are searching for the lost heart scarab of Nefertiti. The story takes the reader from the present to 1922, when Howard Carter discovered Tutankhamun's tomb, and then all the way back to 1331 BCE.

In each book of the Time Keys series, our musical heroes will open a portal into the past and have an adventure. Every story will have at least one powerful portal. I have spent a considerable amount of time thinking about portal stories, how and why they work, my own door lore, and the function the portal plays in the narrative.

FIVE TIPS FOR WRITING A GREAT PORTAL STORY

1. PURPOSE

Know why you are using a portal. Establish how it works and what it does. This is the door lore that creates the magic in the story. Whether it's a door in time or to a secret garden, you need to know why it's there and what purpose it will serve in your story.

2. STRUGGLE

Adding mystery or a struggle to a character's ability to open the portal will make it more of a significant event. Delaying the opening of the door will increase your reader's curiosity about what or who is on the other side. If it's too easy, it's boring. Why might your character fail to open the portal?

3. NEW TERRITORY

What is on the other side of your portal? Your protagonist should notice all physical differences and any strangeness. What do they think or feel about the space on the other side of the door? Consider weather, temperature, landscape, time, flora and fauna and the people or creatures that live in this new place.

4. A CHALLENGE

Whatever is waiting for our hero on the other side of the portal must challenge them, and the experience should change them. In the featured extract, Sim wishes his mum would save him, but after opening the Time Door, he sets out to save her.

5. LANGUAGE

What do you want your reader to know about this new place? Think about how you describe going through the door or portal. Try changing the narrative perspective. Use simile or metaphor to evoke newness.

Extract from

chapter 19,
pages 170-171

Sim closed his eyes. This was it. The Council had found him. He'd never see his mum again.

In his head, he stepped the A played by the tuning fork down to an F, humming the harmonising note so that his skull buzzed with it. F was the first note of the 'Raindrop' Prelude. With his back and hands flat against the metal door, Sim imagined the keyboard of his piano back home and played the opening phrase of Chopin's piano piece, as if it could reach through time and summon his mum. He let the music fill him up until he was brimming with it. Until it radiated out of him like golden sunlight. Until he felt he was no longer physical but pure music and he was falling backwards.

His eyes flew open in shock as he hit the ground.

The metal door had opened behind him.

Except now it was closed, in front of him.

Sim scrambled to his knees, opening the door a crack, peeping into the burial chamber. Trying to see Penhooligan. There was no longer a terracotta sarcophagus outside. Instead, an enormous stone box almost filled the room. Above it was a system of pulleys and ropes. There were tools scattered on the floor. His mum and Jeopardy's footprints had vanished.

'What?'

A noise in the room behind him made him spin round. He saw a flickering candle in a lantern. Kneeling in its glow, on the rough-hewn stone floor, at the feet of a black dog statue on a gold plinth, was a man with his head in his hands.

170-171

These short sentences indicate the effect of the threat on Sim. His breathing and his thoughts are quick and short. He closes his eyes and retreats inside himself because there is nowhere else for him to hide.

The 'Raindrop' Prelude is a call-back to the music Sim has played to his mum earlier in the story. It connects him to her, almost like he's calling to her by playing it in his head.

The choice of words here shows that music has a transformative effect on Sim, described first as if it were liquid (*brimming*) and then as if it were light (*golden sunlight*).

These last four words act as both internal and external description; it's how he feels *and* what is happening. Sim cannot discriminate between the two because he's frightened.

Using the verbs *flew* and *hit* communicates movement and impact. This body blow brings Sim – and us – back into the physical world.

Each of these sentences is a new paragraph because they conflict. The first sentence is what Sim experiences. The second is what his eyes are showing him. Both things can't be true. This is the first indication that something uncanny has happened. Both sentences end with 'him', because Sim is the constant and it's the world around him that has changed.

The description here is provided in drips and drabs to show that Sim doesn't understand what he is looking at. This is the first indicator to the reader and Sim that he is in the same place but a different time.

Showing Howard Carter on his knees, with his head in his hands, indicates that he's not a threat to Sim. Showing this to the reader allows them to guess who this person might be before Sim tells them, which involves them in the story.

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COVER © Tom Percival

Published by Simon & Schuster, 2024

The Wrong Shoes

Witness the devastating impact of poverty through the eyes of 12-year-old Will, and what it means to make an impossible choice, with Tom Percival's powerful novel

JON BIDDLE

Tom Percival is responsible for creating some of my favourite picturebooks from the past few years, including *The Invisible*, *The Sea Saw* and *The River*, as well as the bestselling Big Bright Feelings series. He's also the illustrator of the amazing *Skulduggery Pleasant* books by Derek Landy. His talents seem to have no end, as he's now written and illustrated his debut full-length novel, *The Wrong Shoes*. I first learned of the book when he spoke about it at a conference in 2024 – I was lucky enough to introduce his keynote. He was absolutely fascinating, talking about his life as a child, how he'd grown up in relative poverty and how child poverty is still incredibly common across the UK (recent figures show that over four million children and young people are currently in this situation). He made some hugely pertinent points about the fact that it's basically impossible for a child to focus on their learning in school when they're tired, hungry and worried about money. It's a situation that we see in schools every day, and one that causes enormous concern.

I hope this book, alongside the activities I've suggested, may provide opportunities for conversations to take place in classrooms and help reduce the levels of shame and embarrassment around poverty that many children feel.

As Tom says in his notes at the end of the book, one thing is absolutely certain – *it is never the child's fault*.

Story

The Wrong Shoes is a book that has, rightly, been nominated for several awards, as well as being on the 2025 Read for Empathy list **(empathylab.uk/RFE)**. It's about Will, a young boy who lives with his father after his parents have separated. His father lost his job due to an accident at work and life is increasingly tough for them both. Despite Dad's endless optimism, an act he puts on mostly for the benefit of Will, there's barely enough money available for food and certainly not enough for the 'extras' such as haircuts and trainers. Will struggles on at school as best he can, but feels as if his life is gradually spiraling out of control. When he falls out with his best friend, Cameron, and is bullied by a gang of older pupils, it all becomes too much for him. He doesn't know whom to turn to for help and support, and has to make some difficult, almost impossible, choices. There are numerous themes explored through the book, all with a level of authenticity: poverty, bullying, peer pressure and the endless battle to fit in, even though nobody ever really understands what they're supposed to be fitting into.

"The book explores numerous themes with authenticity"

Activities based around the book

Will's relationships

Will has quite complex, and continually evolving, relationships with the other characters in the book (Cameron, Chris, Kalia, Dad, Mum, Greg and Mr Prince are the key ones). At the end of Act One, work together as a class to create a relationship chart that shows what type of relationship he has with each of them, based on these questions:

- Are they friends or family?
- Is it a positive or negative relationship, or both? How do you know?
- How important are they in his life?

At the end of the story, ask them to repeat the same task, thinking about what has already changed, and considering how it might change again in the future.

A different perspective

There are several key incidents in the story involving other pupils at the school (when Cameron offers Will his old shoes; when Kalia steps in to protect him; and when Chris demonstrates kindness for the first time are all good examples). Ask the pupils to choose one and then rewrite it from the point of view of the other character. Rather than just a straight recount, encourage them to focus on the emotions and motivations of the character. Why do they make the

Take it further

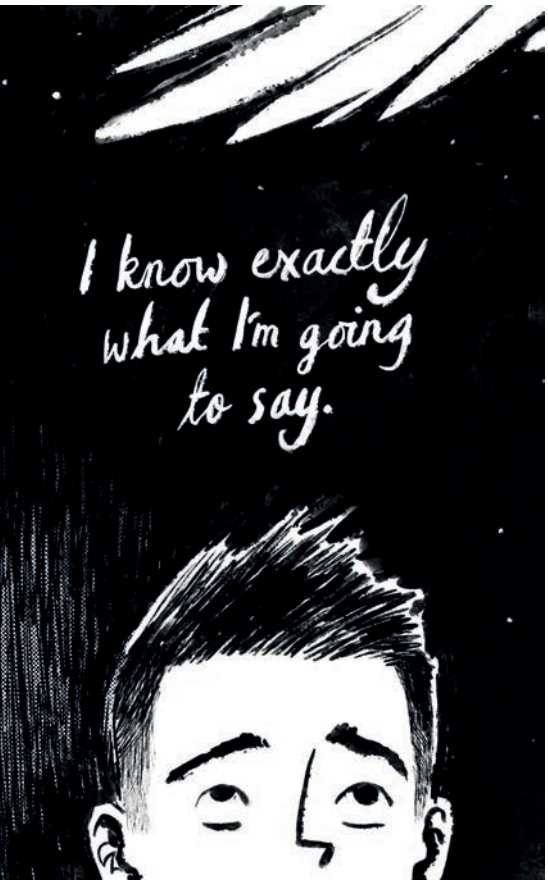
WILL'S CHOICES

Will is forced to make several difficult decisions during the story. Sometimes he makes the right choice and sometimes he doesn't, partly because the options available to him are limited due to the financial position he and his father are in. As a class, look in detail at one of the decisions he is forced to make (one that works really well here is when Chris 'asks' him to steal the headphones from the shop). If Will weren't in such a desperate situation, would he have made a different choice? It's a debate that provides a perfect opportunity to use the drama technique of Conscience Alley (the CLPE has a great intro to this at **tinyurl.com/tp-ConscienceAlley**).

Once pupils realise that he was almost forced into it, see if they can make links to his behaviour at other times in the book. This can lead into a very valuable discussion around peer pressure and financial pressure, and the impact that they can have on the mental health of both children and adults.

FRIENDS AREN'T MEANT TO BE GRATEFUL

Chapter four contains one of the most powerful scenes in the book; when Cameron offers Will a pair of his old trainers, which he would otherwise take to the charity shop. Although he does it out of goodwill, it makes Will feel like a charity case and he replies with "Friends aren't meant to be grateful. They're just meant to be friends." Talk about what this means and see if the children can empathise with Cameron's point of view. Get them to write a letter as Cameron, where he apologises to Will for the misunderstanding, and acknowledges that he unwittingly caused embarrassment to his friend. What could Cameron do differently next time? Discuss the friendships that Will has in the book, especially with Cameron, Chris and Kalia, and explore how those friendships originated. For example, his friendship with Kalia started when she stood up for him against Chris. Should he be grateful to her for doing that or is she just being his friend?



choices they make and behave in the way they do? How do they feel at the end of the scene? Do they have any regrets?

The owl

The appearance of the owl throughout the book adds an extra layer of symbolism to the story. Discuss when Will sees the owl (usually at a time of great stress or pressure), and whether the owl is real – and if that even matters. Why is the owl important to Will and what do the pupils think it might represent? Does it perhaps show hope or reassurance, or does it indicate change, or could it mean something entirely different? It's essential to make it clear that there are no right or wrong answers here – the owl means whatever they want it to mean, both for Will and for them. They could jot down their thoughts on a sticky note each time the owl appears and see how their views change during the story.

Anger strategies

On page 240, Will is so frustrated that he rips up his picture of the owl. Ask the children why they think he acts like this and encourage them to share any anger management strategies they're aware of. Identifying triggers, removing themselves from challenging situations, taking deep breaths and rehearsing how to deal with conversations that don't go to plan will hopefully be some of the ones they come up with. Create a class list and give them an opportunity to share these more widely across the school, either by creating a poster or by drawing a comic strip that shows a character successfully dealing with a situation where they're angry. Younger pupils often respond really well to older pupils sharing their life experiences, as well as their thought processes behind a piece of work, so it could be a good chance for different year groups to collaborate. It's also a perfect time to introduce some drama, where the children can either freeze-frame a scene from the book when one of the characters gets angry and frustrated, or enjoy developing their own.

Loved this? Try these...

- *The Final Year* by Matt Goodfellow
- *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang
- *The Boy in the Suit* by James Fox
- *The Soup Movement* by Ben Davis
- *Squished* by Megan Wagner Lloyd
- *The Invisible* by Tom Percival
- *It's a No-Money Day* by Kate Milner

A new beginning

At the end of the book, the relationship between Will and Chris almost undergoes a reset. Ask the pupils to share what they already know about Chris and his background. If Chris moved schools, to an environment where he doesn't know anyone and where he feels like he doesn't fit in, how would he behave differently? How could he discover his true identity and what might make him realise he can finally be himself? Let them come up with possible scenarios around what happens to him next, and give them time to write their own short story based on this. **TP**

Jon Biddle is an experienced primary school teacher and English lead. Winner of the 2018 Reading for Pleasure Experienced Teacher of the Year award, he coordinates the national Patron of Reading initiative.

SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

Explore some of the metaphors around shoes (having big shoes to fill, the shoe is on the other foot, if the shoe fits, etc). Write a poem from the perspective of someone who feels like they're always wearing the wrong shoes, either literally or metaphorically. The poem could explore the need to fit in, but then shift to a more hopeful ending, where the poet begins to realise that finding the right shoes means being true to yourself. Pupils can also use other imagery related to shoes, like blisters and tight laces.

THEMES

There are several themes that run through the book. Two of the most powerful are child poverty and peer pressure, both of which need handling with sensitivity. However, they also provide ideal opportunities to contact local organisations and get them to visit the school. The Trussell Trust delivers an excellent presentation about food poverty (you can see some of the charity's resources at **tinyurl.com/tp-TTpoverty**). You could invite parents and carers to an assembly linked to the book. This can help raise awareness of the support available to anyone who might need it. Some local police forces also do work around peer pressure and the risks of County Lines. Although this isn't explicitly touched on in the book, it's certainly one of the dangers that Chris, Zayn and even Will might face further down the line. When a book opens up this much discussion, it's important to capitalise on the opportunity and link in as much relevant cross-curricular work as possible.

CALVIN AND HOBBES

Author Tom Percival is an enormous fan of *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Waterson, as am I. As well as being genuinely hilarious, one row of panels from a Calvin and Hobbes story can contain as much love and wisdom as an entire novel. I have a collection of second-hand anthologies in my class that I've been able to pick up over the years. Keep an eye out for them in charity shops and at car boot sales. Once the word spreads around the classroom about how good they are, they won't stay on your shelves for long!

MUSIC
ART
STORIES
CREATE

AVA GETS ACTIVE

Book 2 of the MASC to the eco-beat series (Music, Art, Stories, Create).

An imaginative and informative sequel to 'Ava Goes Green' by Dr Rona D. Linklater to help turn KS2 children's climate fear into climate fun!

Why choose this resource?

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- ✓ **A unique fusion** of fiction and nonfiction. Ava, Jamal and their friends now explore how the effects of chemical and gas pollution are affecting climate change and the habitats of creatures such as Max, the tabby cat, Ran-Tan, the orangutan and Pol, the polar bear.
- ✓ **QR codes** give access to **free** music accompaniment **WAV files** for the novel songs, and **free** instrumental parts for classroom percussion. Ideal for music-non-music specialists, peripatetic sessions, out-of-hours clubs or home schooling.

clip

- ✓ **Stunning illustrations** by **Stu McLellan**, through agent Beehive Illustration, create a magical world to stimulate children's imagination.
- ✓ **Differentiated** creative activities provide a fun reinforcement of the learning through interaction and inclusive participation for children of all abilities.
- ✓ **Teaching information** from the **Teacher/ Parent/Leader Guide** is available from my website linked to the primary grading system assessment statements.
- ✓ **The attitudes and actions** of our children towards the world they are inheriting are crucial if we are to make a difference and maintain our ecosystem.

"There is no more powerful message in the 21st century than climate change. There is no more powerful vehicle for communicating and delivering such a message to children than the performing and creative arts." So . . . Inspire—Create—Enjoy!

https://MASCinAction.wixsite.com/home

mascinaction@gmail.com

Books available from: Gardner Wholesalers, Troubador Publishing, MASC website, Presto Music and good bookshops.

Rona D. Linklater £12.99 / 9781805144090

I SAY...

Children's writing will thrive when we take notice of their interests and encourage them to make themselves heard, says **Ellen Counter**

As teachers, we are usually the gatekeepers of what children write about in school. But how can we ensure that projects are used to help children find their own voice, explore their own ideas and utilise their own knowledge and experiences in their compositions?

A good starting point is to acknowledge that sometimes what we might value as a worthwhile experience or writing topic, removes children's freedom to make their own choices. Given time and the right strategies to develop their own ideas, we can provide children with a fuller, more authentic experience of what it means to be a writer.

Get to know their interests

To allow children to develop their own voices as writers, we can start by using what we know about their particular interests to support their ideas for writing. Do they love animals, sports, video games or fantastical beasts and creatures?

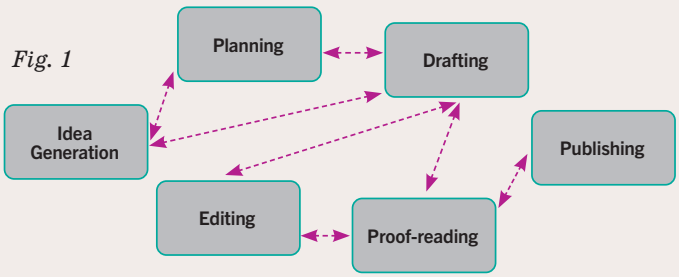
In Donald Graves' book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, he suggests teachers write their pupils' names from memory and note down the interests and knowledge funds of every child in the class. This will take time, plenty of conversations and space for the children to talk about themselves, and if necessary, dedicated activities and/or surveys to help you get to know them better. Once you have this information, you can prompt and encourage them to write about things they are passionate about.

Writing journals

A great way of helping young writers find inspiration is by using journals. Separate from their usual exercise books, children can use a writing journal to create lists of ideas for their own compositions. Examples of ideas lists could include:

- A spooky story for my friends
- A song for me to sing at home in the bathroom
- A poem for my nanna
- A list of all the things I know about
- Instructions for my best friend about how to beat the boss on our favourite computer game

Fig. 1



Once pupils have their lists of ideas, they can keep coming back and adding to them. Children should be invited to share the writing from their journals daily and be encouraged to write up a final piece at least every half-term. You can use the journals during the day to enable your class to switch into 'personal writing project' time – many teachers find the children's ideas from their journals start to inform their writing decisions within their usual class writing projects, too.

Make time for ideas

If you find that pupils are getting stuck on how to develop their ideas, why not throw an 'ideas party' (a brilliant term coined by Young & Ferguson of the Writing for Pleasure Centre)? Put out flipchart paper at group tables and invite children to draw, write and talk about their ideas. For example, pose a 'what if..?' question, e.g. 'What if you came to school one day and the teachers had all been replaced with friendly aliens?' Responses to these are ideal for starting an original story.

Children can come up with a range of questions themselves, too. For example, What if I woke up tomorrow and everything had turned green? What if a spaceship landed in the playground? What if everyone was called Brian except for me? They can share and build upon each other's ideas to form the seed of a story idea that they can then take through the process of planning, drafting and eventual publication (see *fig. 1*).

Learn the craft

To turn all these great ideas into a fantastic story, written in their own voice, pupils can take inspiration from the craft of existing great writers. Most writing schemes expose children to a range of quality literature to showcase what good writers do to engage their readers, but you can also find a series of examples by real authors at **tinyurl.com/tp-WAGOLLs**. Rather than mimicking the style of specific authors and/or replicating the content of their work, studying the writer's craft and its key features can help children implement best practice and develop their own writing style.

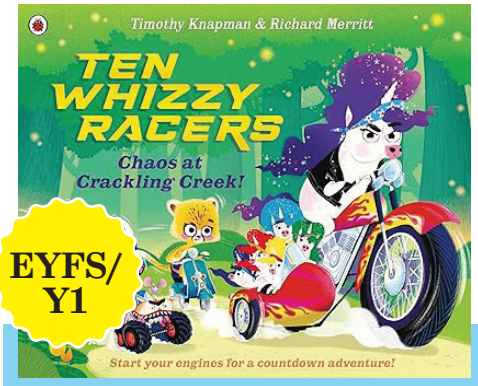
Children already have their own voice and bucketfuls of their own ideas, and with the right tools and opportunities, we can ensure they are heard. TP

Ellen Counter has 17 years of teaching experience, and is now the primary English teaching and learning adviser at HFL Education

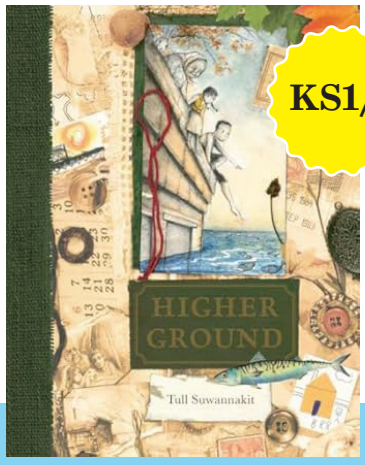
@EllenCounter

Book CLUB

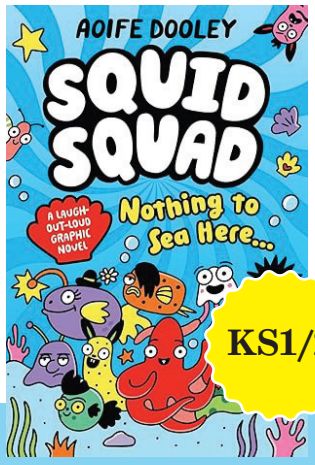
We review five new titles that your class will love



EYFS/ Y1



KS1/2



KS1/2

Ten Whizzy Racers: Chaos at Crackling Creek!

by Timothy Knapman, ill. Richard Merritt

(£7.99, Ladybird)

Who's got the mettle to win? Will Drift, Bounce, Bolt, Speedy or Tricks take the big prize? A delightful, candy-coloured mix of *Wacky Races* and '10 Green Bottles', this whizzy counting adventure has lots to offer for your littlest readers. The rhyming text means it's perfect to read aloud, while bright and busy illustrations allow even those who aren't ready to read the text themselves to easily follow along with the story.
The addition of 'player cards' illustrations (reminiscent of Mario Kart) and a map of the Fairytale Forest is a nice touch, too, encouraging children to be truly invested in the race, and stay till the end to find out who will win the great Beanstalk Cup. On your marks, get set…

Higher Ground

By Tull Suwannakit

(£19.99 HB, New Frontier)

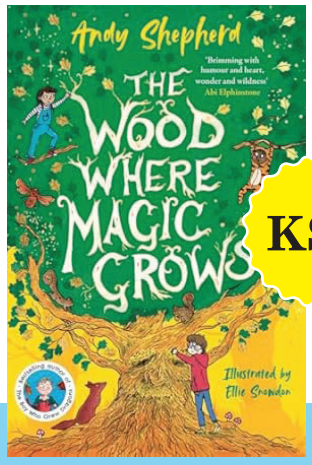
Delicate pencil-and-watercolour illustrations, alongside simple but penetrating text, make this book a real treasure to behold. We join our narrator (whose name and age we do not know, but who looks like a child of around nine or 10) as a violent storm hits their home, causing a devastating flood. The narrator flees the danger with their grandmother and younger sister, and they all end up fighting for survival in an old shed. After their hope of getting rescued dwindles to nothing, Grandma's skills in gardening, fishing, and telling stories keeps the narrator's family safe and allows them to thrive in their new environment. Delivering a beautiful message about resilience wrapped up in a story that will captivate young readers, Suwannakit's latest offering is sure to be a future classic.

Squid Squad

by Aoife Dooley

(£9.99, Scholastic)

Have you ever googled 'vampire squid' on a Tuesday afternoon? Well, thanks to Aoife Dooley's latest humorous title, I have. Meet Ollie the vampire squid (spoiler alert: yes, they are real), who, along with his sea-creature pals, has formed the Squid Squad, celebrating all the 'superpowers' the sea creatures possess, such as Zing the sea bunny's ability to release toxins (again, a real thing), and Ollie's own ability to turn inside out and glow. A fun (though possibly confusing to some readers) mix of fact and fiction, this book teaches us all about Ollie's group of friends and their marine home. The graphic novel format means the information doesn't feel overwhelming, broken up as it is into easily digestible panels, and furnished with cartoon-like illustrations. Definitely one to keep on hand for fans of comics.



KS2

KS2

The Wood Where Magic Grows

By Andy Shepard, ill. Ellie Snowdon

(£7.99, Piccadilly)

The utter joy of imagination and children's amazing capacity for make-believe (or is it real magic?) really come to the fore in Andy Shepard's latest tale. Brothers Iggy and Cal have discovered that magical wooden animals around their new house can come to life, and when they meet Mae, local amateur spy extraordinaire, they delve into Wildtop Wood to see what other magic they can find amongst the treetops.

Intriguingly illustrated with dynamic black-and-white artwork throughout, this is a brilliant tale of adventure, and an exploration of both the wonders of nature and childhood friendship. Are you ready? The Green is waiting…

Cobweb

by Michael Morpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman

(£7.99, Puffin Books)

Cobweb may be a dog, but he knows and understands a lot more than people think he does…

Michael Morpurgo's latest novel is a moving tale of bravery and unbreakable bonds, based on true events. Cobweb, a beloved dog in Pembrokeshire, Wales, is torn away from his loving owner Bethan in order to help out as a droving dog during the Napoleonic wars in 19th century Britain. As Cobweb treks all the way to London, leaving Bethan behind in Wales, we're drawn into this beautiful story of the power of animal-human relationships, and the horrors that war inflicts upon families. An historical story with a (sadly) relevant modern theme, this is the kind of epic we've come to expect of 'the nation's favourite storyteller'.

Meet the author

MICHAEL MORPURGO OBE ON THE HORRORS OF WAR, AND THE POWER OF OTHER PEOPLE'S STORIES


© Steven Hatton

What sparked your interest in stories about animals and war?

First and foremost, I've always loved animals. I grew up in a family where animals weren't really encouraged. My parents finally gave in and got my brother and me a dog, who we absolutely adored, but unfortunately after four or five years of his escape-artist ways, my parents decided he was too much trouble. One day, without telling us, they gave him away. We came home from school, and he was just… gone. After that, I only had goldfish.

My interest in war is a separate thing – I was born in 1943, so went through many of the same experiences I'm sure children in Ukraine and Gaza are having now. We played in bomb sites and so on. I also had an Uncle Peter, who died at age 21 and who I only knew as a photo on the mantlepiece, about whom everyone talked with tears in their eyes. So I was aware of the devastation war causes.

What can we learn from the relationship between Bethan and Cobweb?

The story is about love, loyalty, and family. Bethan lost people in her life, but her love for Cobweb never wavered, no matter how long he was gone. And the dog had the same longing to return. The relationship between animals and humans is a special one – sometimes it seems we should be able to consider and care for each other the way we often do for our animal companions.

If you could share one message with teachers, what would it be?

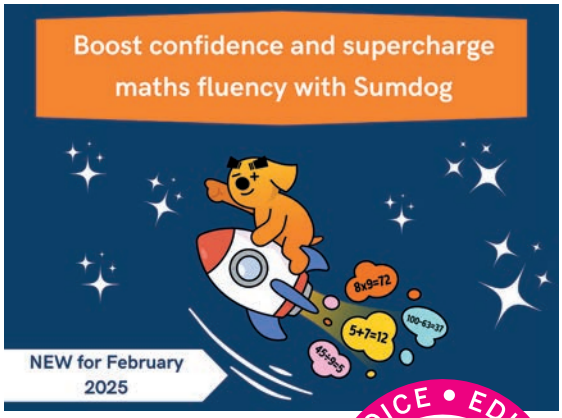
I trust teachers completely – I was one myself for around 10 years, and I find most of them have the right priorities and commitments. The only thing I can share, really, is what I know works, and that's reading to children. Something happens when we share a story with someone – it can inspire them to pick up a book on their own terms, of course, but it also deepens our relationship with them. You can stop being a teacher when you read to a child; you become simply 'the storyteller'. And if you read with passion – if children see that you care – they'll respond.

The paperback edition of *Cobweb* by Michael Morpurgo, is out now.

Top of the class

Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration to your classroom

1 Unlock maths potential



Sumdog's new Maths Fluency Booster is designed to help teachers reinforce pupils' core number skills, going beyond just number bonds and times tables to develop overall fluency. Maths fluency is about developing number sense and the ability to use strategies accurately and efficiently, while also being flexible and able to apply those strategies in different contexts. This tool adapts to each pupil's level, identifying areas where they can improve and providing targeted support. As children progress at their own pace, they build confidence in these skills, which enables them to tackle more complex topics. Discover more at **tinyurl.com/tp-SumdogMaths**

3 Swings and roundabouts...

Take learning to new heights with the Gulliver's Swings and Roundabouts workshop. This exciting STEM-focused experience gives pupils a behind-the-scenes look at how theme park rides work.Through a guided tour, they'll discover the science, engineering, and mechanics behind their favourite attractions while exploring real-world careers in the theme park industry. Perfect for school groups, this hands-on workshop brings learning to life in a fun and engaging way. Introduce young minds to the wonders of the great outdoors, while fostering their social skills, physical wellbeing, and a love for discovery. Book your school trip today. Visit **gulliversfun.co.uk/groups** or call **01925 444 888**.

4 Lights, camera, action!

The HUE HD Pro is an affordable, multi-purpose, plug & play visualiser for the 21st century classroom. Flexible and easy to use, it enables teachers to capture images and videos, annotate, live stream, and share documents, experiments and techniques with pupils in the classroom and online. £59.95 + VAT (includes the case). HUE Animation Studio is a movie-making starter kit, which includes stop motion and time-lapse software for Windows and macOS, a HUE HD camera and a 64-page full colour instruction book. Designed for children aged 7+, the kit fosters creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. £49.95 + VAT. (includes the case). Get in touch at **huehd.com/contact**

2 Your new career awaits you

Tired of paperwork and long hours? Cook Stars offers a fresh, rewarding career where you can teach in a fun, engaging way, without classroom stress. With over 40 branches nationwide, many run by former teachers, you'll join a thriving network. Cook Stars handles all lesson plans and recipes – no planning required! You can also enjoy flexible work around your lifestyle; full training and support; and low startup costs. Scan the QR code above to order an info pack and learn more about the UK's largest and fastest-growing children's cooking franchise. Visit **cookstarsfranchise.co.uk**

5 Recruit brilliant teachers

Finding new teaching talent for your school can be time consuming and costly. Especially when you want to focus on your pupils and give them the great education they deserve. Teach First recruits dedicated, diverse teachers for you, working hard to select high-quality trainees and match the right educator to your school. All trainees are classroom ready when they join you and, with Ofsted-rated outstanding training, Teach First ensures they develop lifelong classroom skills, and your pupils will thrive as a result. Visit **teachfirst.org.uk/teacher-recruitment** to find a talented teacher for your school.

RE

Can we really give to others unselfishly?

Is it possible to be truly selfless? Explore dāna, the Buddhist concept of generosity, with **Matthew Lane**

@MrMJLane theteachinglane.co.uk

Generosity, or *dāna* in Pali, is a central idea in Buddhism. It involves giving without expecting anything in return. For Buddhists, this practice cultivates kindness, reduces attachment, and promotes a sense of community and compassion. This lesson explores how dāna shapes Buddhist thinking and life, and compares the concept with similar values in Islam. It also offers children a chance to explore their own personal worldviews and their thoughts and beliefs on giving. In our culture, where effort and reward can be the driving factor in decision-making, how hard is it to give selflessly?

WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- What dāna means in Buddhism
- How dāna is practised in Buddhist communities
- How generosity relates to reducing attachment
- How dāna compares to charitable giving in Islam

START HERE

Ask pupils about any acts of generosity they might have seen or experienced recently. Encourage them to think broadly – it could be helping a friend, donating to charity, or offering time to others. Ask them to consider their motivations for this generosity: was it linked to a Brownies or Scouts badge? Was it something a family member does, and they were joining in? Was the act to strengthen a friendship?

Have them jot down these examples to use later in the lesson. Highlight how generosity feels for both the giver and receiver, and compare this to Buddhist teachings, which emphasise giving without expectation as a way to reduce selfishness and foster kindness.

MAIN LESSON

1 | UNDERSTANDING DĀNA

Begin by introducing dāna as a foundational Buddhist practice, meaning generosity or giving. It is one of the ten perfections (paramitas) that Buddhists cultivate on their path to enlightenment. Generosity takes many forms – providing food to monks, donating money to temples, or offering wisdom and kindness. Explain that selflessness is key: giving without expecting anything in return helps Buddhists overcome attachment and selfishness which are obstacles to spiritual growth.

To deepen their understanding, ask children to create a mind map showing different forms of generosity, branching off from each example to show its potential impact on the giver and receiver. They can use their list of ideas from the starter activity as a basis. For example, they could map giving time (e.g. they might have helped a grandparent with the gardening). In terms of impact, their grandparent received help, while the child was able to spend time with their grandparent and share in an activity with them.

The point of this activity is to encourage personal reflection and make the concept of dāna more relatable. As a final short activity, ask pupils to reflect on their own

"Dāna cultivates kindness, reduces attachment, and promotes a sense of community and compassion"

acts of generosity from the mind map and compare their motivations to the Buddhist idea of selflessness. They could write a short paragraph reflecting more deeply on one chosen example, and explore whether they think it was a selfless act or not.

2 | PRACTISING DĀNA

In Buddhist communities, dāna is woven into daily life. Show a picture of monks on alms rounds in a Buddhist country like Thailand (the academic news site The Conversation has a good one, at **tinyurl.com/tp-Alms**). Discuss how laypeople give food to monks, enabling them to focus on their spiritual practices. This mutual exchange supports the entire community; laypeople earn merit for their generosity, and monks sustain their role as spiritual guides.

Share a story or description of a Buddhist festival of Kathina, where offerings of cloth for robes and other essentials are made to monks (the British Library blog has a good explanation of the history of Kathina, at **tinyurl.com/tp-BLkathina**). Following this, ask students to summarise how generosity is practised in these events and why it is significant to the community. They could write a short explanation or complete a sentence-starter activity, such as, 'Dāna is important in Buddhism because…'. Alternatively, you might want to do this as a class discussion if children did lots of writing in the first part of the lesson.

3 | COMPARING DĀNA AND ZAKAT

Next, compare dāna to Zakat (or Zakah) in Islam, where Muslims give a portion of their wealth to those in need as a religious obligation (BBC Bitesize has a good overview at **tinyurl.com/tp-BBCzakat**). It is important when comparing religions or worldviews that we do not make superficial comparisons. The purpose of this part of the lesson is to explore how generosity and charitable giving are central tenets of two different worldviews, rather than contrasting the ways giving is undertaken.

Explain that both religions emphasise community welfare and reducing inequality, but differ in structure. While dāna is voluntary and focused on cultivating personal virtue, Zakat is a mandatory act of worship.

If pupils have explored Zakat before, ask them to create a comparison chart, drawing on examples from what they've learned about both practices. Or you could give children a completed table to read and reflect upon. Discuss how both traditions value generosity and its impact on individuals and communities. As a final activity, the class could write a reflection comparing how generosity in these two traditions compares to giving and generosity within their own personal worldview.

Matthew Lane is a teacher from Norfolk. His book **Wayfinder**, *on how to lead curriculum change, is out now.*

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Research how dāna is practised differently in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism (see BBC resources at tinyurl.com/tp-BBCbuddhismdiv). The differences are subtle, so they will need to compare a few sources.
- Investigate other charitable practices in religious or secular traditions. For example, they might research tzedakah in Judaism (see RE Online for an explanation: tinyurl.com/tp-tzedekah), or the role of the Salvation Army. They can also explore secular practices such as community service and food banks.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to give selflessly?
- How does dāna help Buddhists on their spiritual journey?
- What are the differences between dāna and Zakat?
- Can generosity create a better community?

Summers coming

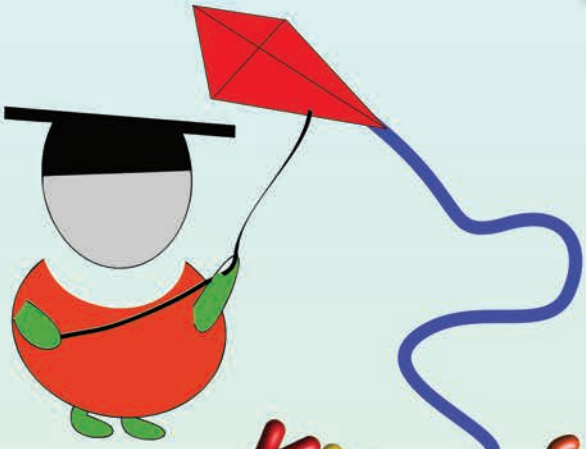
KITES FOR SCHOOLS SPRING AND SUMMER KITE PROMOTION 2025 –

Helping children to make friends with the outdoors.

Making your own kite and then seeing it fly is a little bit of magic that can change self-belief from "I can't" to "I can"! This encouragement can be built on in schools and children's groups such as Brownies and Cubs to introduce other outdoor activities.

In times when children's mental health and confidence may be suffering, the achievement of making something that flys cannot be underestimated.

Kites for Schools kite packs are handcrafted in the UK and *priced at less than the cost of a hamburger* per child.



- It usually takes less than 20 minutes for the whole class to make their kites.
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Years 1-6

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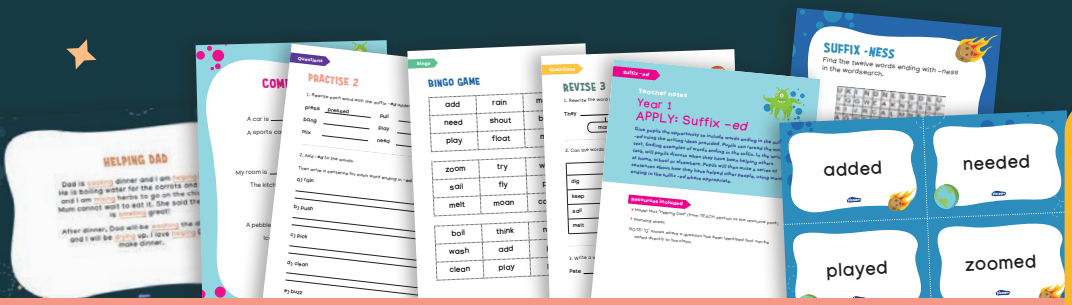

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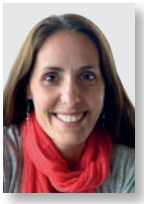
Science

Wibble wobble, wibble wobble, jelly on a plate



Investigate the concept of solubility by using examples from the kitchen, with **Hannah Shaw**

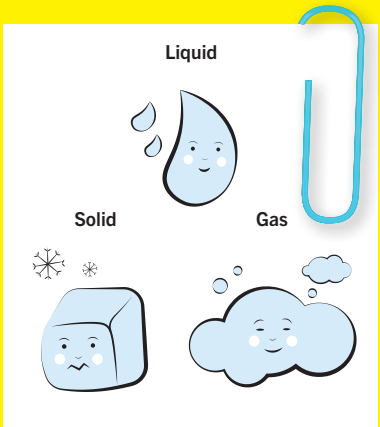
purelynutrition.com phunkyfoods.co.uk

When we first think of chemistry experiments, we might visualise a complicated lab with dangerous chemicals fizzing in beakers. Not exactly child friendly! But there are lots of everyday activities that can help teach your pupils about this area of science, while also imbuing them with important life skills. Consider the kitchen: there are several interesting experiments using food ingredients and simple equipment that you can complete safely at school. So dig in and turn an ordinary daily task into an exciting investigation of reversible and non-reversible changes.

WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- The difference between reversible and irreversible changes
- Different techniques to separate mixtures
- Which ingredients are soluble and insoluble

START HERE



This lesson focuses on properties and changes of materials. Assess the children's prior knowledge by asking who can name the three states of matter. After taking some answers, demonstrate the differences in the particles in a solid, liquid and gas. Gather the pupils into a space and ask them to behave like particles in a solid (standing close together and unable to move). Next, get them to pretend they are a liquid (they can spread out a bit and move around up to an imaginary border). When the children are a gas, space them out further and let them move freely. Explain that today's lesson will consider materials with different states of matter and the changes that can occur to them.

MAIN LESSON

1 | REVERSIBLE VS IRREVERSIBLE

Explain to the class that states of matter can change, and that there are two types of changes that can occur: reversible and irreversible. Ask the pupils to discuss what they think the difference between these two changes is, with a partner. After sharing some ideas, explain that reversible changes are ones that can be undone, with the materials returned to their original state. Irreversible changes to materials are ones that cannot be undone; the original materials cannot return to the state they were in before the change, and sometimes these changes can result in the formation of new materials. Ask the children to turn to their talk partner again and think about some examples of both reversible and irreversible changes.

Display the 'Reversible or irreversible changes?' document (in resource download) on the whiteboard and complete as a class, discussing each example. Introduce the words *reactant* (the material before the chemical change) and *product* (the material after the chemical change).

Explain that we are going to be focusing on reversible changes for the rest of this lesson. If you want to include more examples at this point, consider ice>water.

"There are many interesting experiments using food and simple equipment that you can complete safely at school, so dig in, and you might even end up with a semi-edible snack..."

2 | MIXING AND SEPARATING

Explain that the action of mixing can be reversible, depending on what you're combining. For example, mixing different fruits to make a fruit salad is reversible, because the fruits could be separated by hand. Combining ingredients to bake a cake, however, would be an irreversible change, because the mixture cannot be separated back into its constituent parts.

Provide the equipment in *Fig. 1* and set up a carousel of activities. Allow the pupils to experiment and attempt to combine and separate the ingredients using the various resources. Discuss the children's findings and experiences, and address any misconceptions.

Ingredients	Technique	Resources
Rice and flour	Mixing	Bowl and spoon
Rice and flour combined	Separating	Bowl and sieve
Salt and warm water	Dissolving	Cup and spoon
Ice cubes	Melting	Plate
Sand and water ('dirty water')	Filtering	Cup, funnel, filter paper and jug

Fig 1.

3 | DISSOLVING

When a substance dissolves in liquid, it is called a *solution*. In groups of two, ask the pupils to think about examples in the kitchen where they may dissolve foods, and then share their ideas with the class. Examples might include coffee granules, sugar, and a stock cube.

Do the pupils think that all materials will dissolve in water? Working as a class, experiment using eight cups of warm water and eight materials (e.g. sugar, sugar cubes, salt, rice, sand, coffee, gravy granules and flour). Before mixing each substance with the water, ask the pupils what they think will happen. Will the material be soluble and dissolve, or will it be insoluble and not dissolve? Afterwards, discuss whether all the soluble materials dissolved at the same speed. Which materials dissolved quickest or slowest? Did stirring the solution alter anything? What would changing the temperature of the water do? Was there a difference between the sugar cubes and the pouring sugar?

Hannah Shaw was a primary school teacher before working as the consultant teacher for Purely Nutrition and the PhunkyFoods programme.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Experiment with ice cubes and the time they take to melt. What could make them melt faster or more slowly?
- Make jelly! Let the class experience jelly cubes dissolving in water and then setting in a jelly mould – and then enjoy eating it!

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between a reversible and an irreversible chemical change?
- Which techniques can you use to sperate mixtures?
- Which kitchen ingredients are soluble and insoluble?
- How can you make a soluble substance dissolve?

Art and design

Create your own climate-friendly fashion show

Explore sustainability and clothing design, culminating in a green runway showcase, with **Emily Azouelos**

From microplastics in our clothing to the science of design, there are plenty of teaching moments in a fashion show. This lesson will explore the fashion industry, guiding pupils through issues that exist and finding solutions to protect the environment. They will explore things like the natural materials that can be used to design and make garments, and will be encouraged to sketch design drawings as well as gathering recycled materials to embellish their ideas. Finally, you will introduce the children to the world of pre-loved clothing, using their new knowledge to stage a green fashion runway.

WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to set up and record findings from an experiment
- How to use the natural world as inspiration in fashion
- The importance of upcycling and pre-loved fashion
- How our fashion choices affect the environment

START HERE

Hold a class discussion to introduce the fashion industry. First, list all the ways to get clothing (e.g. online shopping, hand-me-downs, etc). Ask the children to sort these choices into ones they think are bad for the environment and some that may be a better choice to make. From the discussion, pull out the issues with fast fashion and show images connected to the impact this kind of consumerism has on the environment. Use thought bubbles around the images to gather pupils' thoughts and reactions. Explain that they are going to explore the more sustainable fashion choices that people could make to protect our planet.

MAIN LESSON

1 | IN A PLASTIC WORLD

Discuss microplastics and fast fashion and the impact they have on our environment. Explain that, particularly in clothes made from synthetic materials, this kind of pollution is a big issue and that the microplastics are often found in our ocean and seas, harming wildlife there. Explore what materials could be best to filter out microplastics by conducting an experiment. Gather a range of materials, including different fabrics, as well as a plastic filter funnel, a water and sand mixture, and an empty beaker. Create the filter by spreading the material over the funnel. Next, pour the water and sand mixture through the filter and into the beaker. Note down how much sand has been left in the filter. Record the measurements or observations on a table to keep track of the results. Which material was the best filter? Discuss if there is a way we could use the materials that act as good filters for microplastics in our fashion choices, or how they could spread awareness to help people when designing clothes?

2 | AU NATURALE

Our natural environment offers different colours, shapes and textures to explore. Take the children out on a nature walk and ask them to record and sketch the

> *"Teach children about everything from microplastics to the science of design"*

things that they notice. They can also pick up items such as leaves and berries (remind them **never** to eat any!). Back in the classroom, bring these items and their sketches to life through collages, experimenting with colour and texture from different sources. For example, try making different coloured paints with fruit and vegetables. Children can also bring in items from home:

- Red from beetroot and red berries
- Orange and yellow from onion skins, turmeric, and lemons
- Green from spinach and leafy greens (if you wear gloves to pick and handle them, stinging nettles make a nice bright green!)
- Blue from red cabbage mixed with baking soda
- Purple from blueberries
- Brown from used tea bags and old filter coffee granules

To turn them into a dye, place your chopped vegetable or fruit into a saucepan and cover with water. Use twice the amount of water to the amount of fruit or vegetable. Heat to a boil, then simmer for about an hour. Let the water cool to room temperature and strain into a container. You will likely want to do this part yourself, perhaps separating this lesson into two halves and preparing the dye in between.

3 | REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Next, to focus on the importance of reusing materials, ask the children to design an up-cycled white t-shirt. Record their design sketches and label the materials and colours they want to use. Use the handmade dye to tie-dye a plain t-shirt, exploring how to create tie-dye effects by using string to create the shapes on the fabric. Each child can do their own shirt, or you can create one as a class, depending on what works best for you. Encourage pupils to explore recycled materials to decorate and embellish their t-shirts further. Examples could include constructing paper flowers, using crisp packets folded into fans, or incorporating old newspapers and magazines to create ruffles or motifs.

You can build upon upcycling clothes by organising a class trip to the charity shops in the local area. Discuss with the class the boom in pre-loved fashion and how it helps the environment. Explain to children that they will stage a 'green fashion runway' using the clothes they have made and upcycled, and clothes they might have that have come from charity shops. You could stage the show in an assembly, or sell tickets to help raise money for a cause or charity the children are passionate about.

Discuss the different roles and responsibilities that come with staging a fashion show to ensure everyone has a part to play (e.g. models, organisers, designers, set engineers, etc).

Emily Azouelos is an experienced primary teacher and educational content creator.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Link to writing by creating 'A day in the life of…' piece that explores people who are working in the fashion industry and the issues they face. Examples can include: a factory worker/cotton picker/seamstress/model.
- You can also explore persuasive writing through letters to governments and fashion brands, asking them not to use cheap labour and to demand better workers' rights and conditions.
- Turn the upcycling and pre-loved clothing tasks into a competition and make links with the maths curriculum by getting the children to cost up the clothing they could buy from a charity shop or any recycled materials they've used (e.g. the cost of a crisp packet). The cheapest costume wins!

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What environmental problems are created by fast fashion?
- Can you suggest an alternative solution to the problem of over-consumerism?
- How would you encourage people to be more sustainable with their fashion choices?

ENGLISH

The Five Minute Box

A practical and comprehensive addition to your teaching arsenal

AT A GLANCE

- **A structured multi-sensory phonics programme and screening tool for potential Specific Learning Difficulties**
- **Designed to be delivered by teaching assistants**
- **Covers the first stages of phonics**
- **Supplements class teaching**
- **Gives children ownership of their own learning**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

When it comes to literacy interventions, what matters the most is how well pupils are targeted, assessed, and monitored within the framework of a particular programme. Although there can never be a single universally effective programme, some interventions do manage to work effectively for a sizeable number of pupils. One such literacy intervention is the recently updated Five Minute Box, a proven system for teaching early literacy skills providing high quality phonic work to ease reading difficulties.

This is really a sturdy, plastic valise of practical literacy resources packed together to help with confidence, reduce anxiety and help pupils to keep up and master early literacy. It's an easy-to-use and practical toolkit that is designed for direct 1:1 support for 'at risk' children with the aim of helping them improve their knowledge, understanding and attainment. As it is intended for individual tuition, children don't have to worry about group dynamics or the fear of failure in front of their peers. It's especially useful for helping children with dyslexia, developmental language disorder and social and emotional needs and allows for progress to be made at different rates.

What makes the Five Minute Box so good to use is that it is geared up for explicit and systematic teaching delivered in brief, but intensive, structured interventions. This means it provides clear models for positive and supportive learning using an array of examples proven to teach reading, writing, spelling, handwriting and literacy skills. Inside the case you get a newly updated 39-page resource book containing all you need to know about the box and how to get the most out of it. This includes the benefits and key points, initial assessments, teaching sessions, lesson plans, structured reading and spelling programme, and further assessments.

Also in the case you will find all of the hands-on materials you need for each lesson, including magnetic alphabet letters, sounds board, keyword cards and boards, handwriting formation board, record of achievement forms, record of work sheets, whiteboard and pen. As the materials are in one place, this helps save any preparation time and maximises time for actual teaching. There's a very handy fold-out instruction guide as well, which condenses the key information into easily digestible sections. The resource itself requires little in the way of preparation apart from familiarising yourself with the lesson plans and materials, so this is very much an 'open the box and get started' resource. Affordable training is also available if staff require it. Lessons are taught in small chunks, and each session covers a sounds board, keyword cards and personal information. The lesson plans included are all clearly set out in a step-by-step format using a 'Hear it, Say it, Read it, Write it, Read it again' approach. There are activities in phonics, keyword reading, spelling and writing and the box is intended for use in class rather than taking children out.

The Five Minute Box is not a box of tricks. It's a structured intervention toolkit of child-focused activities that allows all learners acquire secure phonic knowledge and literacy skills via short and impactful lessons that focus their attention and keep them involved. An intervention doesn't have to take hours to be effective, and The Five Minute Box proves that early intervention in short, focused bursts can really accelerate children's catch-up growth and be a rewarding not overwhelming experience.

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✔ **Ideal support for dyslexic or second-language learners**
- ✔ **Gives pupils the phonic skills and confidence they need to succeed**
- ✔ **Gives pupils multisensory support to learn new strategies and skills**
- ✔ **Provides chances to think aloud and talk about their learning and decisions**
- ✔ **Provides pupils with extensive feedback, self-esteem, motivation to learn and self-help strategies**
- ✔ **Provides valuable data and easy to monitor by SENCo**

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AT A GLANCE

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- **Enables all learners to achieve through a powerful, adaptive algorithm.**
- **Designed to establish an accurate measure of current maths attainment.**
- **Identifies areas of relative strength and areas for further development.**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Maths assessments are notoriously difficult to get right. You need them to be robust and reliable, tried and tested, and provide you with the accurate information to support your own judgements and make well-informed decisions about your pupils' skills. Maths assessments need to check for understanding, monitor learning and provide timely feedback and next steps. They also need to measure curriculum effectiveness. So where do we look?

The New Group Maths Test (NGMT) is a new digital, adaptive, termly test that measures maths attainment, pinpoints gaps in conceptual knowledge and puts meaningful information in the hands of both specialist and non-specialist teachers. This new test is a dynamic and effective way of touching base, eliciting evidence of learning on an individual and whole cohort level and is an efficient way of getting a sense of children's understanding of concepts. It is perfect for spotting children not hitting milestones, highlighting misconceptions, and recognising children with specific or more wide-ranging gaps in knowledge. It's also valuable in pinpointing children's understanding of maths vocabulary and highlighting potential concerns surrounding particular concepts.

What's different about this test? As one size does not fit all, NGMT uses adaptive testing by adjusting the difficulty of questions based on a pupil's responses, providing a personalised test experience using clear and unambiguous questions that test specific concepts and skills. As children do well, the test questions get harder and if they do less well, the content difficulty is reduced and a test outcome is decided when a child's level settles out. The test platform is clear and without gimmicks and so looks and feels sharp and formal but still user-friendly.

The NGMT test works efficiently because it ensures that children's time is not spent answering questions that are too hard or much too easy. It is auto marked and easy to use and it therefore delivers data you can trust, in less time.

A very broad range of skills can also be tested so this is an engaging and meaningful test for all learners. If you are looking to empower pupils and quickly identify and close their knowledge gaps then this is the test for you.

You view the results of the test in a dynamic reporting platform called Testwise where you can decide how to display the data. For example, you may decide to display results in terms of gender, Year group, class, nationality, SEND, or English as an additional or second language. The NGMT test and Testwise reporting combine seamlessly and provide precise information about how a child is tracking and achieving, with data that can be explored in far greater depth. It is also a more supportive experience for each pupil.

The adaptive algorithm is an underused technology in the world of nationally standardised tests. Real benefits include a more engaging test experience that produces a detailed and accurate picture of maths attainment enabling teachers to more precisely identify needs and target teaching where it is needed most. NGMT is a maths monitoring tool that is truly personalised for children and their capabilities. It is a highly workable, desirable and effective assessment solution. By utilising pupils' zone of proximal development and adjusting to each pupil's answers, the test can support learning effectively through 'just-right-for-me' learning opportunities.

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✔ **High-quality questions for the enhancement of learning**
- ✔ **Provides a valid and reliable picture of maths attainment**
- ✔ **Provides inclusive content for all learners**
- ✔ **Gives a holistic view of learners' strengths and improvement areas**
- ✔ **Facilitates responsive teaching and a pedagogy of engagement**
- ✔ **Helps teachers focus on what matters to bolster maths**

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Q&A

We take the famous Proust questionnaire and pose eight of its questions to a fellow educator. Take a peek into the deepest depths of a teacher's soul...

1 What is your idea of perfect happiness in your job?

When you do a job you love, you never have to work a day in your life, right? That is the definition of perfect happiness for me. When waking up isn't a chore, when preparing and planning is a joy, satisfaction is common, and impact is evident. I am fortunate to be currently doing this, but I think every teacher should get the chance to experience it.

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

Being totally honest, I have always feared waking up one morning and being unable to connect with the children, not being liked, or not able to teach them well; almost as if I shouldn't be there anymore. That's my fear – becoming ineffective and bad at the only thing I have done for my entire adult life.

3 What is your current state of mind?

I am currently relaxed and focused. I have two jobs that are flexible and achievable, whilst being intellectually and physically demanding. I enjoy challenges, so at present, I am feeling blessed. (I am also writing this midway through Ramadan!)

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

For me, it's the idea that in order to be a brilliant teacher, you must work constantly, sacrificing yourself, your partner's time, and maybe even time with your own children. I believe teaching is a job, and we have to make sure to invest time, energy and effort in the rest of our lives, too.

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

I might lie to my class by telling them they are all equally important to me! The reality is, I always have a special place in my heart for those who start their lives with the most difficult challenges, the most hills to run up, and the most obstacles to face. But, like Mr Wickens (my favourite teacher) taught me, I will make every single child feel like they are the most important person in my classroom.

6 Which words or phrases do you most overuse with your class?

"That's not finished!", followed by, "If it's not excellent, it's not finished!" I also have some phrases I wish teachers NEVER used, such as "This will be easy/straightforward/simple"; "Just try your best", or my favourite, "I know this is boring, but we have got to cover it!"

"I always have a special place in my heart for those who start their lives with the most difficult challenges to overcome"

7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

I actually taught my younger brother A level law. He had six externally marked modular exams, (no coursework!) and he achieved an A*. In fact, he got 100 per cent in four of his six exams. For reference, he didn't score that in his other A levels, and refused to call me Sir once. But he listened, learned, and I am very proud of that!

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

My clicker. I can't go and present anywhere without MY clicker. I like the way it feels, where the buttons are, etc. Sad, I know, but it has to be my clicker!

NAME: Amjad Ali
JOB ROLE: Inclusion and CPD lead at Chiltern Learning Trust
EXTRA INFO: Founder and creator of trythisteaching.com, keynote speaker, and CPD provider. Amjad is also the author of *A Little Guide for Teachers: SEND in Schools*, and is cofounder and trustee of the BAMEed Network Charity.

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