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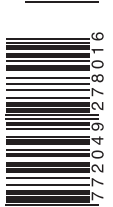
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## FROM THE EDITOR

### “Welcome...



First comes the wave – sweeping away the firmly held assumptions, the articles of faith, the entrenched orthodoxy that says, ‘Round here, we do things *like this*.’ But what then? How different will the new boss really be compared to the old boss, and what plans do they intend to enact?

One election day and a robust 158-seat Labour Parliamentary majority after we last met in this corner of *Teach Secondary*, it appears that we’re going to start seeing a few changes in how the DfE conducts its affairs – though based on what we’ve heard so far from the new(ish) Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson, it doesn’t seem like a dramatic, Gove-esque overhaul of the profession is on the cards any time soon.

That said, a wide-ranging curriculum and assessment review led by Professor Becky Francis CBE is currently underway, which will be paying particular attention to the challenges faced by socio-economically disadvantaged children and their families, as well as the various barriers that learners with SEND are confronted with. It’s also been made clear that any revised National Curriculum to emerge from the process will need to be taught by all state schools, with academies no longer being able to opt out of doing so.

The ability to re-envision and reform the education system in line with your governing principles may come with the Ministerial gig, but so too does responsibility for addressing the long list of ongoing issues that disrupt and complicate schools’ core mission of educating the young – and right now, the issues jostling for attention near the top of that list include funding, rates of student absence and hard-to-reach teacher recruitment targets.

As Melissa Benn notes on page 19, it will be interesting to see how long Labour’s very public vows to be frugal in its spending last in the face of enduring problems that will be costly to address, like depressed teacher pay and a school estate in dire need of refurbishment and repair.

It may also be necessary for Labour to contemplate some radical solutions in the face of the absence issue, suggests Ed Carlin (see page 57), while Sally Newton puts forward a few ideas for novel incentives that might go some way towards attracting the teachers that successive cohorts will need over the coming years.

So yes, change is on the horizon. Let’s hope it’s for the better.

Enjoy the issue,

**Callum Fauser**  
callum.fauser@theteachco.com

## On board this issue:



Ama Dickson is a  
maths teacher



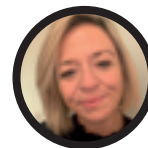
Ed Carlin is a  
deputy  
headteacher



Sally Newton is  
secondary partnership  
manager at the Tommy  
Flowers SCITT provider



Steve Brace is chief  
executive of the  
Geographical  
Association



Jenny Hampton is an  
English teacher and  
literacy lead



Kit Betts-Masters is  
a lead practitioner  
for science

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## School of thought

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There have already been signs of a dramatic change in education policy following Labour's historic election victory in May – though some concerns remain...

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Aggregate absence statistics can serve to conceal some deeper psychological reasons for teens' reluctance to attend school

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Students coming unstuck with those speed, distance and time calculations? Colin Foster has some suggestions for getting them back on track

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The first lesson you teach those new Y7s or Y12s will leave a huge impression, says John Lawson – so make sure it's a good one...

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Our current cohort have grown up with the internet as a continuous presence throughout their lives, says Nicky Cox – which is precisely why we should be giving them lessons in critical thinking

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teach  
SECONDARY

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Published by: Artichoke Media, Suites 2 & 4, Global House, Global Park, Eastgates, CO1 2TJ

artichoke

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# The newsletter

Teach Secondary's digest of the latest goings-on in the profession...

## The UNINFORMED teacher's guide to...

### SKIBIDI TOILET

If you've heard some of your younger Y7s chant the 'words' *'Skibidi dop dop dop yes yes skibidi double u reeh reeh'* to each other while their older peers and any passing Y8s look on in disdain, this will be why.

Put very simply, *Skibidi Toilet* is the name given to a sprawling YouTube video series created by Georgia-based animator, Alexey Gerasimov. It started life as a showcase for Gerasimov's experiments with the user-friendly Source Filmmaker animation software, parlaying his recurring nightmares about toilets into a surreal collection of sub 30-second animations featuring disembodied heads suddenly appearing out of toilets and urinals, lip-synching the lyrics of 'Dom Dom Yes Yes' by Bulgarian pop artiste Biser King set to the music of 'Give it to Me' by US producer Timbaland.

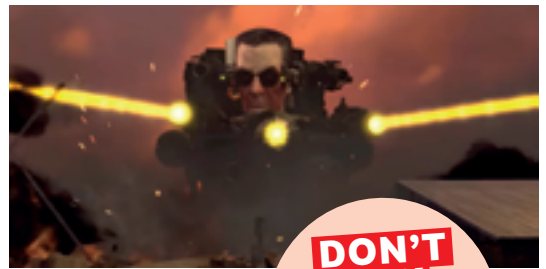
18 months and 76 episodes later, the series has since grown into an outlandishly ambitious sci-fi fever dream, depicting a global war between the Skibidi Toilets and their sworn enemies, the Camermen and Speakerman - the latter of whom are regular humanoids, except with cameras and speakers in place of heads.

Instalments of *Skibidi Toilet* now regularly depict giant war machines battling in futuristic cityscapes - and if all that doesn't sound exhausting enough, it's recently been announced that bombastic film auteur Michael Bay is in talks with Gerasimov to adapt *Skibidi* for the big screen. Great news if you're 11. Deserving of a dismissive eye roll if you're 12, apparently...



### DO SAY

*"Skibidi dop dop dop..."*



### DON'T SAY

*"I'm the Scatman!"*

## BEAT THE BUDGET



### What's on offer?

A script for a play of approximately 50 minutes in length, alongside a resource pack containing a programme, production guide, fact sheet and glossary

### How might teachers use the resources?

Produced by the children's charity Corum, the play *Echoes Through*



*Time* charts the history of England's care system, exploring young people's experiences of life in care today, and how they parallel and diverge from the lives of children growing up at the historic Foundling Hospital in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Coram is encouraging schools, youth and community groups to stage their own productions of the play to familiarise new audiences with the story it portrays.

**Where is it available?**  
coramstory.org.uk

### What are we talking about?

*Echoes Through Time: The Story of Care*

### Who is it for?

Learners and performers aged 14 to 24, and audiences aged 14 and up

## WHAT THEY SAID

"Taxing independent education is wrong-headed for multiple reasons; accelerating it, without giving adequate time to prepare, is reckless. This risks untold disruption

- including for many state schools."

- Tweet by Shadow Education Secretary Damian Hinds, in response to the launch of a government consultation on removing the VAT exemption for private school fees

## Think of a number... £9.2 billion

Amount spent by the DfE in 2023-24 on interventions for improving the attainment of disadvantaged children

Source: National Audit Office

25%

of disadvantaged pupils achieved grade 5 or above in their English and maths GCSEs in 2022/23, compared to 52% of their non-disadvantaged peers

Source: National Audit Office

69%

of children excluded in primary school received at least one suspension in secondary school

Source: 'Too Young to Leave Behind' report produced by Chance UK

91%

of secondary school teachers believe their students worry too much that their exam results will determine their future.

Source: Teacher Tapp survey of 8,410 teachers commissioned by the NSPCC

## ONE FOR THE WALL

"If you do not tell the truth about yourself, you cannot tell it about other people"

Virginia Woolf



## Facing fines

A school in Essex was recently reprimanded by the Information Commissioner's Office over its use of facial recognition technology (FRT).

In March 2023, Chelmer Valley High School in Chelmsford introduced a new FRT-based system for processing cashless canteen payments. Because such systems are built around storing and recognising individuals' unique biometric data for identification purposes, organisations are required to carry out a data protection impact assessment (DPIA) before they can be used.

That wasn't the case here, however - and nor had the school sought 'opt in' consent for its students' biometric information to be gathered for payment purposes. Parents were issued with slips they could return if they wished to withdraw their child from the scheme, but 'opt out' mechanisms aren't recognised as a valid form of consent in such cases under UK law.

It's a cautionary tale for schools that are increasingly being courted by technology vendors keen to sell CCTV systems, reception equipment and payment solutions that incorporate FRT.

According to Lynne Currie, head of privacy innovation at the ICO, "We've taken action against this school to show introducing measures such as FRT should not be taken lightly, particularly when it involves children.

*We don't want this to deter other schools from embracing new technologies. But this must be done correctly with data protection at the forefront, championing trust, protecting children's privacy and safeguarding their rights."*

## SAVE THE DATE

19-20 OCTOBER 2024 Battle of Ideas Festival | 13 NOVEMBER 2024 The Education People Show | 20 NOVEMBER 2024 Schools & Academies Show

### 19-20 OCTOBER 2024

**Battle of Ideas Festival**  
Church House, Westminster  
[battleofideas.org.uk](http://battleofideas.org.uk)

Fans of robust debate and those with trenchant views they'd like to get off their chest will find plenty to chew on at this year's Battle of Ideas, where a vast spread of topics - women's rights, AI, mental health and disinformation among them - will be subject to impassioned discussion. Secondary pupils can attend one of the days for free, or both for a discounted £10.

## SPEECHES AND CORRESPONDENCE

Forget the media-friendly soundbites - what else was in those announcements and speeches you missed?



### THE SPEECH:

## Education Secretary addresses the Embassy Education Conference

**WHO?** Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education

**WHERE?** King's College London

**WHEN?** 23rd July 2024

"In my first weeks as Secretary of State in this new government I have been resetting relationships across the length and breadth of education. I want to refresh old partnerships and grow new ones - not just at home, but around the world too.

Closed systems that only look inward quickly run out of ideas. Creativity crumbles, innovation dies, the same thoughts spin round and round and collapse in on themselves. But through our international partners, we can reach out across the world and bring back a freshness of thought that breathes new life into our society.

My passion is for an open, global Britain - one that welcomes new ideas. One that looks outward in optimism, not inward in exclusion. We already have deep education partnerships with countless countries around the globe, and I want to build more.

Whether that's through British international schools abroad, or cross-border collaboration on skills training. School trips and scholarships, exchange programmes and language learning, policy conversations that span the early years to learners with special educational needs.

Education puts us on the path to freedom. Intellectual freedom. Economic freedom. Social freedom. Cultural freedom. Through education, we can enlarge and expand those freedoms, we can show that government is a power not just for administration but for transformation."

### THE RESPONSE:

## NASUWT responds to King's Speech



**FROM?** Dr Patrick Roach, General Secretary of the NASUWT teachers' union

**REGARDING?** Labour's upcoming policy programme as set out in the King's Speech

**WHEN?** 17th July 2024

"The new Government's programme provides an opportunity to reset our education system and take a significant step forward in addressing the inequality, fragmentation, chaos and damage inflicted on the education system over the last 14 years, and restore the status of the teaching profession.

We will now be looking to the new government to work with us in taking forward these and other measures in the interests of children and young people and the workforce in our schools and colleges."

### 13 NOVEMBER 2024

**The Education People Show**  
Kent Event Centre, Detling  
[theeducationpeopleshow.co.uk](http://theeducationpeopleshow.co.uk)

Billed as the South East's 'Leading event for the promotion and development of effective school leadership, management, learning and teaching' and free to attend, those making the trip to Detling will get to participate in a series of workshops spanning an array of topics - from employment law and SEND provision to school finance. Proceedings will conclude with a keynote address by Beth Tweddle MBE.

### 20 NOVEMBER 2024

**Schools & Academies Show**  
NEC Birmingham  
[schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk](http://schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk)

Back for another stint at the NEC is this fixture of the education events calendar, offering lots in the way of knowledge-sharing, advice sessions and inspiring keynotes. This year's event will be sharing exhibition space on the day with both the EdTech Summit and the Independent Schools Conference, making for more networking opportunities than ever before.

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By Djamila Boothman

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**All Of Us: 24 brilliant texts to enrich your A level and IB English curriculum**



# Get Into Film

**BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER (2022, 161 MINUTES, 12A)**



**CURRICULUM LINKS:**

Citizenship, art and design, politics

This highly anticipated sequel to *Black Panther* commences with the funeral of King T'Challa (following the real-world death of renowned actor Chadwick Boseman). With the Kingdom of Wakanda in mourning, Queen Ramonda and Princess Shuri take some time away to grieve their loss. This period of peace is interrupted by a sudden attack from Namor, ruler of the underwater kingdom of Talokan, forcing Wakanda to defend itself against a formidable invading power. This is another exciting addition to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and a visual feast of Afro-futurism.

**Discussion questions:**

- Based on what we're shown, to what extent could Namor's actions throughout the film be justified?
- What are some of the core messages contained within *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*?
- Would you have made the same decision as Shuri, following her confrontation with Namor at the end of the film? If not, why not?
- What similarities and differences are there in the film's portrayals of Talokanil and Wakandan society?

Head online to [intofilm.org](https://intofilm.org) to stream this film for free and download the film guide containing Teacher's Notes; look out also for our online resources to mark Black History Month - see [bit.ly/ts136-BPWF](https://bit.ly/ts136-BPWF) for more details

## X Retweets

Who's been saying what on Twitter this month?

**Sam Strickland** @Strickomaster

How to think critically... Possess lots of knowledge. Know lots. Subjects like English, History, Geography, Politics, Science, Maths, Art & Design (to name but a few) will hugely support with this...

**James Eldon** @EldonPrincipal

As school budgets become ever more stretched, save money on elaborate rewards by allowing part of your yard to become green with mildew. Then at the end of each term, the award winning students jet wash the yard. No greater pleasure and a community reward. What a wellie joy!

Follow us via @teachsecondary - and let us know what you're thinking

# TEACHER TALES

True stories from the education chalkface

## HOWZAT!

One of my colleagues in the PE department was assigned to accompany the school cricket team to a match at the local independent school - but hailing from a Welsh school that never played cricket, he was a little unsure of umpiring etiquette. His counterpart at the independent school was immaculately turned out in a white coat; our representative was resplendent in t-shirt and shorts.

Relations deteriorated further when my colleague was required to adjudicate on a close run-out call. Having previously watched umpires officiating at American baseball games on TV, he moved nimbly to one side, confidently waved his arms across his body and loudly declared, "SAFE!" - much to the despair of the opposition umpire.

Not only that, but whenever a wicket fell, my colleague indicated not with the traditional raised index finger, but with a dramatic point towards the pavilion while bellowing "You're outta here!"

We were never invited back...

## I've heard worse excuses

I once asked a Y7 boy why his shirt wasn't tucked into his trousers. With supreme confidence, he told me "Every time I put my hand up to answer a question, it falls out." Can't argue with that...

**Have a memorable true school tale or anecdote of your own? Share the details, and find more amusing stories, at [schoolhumour.co.uk](https://schoolhumour.co.uk)**

## A FEW MINUTES OF DESIGN

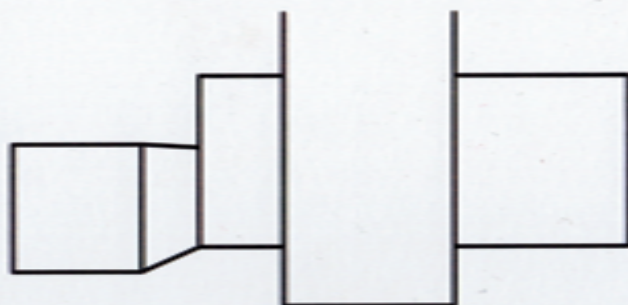
Redraw or trace the shape below.

The shape is unfinished.

Finish it in a logical and pleasing way so that the outline is continuous.

## #32 FINISHING WELL

A Few Minutes of Design FINISHING WELL



## Q&amp;A

# “AI is not just about technical skills”

Ben Garside of the Raspberry Pi Foundation explains how its latest resources will help teachers and students develop greater awareness and understanding of how AI will come to shape the course of our lives



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

Experience AI provides teaching resources on artificial intelligence and machine learning for students aged 11 to 14. This cutting-edge, research-informed programme from AI experts at Google DeepMind and the Raspberry Pi Foundation can help you bring AI into your classroom.

### What is Experience AI?

Experience AI is a free educational programme designed by the Raspberry Pi Foundation and Google DeepMind to equip students aged 11 to 14 with the knowledge and skills they need in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML).

It provides a comprehensive range of resources – including adaptable lesson plans, slide decks, worksheets and student-facing videos – designed to help teachers seamlessly integrate AI and ML into their curriculum and provide stimulating learning experiences.

### Why is it important to teach students AI literacy?

AI literacy isn't just about technical skills; it's about empowering the next generation to navigate a world increasingly shaped by AI.

A greater understanding of how AI systems work will enable young people to make more informed decisions about how they use and devise new AI applications, and around the role that AI will play in their futures.

They will also be better able to navigate the world with improved critical thinking skills, coupled with an awareness of how they might use AI to creatively solve problems they care about.

### What makes Experience AI unique?

The resources are informed by our research work, and developed in collaboration with Google



DeepMind's industry experts in AI technologies.

We have placed deliberate emphasis on addressing diversity and under-representation (an issue particularly relevant in the field of AI), as a way to mitigate the risk these tools have to increase biases and inequities in society.

### I don't know much about AI – how can I teach it?

We understand that AI might seem complex, and there's a common misconception that only experts can grasp the concepts behind it. But the truth is, you don't need a



**ABOUT BEN:**  
Ben Garside is senior learning manager at the Raspberry Pi Foundation

specialised degree to understand the fundamentals of AI, or how it can influence you.

That's why we've designed resources for all educators, regardless of subject area or technical background. Our materials make AI accessible and relevant to your classroom and curriculum.

### Are there any exciting developments on the horizon?

In October, we will launch our new set of resources on AI safety, responsibility, and privacy.

The free resources will be suitable for anyone – teachers, club leaders, or parents – who sees the importance of helping young people stay safe when using AI-powered tools.

### Experience AI

**Contact:**  
[experience-ai.org](https://experience-ai.org)

## Need to know

- + All the free resources you need to confidently teach AI and ML in your classroom.
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# The age of (democratic) CONSENT

**Toby Marshall** considers whether lowering the voting age to 16 might engage young people in politics – and if so, what the implications of that might be...

**A**head of the 2024 General Election, the Labour Party manifesto stated that, “We will increase the engagement of young people in our vibrant democracy, by giving 16 and 17 year-olds the right to vote in all elections.”

At the time of writing, we don’t yet know if the Labour Party will be true to its word, and if so, how the country’s 16- and 17-year-olds will intend to use their vote. But either way, I believe that schools should be sharing Britain’s suffrage story to date with our future voters, up to the age of 16, through the teaching of history.

## Our national suffrage story

The Office for National Statistics estimates that the UK population is just shy of 68 million – 49 million of whom were registered to vote in 2023. The ONS further calculates that in April of this year, there were approximately 1,602,000 16- to 17-year-olds living in the UK.

When Harold Wilson’s Labour government lowered the voting age to 18 in 1969, it was seen as ushering in an important new chapter of our national suffrage story. More recently, younger Scots have been allowed to participate in local votes, including the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence.

Yet both sets of changes generated mixed results in terms of youth engagement, with the changes in Scotland

appearing to have done little to transform Scotland’s overall electoral culture. That’s what the turnout at this year’s General Election seems to suggest, being lower in Scotland (59%) than it was in the UK as whole (60%).

Previous chapters in Britain’s suffrage story have been considerably more dramatic and transformative, because they had greater democratic meaning.

## A whiff of paternalism

The full, unrestricted, franchise first came to all males in 1918, following prior campaigning work by the Chartists from the 1830s until the 1860s. The franchise was then extended to women in 1928, after the similarly commendable actions of the Suffragettes, who picked up the suffrage baton after the initial Chartist campaigns died down.

Young adults then finally got the vote in the 60s – but as many historians of that decade have observed, this was different to prior extensions of the franchise, in that it wasn’t granted in response to popular demand. It’s said that the decision was instead driven by elite concerns over the radical activities of the ‘69ers, as well as a perceived crisis of parliamentary legitimacy.

Similarly, young people today aren’t exactly calling for the vote in huge, unprecedented numbers, which is why Labour’s latest voting proposal has more than a whiff of paternalism

about it. Labour seems to want young people to become more politically engaged – just as any good teacher or parent would – but adult politics, at least as I understand it, is about representing the needs of *adults*; not teaching people how to grow up.

## Power struggles

Neither the Chartists nor the Suffragettes were seeking a political education. Rather, they were engaged in a power struggle against those that

supporters once they succeeded in getting the law changed.

The Chartists had Fergus O’Connor – a Cork-born Irishman who, by many accounts, towered above his peers, both morally and physically. His song, ‘The Lion of Freedom’, was often sung in the pubs of England and ends with the following couplet:

*“We’ll hail our caged lion,  
now freed from his den,  
We’ll rally around him,  
again and again.”*

**“Young men of 18 command tanks costing £200,000. They are old enough to be killed, old enough to breed, and I think they should be old enough to vote – but I do not think that necessarily means they are going to use that vote.”**

– Viscount Monckton, responding in the Lords to Labour’s 1969 Representation of the People Act, which lowered the age of voting in the UK from 21 to 18

were oppressing them.

Both mass movements had their firebrand figureheads and their moderates. At the firebrand end, the suffragettes had the Manchester-born, East London radical Sylvia Pankhurst, who was arrested on multiple occasions, went on hunger strike for the cause and was later carried into Parliament by her

Fast forward to now, and I’d argue that there’s no comparable popular movement for youth votes at 16 and 17 today, and certainly no youth leaders anywhere close to Pankhurst or

O'Connor. Existing in the curious, inbetweenish state of mid-adolescence is no easy thing, for sure – but being a teenager without the vote simply isn't the same as being an oppressed adult woman, or an oppressed member of the working class.

### Structures and sentiments

Nevertheless, let's assume Labour gets its way and the voting age is lowered. What might the impact be upon the teaching of politics at school?

On one level, as a teacher and a British citizen, I believe the young should be taught about the norms of our democracy and its odd constitutional structure. The task of doing this should fall to teachers of citizenship, which Labour (correctly,

in my view) introduced to the National Curriculum back in 2001.

At the same time, however, any lowering of the voting age will inevitably compel schools to think even more carefully than they already do about how topical or controversial issues ought to be discussed within lessons, lest they be accused of seeking to influence the views of those who would be our youngest voters.

When discussing politics and democracy, we shouldn't hector the young. As teachers, we should try to cultivate the political voice of the young by giving them knowledge and understanding of what politics means, whilst also respecting that their political dreams and aspirations will not

– and indeed should not – be the same as ours.

If it's to endure, our democracy must reproduce itself in both its structures and in the sentiments and expectations of its citizens. This largely happens outside of schools; insofar that education has a role to play, it needs to be a narrow one, centred on teaching *about* politics, not for any particular position *within it*.

### A sense of history

This is why I believe it's a great shame that the English state school system, almost uniquely in Europe, doesn't require all students to study their own history up to the age of 16. When we vote, we naturally think about what's gone before, whilst also considering what might yet happen in the future. A sense of history is critical to any form of political decision-making.

Labour might therefore want to consider making history a compulsory subject for all students in its forthcoming curriculum review. It would be educationally negligent to let young people drop British history at the very moment in their lives when they most need the powerful knowledge about politics that it contains.

In conclusion, I agree with the spirit, if not the letter of Labour's proposal to fully engage the young in democracy. The aim is a noble one, in which teachers have a special role to play – provided they avoid the risks of indoctrination by not abusing their position of trust and resolving to remain objective, factual, critical, dispassionate and impartial at all times.

If there's one takeaway from the 2024 election result, it's that many of us, not just the young, share a somewhat jaded view of Parliament. If Labour succeeds in standing up for the many against the

## IN BRIEF

### What's the issue?

The now governing Labour Party has proposed lowering the voting age to 16, which will inevitably have consequences on the way politics is taught in schools.

### What's being said?

Those in favour of the policy have invoked similar arguments to those made when the voting age was last lowered in the 1960s – that the rights and obligations which take effect at 16 (to work, to serve in the Army, to pay taxes) should include the right to vote.

### What's really happening?

The granting of voting rights at 16 would increase the need for schools to improve the quality of their political education – which, in the absence of careful planning and delivery, may increase the risks of potential indoctrination of pupils by teachers.

### The takeaway

Any expanded politics offer by schools should be firmly rooted within the citizenship and history curriculums, alongside the introduction of a statutory history component at KS4, so as to better inform the country's newest and youngest electoral demographic.

privileged few, then we might well see increased turnout rates next time. Five years should be long enough to accomplish that.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Toby Marshall is an A Level film studies teacher



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# 5 REASONS TO TRY... Online AP in Hybrid Learning Models

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## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

Online AP supports students with diverse needs, blending seamlessly into school schedules. By attending in-person and online AP classes via a hybrid learning model, students receive personalised support, ensure continuity in their learning and stay connected to their school environment. Schools can also address any recruitment and specialism challenges.

### 1 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Online AP providers are specialised in driving student engagement. Teams of expert educators will often leverage innovative teaching methods to keep students engaged and encourage class participation, while respecting challenges and individual preferences.

Academy21, for instance, leverages interactive tools and private pods to keep communication open between teachers and students, making students feel more comfortable in sharing their thoughts or questions. We have had students who were refusing to interact with others when they joined us becoming much more participative, after just a few weeks with us.



### 2 EASY ACCESS TO RESOURCES

With online AP, schools don't have to employ more specialist resources to be able to support students with unique needs. As a ready-to-deploy solution, online AP gives schools instant access to expert teachers and specialists that are difficult to source and recruit, effectively solving any recruitment barriers. At Academy21, our teachers are experts in their subject areas, but also have experience in online teaching and supporting students with SEN. At Academy21, we also offer additional SEN support, a SEN-inclusive induction and an accessible online learning environment.

### 3 STAGED REINTEGRATION

Online AP is flexible and can be accessed from school settings, making it easier for students following a hybrid learning model to move between their

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in-person and online classes. Because they are still physically present on-site, they won't ever be disconnected from this environment, and can still maintain school commitments and relationships while receiving additional support online. As students progress, they can easily adjust their schedule to more in-person classes and eventually, whenever possible, reintegrate fully into their mainstream classes.

### 4 CONTINUITY IN EDUCATION

Online AP should work as an extension of your school, ensuring that students access a consistent curriculum and don't develop any learning gaps (or, rather, close existing ones). Online AP specialists, like the DfE-accredited Academy21, offer a high-quality curriculum that mirrors that taught by mainstream schools. This means that

during their hybrid learning, students will continue to receive an excellent education that is equipping them with all the skills they need to succeed in their exams or continue on their learning journey.

### 5 MONITORING

Schools know how their students are performing in their classes, but what happens when they move online? At Academy21 we ensure that monitoring and progress reports are easy to access via the mentor portal, which provides schools with regular updates on EUI (engagement, understanding and interaction) scores, as well as attendance, teacher feedback and termly reports. This data aids reintegration planning and enables schools to produce comprehensive reports for parents.

## Key Points

With flexibility built in, there are no minimum purchase requirements; the number of students, subjects, lengths of study and payment options are all adjustable.

Technology that fits in with school IT systems, seamlessly blending online and in-person learning, allowing for successful reintegration into mainstream school.

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David Voisin is a head of MFL

# DICTIONARY DEEP DIVE

Join **David Voisin** on a rich, and sometimes surprising journey through the points at which literacy, language and vocabulary intersect...

## PARDON MY FRENCH

RDV stands for the French, 'Rendez-vous'. As a compound noun, it means 'agreed encounter' – sometimes of a romantic nature – or the more formal 'appointment'. As a phrase, it means 'make your way somewhere' or also, ironically, 'surrender yourself'. The expression isn't to be confused with 'RSVP' which stands for 'Répondez s'il vous plaît' ('answer please'). The Tier 2 word 'respondent' (a person who answers) is evidently linked.



## TEACHING TIP: SHOW HUMILITY

School literacy doesn't start with literacy programmes, or even books. It starts with teachers. A rich literacy culture is built upon the two pillars of passion and knowledge, yet school leaders sometimes neglect to capitalise on teachers' experience, willingness or talent.

This is because it's often assumed that literacy coordinators must belong to English departments, stemming from a narrow view of what constitutes 'language'. The only way to contemplate English (or any language) is with humility. English is such a multi-faceted entity that one person alone cannot claim to know enough about it – and let's not forget that literacy extends far beyond championing poetry and the canon.

What about song lyrics? Religious debates? PE pep talks or sports commentary? What about rap, theatrical scripts or the non-fiction texts studied in the sciences and humanities?

MFL teachers who have studied both literature and linguistics can expound on all these, as indeed can any member of staff who genuinely wants to get involved and read to children. If leaders want literacy to permeate the whole school, then they have to invest in their teachers first.



## LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS



Reacting to a pupil's misuse of grammar, a German colleague of mine once commented, "What's

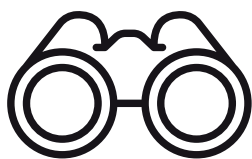
*happened to the past participle?*" As two immigrants of different nationalities, we were now speaking the same language.

Relatively few anglophones will be familiar with this term. Deriving from the grammatical construction 'subject / auxiliary / past' (as in 'I have written'), the infamous past participle can often lead to confusion. As languages have evolved, this construction has become modified over time, with speakers sometimes omitting the auxiliary ('I done this') or simply flouting the past participle altogether, and using just the past form of the verb ('I have wrote' or even 'I had my nails did').

Non-standard parlance still qualifies as language, but we ought to perhaps describe such use as 'convention', rather than the more prescriptive 'rule'. It's been observed that past participles ending in 'one' (such as 'done' or 'gone') are more susceptible to change – yet it's interesting to see how people who learnt English grammatically, rather than phonologically, will rarely write the egregious 'I could of done', as a misspelling of the abbreviated auxiliary ('ve).

Syntactic understanding does more than simply please grammar sticklers, though. Past participles are a useful derivation of the verb. The form often lies at the heart of the passive voice, and it can also be used stylistically, in the manner of adjectives ('fallen angel', 'sunken eyes').

## SAME ROOT, DIFFERENT WORDS



The Spanish '**mirar**' means 'to look'



In French, 'un **mirador**' is a watchtower and '**ligne de mire**' means 'line of sight'



You look at yourself in a **mirror**; a **mirage** is an optical illusion



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The honeymoon effect following Labour's decisive victory in July is strong – and it's already having a major impact on education in England...

# Melissa Benn



Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner, Bridget Phillipson. All are key figures in the recently elected Labour administration, and have – in striking contrast to many high profile figures in past Conservative administrations – frequently spoken of their working class backgrounds, and how much they relied on public provision to help them get on in life.

Phillipson, the newly appointed Education Secretary, has highlighted on numerous occasions the 'brilliant state school' that propelled her, a child brought up in poverty by a single mother, first to Oxford, then to frontline politics and now into government.

Within days of taking office, she released a statement announcing her wish to work closely with teachers, leaders and school staff; a marked change of tone from the recent slew of Conservative Ministers who often seemed permanently at odds with almost everyone in the sector, bar a few influential MAT leaders.

## The VAT exemption

Since early July, Labour has been pressing ahead with its tightly costed manifesto pledges – which notably included removing the VAT exemption on private school fees, and using the resultant money to recruit 6,500 teachers into state schools and improve mental health provision.

The run-up to the general election saw relentless campaigning against this policy, jointly led by private school parents and influential groups within the sector, such as the Independent Schools Council. Hardly a week passed without some article in the centre-right press alleging any number of harmful impacts that it would have. Phillipson herself was even accused of being 'Very chippy' about private education in emails leaked to *The Guardian* (see bit.ly/ts136-MB1). Publicly, at least, she wisely took no notice.

Phillipson has also moved fast in other areas, having announced plans to review existing curriculum and assessment arrangements, and abolish Ofsted's hugely unpopular single-word judgements in favour of more detailed 'school report cards'. She has also resolved to oversee the opening of thousands more nurseries and the creation of breakfast clubs in every school (see bit.ly/ts136-MB2)

## A new regime

The DfE has further pledged to phase out the use of isolation booths, excessive exclusions and strict behaviour regimes in schools (see bit.ly/ts136-MB3), while Chancellor Rachel Reeves has hinted that the Treasury might be able to fund an above inflation pay rise for teachers, whose pay has been kept down for so long (see bbc.in/46lH9pR).

So far, so good.

Of course, by definition, honeymoons don't last, with this new government likely to start facing severe challenges as early as this autumn. Given its commitment to tight spending constraints, it's hard to see how Labour will solve some perennial problems, such as the crisis in SEND provision, or the condition of our crumbling school

buildings.

Many within the Labour family have also expressed disappointment that the incoming administration clearly doesn't intend to dismantle the dramatic structural reforms brought in by Michael Gove from 2010. As most readers will know, these included mass academisation, the subsequent consolidation of MATs and a corresponding running-down of LA involvement in education.

## Establishment advice

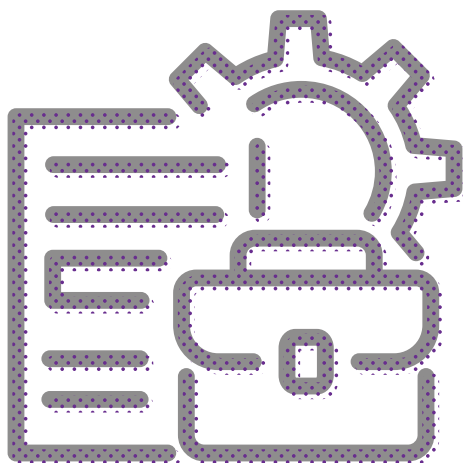
Labour also seems to be relying on the advice of the existing 'educational establishment', many of whose members rose to prominence during the Conservative years, while sidelining individuals able to bring expertise and ideas from its own side (see bit.ly/ts136-MB4).

Nor do there seem to be any plans for tackling the ongoing grammar/comprehensive divide in several counties. How, one wonders, can an administration pledging support for social mobility and improving the wellbeing of working class children continue to maintain a system that ruthlessly favours relatively affluent and privately tutored children through the 11 plus test?

Regardless, however, it's clear that many within the Labour party – including several at the top of government – remain strongly committed to comprehensive education and privately opposed to grammars.

Could this new Labour administration, emboldened by power, eventually decide to follow the advice recently given by one school head and finally complete the 'unfinished revolution' of the last Labour government by phasing out selective education altogether (see bit.ly/ts136-MB5)?

Such an outcome doesn't – yet – seem impossible...



## Q&amp;A

# “It can’t be left to chance”

Lizzie Catford, Director of Children’s Books at BookTrust, discusses the impact that encouraging reading for pleasure at the primary/secondary transition can have on students’ future success



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

BookTrust is the UK’s largest children’s reading charity, working with millions of young people each year to get them reading. Its Bookbuzz programme helps put reading for pleasure at the heart of your school’s transition strategy.

### Why should reading for pleasure be a key focus in school transition planning?

Transition into secondary school presents many challenges for students – a new environment, new peer group, new timetable and greater independence, but more responsibility too.

As they join Y7, reading for pleasure is a vital tool for easing the transition and ensuring that students don’t lose momentum. Many qualitative and quantitative research studies show the impact that reading regularly, and by choice, can have on attainment and cognitive development, as well as its effects on wellbeing and social outcomes.

### How does reading for pleasure set students up for success across the curriculum?

Students who read are more likely to do better at school and make more progress across the curriculum. Reading enhances educational attainment. By feeding into their development of cognitive skills, and helping them understand forms of reasoning, complex concepts and imaginative richness, reading can support students’ problem solving skills and enhance their intellectual capacities.

### How does reading for pleasure support student wellbeing?

Students who read are more likely to be happier, healthier and



experience better mental wellbeing and self-esteem.

Children aged 11-14 who read for pleasure have been shown to have healthier lifestyles. They’re less likely to try cigarettes or alcohol and eat more fruit, irrespective of their family background. They have a better foundation for healthy social-emotional development.

### How does reading for pleasure promote social interaction?

Reading offers a unique tool for social interaction. A head of English at a large comprehensive school in the Midlands recently shared that she really values how BookTrust’s Bookbuzz programme – which gives students the chance to choose and keep a book they’ll love – provides great opportunities



#### ABOUT LIZZIE:

Lizzie Catford is an experienced publisher and reading for pleasure specialist, working on national-level behaviour change programmes to develop children’s reading habits.



**Contact:**  
020 7801 8800  
bookbuzz@  
booktrust.org.uk

for getting to know her new Y7 students through low-stakes, informal book talk, in which students open up and share their points of view, likes and dislikes.

### Why do schools need to embed reading for pleasure as a priority?

Put simply, it can’t be left to chance. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) released in May 2023 found that fewer students in England reported enjoying reading than in the previous study, with a quarter saying that they didn’t like reading.

With reading for pleasure in decline, taking the time to use Bookbuzz at the start of Y7 to embed positive associations with reading will pay dividends for the future. It will develop core skills by helping to scaffold choices, so that students know how to find a book that’s right for them.

**Find out more about the benefits of reading and the evidence base via [bit.ly/ts135-BT1](https://bit.ly/ts135-BT1)**  
**For more information on Bookbuzz visit [booktrust.org.uk/bookbuzz](https://booktrust.org.uk/bookbuzz)**

## What’s the difference?

- + Bookbuzz provides a curated programme of books and resources to help embed a reading for pleasure culture, right from transition
- + It supports schools in scaffolding students’ choices, helping them to self-select the books they’ll read, which is proven to increase reading motivation
- + The programme spans 16 fiction and non-fiction titles, all selected by experts to ensure that there’s something for every interest and reading level

# Foil or functionary?

**Adrian Lyons** considers what the recent history of relations between Ofsted and government can tell us about where we may be heading next...

In recent years, the role of the Secretary of State for Education in the UK has been a revolving door, with numerous individuals occupying the position and leaving little lasting impact on the educational landscape – or indeed on Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education.

This high turnover rate can make the leadership of a school under Special Measures appear remarkably stable by comparison. Reflecting on the last decade, it's easy to forget some of the figures who have briefly held the position, highlighting the transient nature of their influence – particularly the tenures of Kit Malthouse (6th September 2022 to 25th October 2022) and Michelle Donelan (5th to 7th July 2022).

## An HMCI inheritance

The most significant shifts set in motion by the Education Secretary have tended to occur with changes in the governing party, as we've witnessed over the course of the summer just gone. This is a fairly well-established pattern, with similarly dramatic transitions previously occurring in 2010, when Michael Gove was appointed to the role, and in 1997, during the tenure of New Labour's first Education Minister, David Blunkett.

What's interesting to look back on now is how both appointments quickly raised questions concerning the existing Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) each Minister inherited. Chris Woodhead, who was appointed as Ofsted chief in 1994, stands out as a particularly controversial figure in the regulator's history.

Known for his outspoken criticism of the education system and its teaching staff, Woodhead's claim that there were '15,000 incompetent teachers' became infamous. His tenure was marked by an consistently adversarial relationship with the teaching profession, making him a contentious figure when New Labour came to power. Despite facing significant pressure to replace him, David Blunkett actually renewed Woodhead's appointment, since he valued his stance on educational standards over the need to appease the teaching unions.

## Broad and holistic

Following Woodhead's departure, the HMCI role was filled by Sir Mike Tomlinson, and later Sir David Bell. Both men sought to maintain a somewhat lower profile in the role, while quietly implementing a number of important changes to the wider inspection framework.

After Bell left to become permanent secretary at the then Department for Education and Skills, there was a period of interim leadership

before Dame Christine Gilbert eventually took over in 2006. Her appointment was highly scrutinised at the time, due to her marriage to a Home Office minister, which sparked accusations of cronyism – all firmly denied by the DfEaS.

Under Gilbert's tenure, Ofsted's priorities came to be closely aligned with the Labour government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda, emphasising a broad and holistic approach to school inspections. Her era is often remembered fondly nowadays for its comprehensive focus on various aspects of student development, including academic progress, behaviour, healthy lifestyles and future economic wellbeing. However, this ambitious scope for inspections often clashed with the practical limitations imposed by the resources available.

## Back to basics

As most readers will know, the election of the Coalition government in 2010 marked a dramatic shift. As the newly appointed Education Secretary, Michael Gove opposed Gilbert's broad inspection framework, preferring instead a focus on traditional educational standards and behaviour.

Despite initial resistance, Gilbert left in 2011, paving the way for Gove to appoint Sir Michael Wilshaw. Wilshaw's tenure brought a narrower focus to inspections, with a particular emphasis on

standards and discipline. Yet tensions arose when Wilshaw asserted Ofsted's independence from government – particularly when some of Gove's flagship free schools were rated inadequate.

Given this background, it's understandable that the current HMCI, Sir Martyn Oliver, has delayed making major reforms to Ofsted until the new Secretary of State, Bridget Phillipson, has got her feet under the table.

He'd previously said that his role is to carry out the policy of the Secretary of State of the day, but this is a position with which many would disagree. The HMCI's job description mentions 'advising' the Secretary of State, and building highly effective relationships with Ministers, but this doesn't involve being a functionary.

While I may yet be proved wrong by the time this article is published, I suspect that the current HMCI has been canny enough to survive this latest change of government...



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrian Lyons was one of His Majesty's Inspectors between 2005 and 2021 and now works with MATs, teacher training providers and LAs to support education; find out more at [adrianlyonsconsulting.com](http://adrianlyonsconsulting.com)



# Achievement UNLOCKED

We can bemoan the amount of time students spend playing video games – or, as **Morgan Owen** points out, we can embrace the lessons they have to impart around storytelling...

**B**y the time a gamer has won the final boss battle and saved the world from ruin, they'll have been on a long narrative journey. They'll have made friends and foes, experienced victory and defeat. The player is embedded in the story – not just as a passive spectator, but as an active protagonist.

In an era of shortening attention spans, ever more digital distractions and a growing list of reasons as to why we might all occasionally want to escape reality, it's hardly surprising that many young people now prefer gaming to reading.

Games allow us a degree of control in a world that sometimes gives us none. As games become yet more immersive in the future, books may struggle even further. Yet fighting against this is futile, when there's a better option – *embrace it*. Because video games are just another form of storytelling. The key difference is that in games, readers are being invited to take part in the action.

## Fluid masterpieces

The majority of games take place in fantasy worlds, complete with casts of characters and plots that gradually unfold through dialogue and dramatic cutscenes, while also leaving some room for personalisation.

Whether the ending is a happy one or not will often be down to the player's efforts. There's typically going to be a story arc that's destined to

be resolved, but those small, player-driven differences help make the story fresh, vivid and exciting to uncover.

Where a good book is an immovable piece of art, a good game is a fluid masterpiece. Ever since the

human nature – themes made all the more impactful because the player is involved. They are present and consequential.

A game's writers and designers will lead the player on a journey of discovery, but it's really a collaborative

**“Everything that makes for a good story also tends to be present in the most widely admired games”**

days of Choose Your Own Adventure books, readers have enjoyed 'interactive stories' built around multiple paths and endings. Games create a unique experience by combining multiple plotlines with audience participation, which is what makes gaming such a compelling activity.

## Collaborative works

Everything that makes for a good story also tends to be present in the most widely admired games. Modern titles can be vast in scope and complex in their construction, boasting subplots, distinct acts and arcs. They will have foreshadowing and plot twists. There are many gamers who will have wept at the death of a non-player character (NPC) or raged at the injustice of a villain's wrath.

The stories in some games can touch on poignant or powerful themes, such as tyranny, environmental destruction or the duality of

work. Those making the game rely on the player to be curious, ask questions and explore in order to fully experience the story as conceived. This complexity of choice only adds to the overall immersive effect.

## Characters and world-building

Games are also a great tool for teaching students about character development, dialogue and world-building. Most role-playing games have a character creation tool that lets players create their own box-fresh pixel person. In *The Sims 4*, players choose their character's appearance and clothing, but can also assign them certain personality traits, likes, dislikes and aspirations.

Whenever I start a new story, I'll usually recreate the characters I've made for that story in *The Sims*. This serves as a useful visual reference, but can also be a way of exploring their personalities. By hitting

'play' and letting them flex their Sim free will, I'm allowing for developments that might help make them feel like a full person, complete with flaws and idiosyncrasies.

Another fun task is to decorate a Sim's virtual room as a character would – choosing specific items to represent them and imagining how they'd spend their free time. This activity can be used for world-building too – *what does your own bedroom say about your reality?*

The room of someone living in a dystopian society will be very different to that of someone living in a fairytale kingdom. You could then build out from that initial room to create a house, a street or even a whole town. By building a fictional city brick by click, you can come to a better understanding of how it might actually work, stepping directly into your own story's setting.

## Possibility spaces

Games like those in Nintendo's long-running *Legend of Zelda* series are Tolkienesque in their world-building scope, crammed full of unique trades, objects, creatures, locations, philosophies, mythologies and centuries of accumulated lore.

Even a nominal first-person combat

game like *Bioshock* can draw on a rich heritage of storytelling to support its gameplay. Peeking at the inventory of items a player has gathered can tell us lots about the world of the game and the player's role within it, since every piece of the puzzle will have been designed to tell a story.

Games ask you to navigate maps, collect treasures, use tools and find creative solutions to problems – but it's the fertile ground they provide for exercising the imagination that's perhaps their most beneficial feature.

Sophisticated open-world

role-playing games like *Skyrim* are so rich with possibilities that they're as good as sitting down with a pen and a sheet of paper and being asked to write a story. Even comparatively 'simple' games like *Animal Crossing* can be a blank canvas upon which to create whatever you like.

### Storytelling gifts

To be clear, nothing can replace the experience of reading a book – but sadly, not everyone enjoys it as an activity. Many reluctant readers struggle with exercising their visual imagination or

concentrating. They may be interested in storytelling, but simply prefer to

explore it in a different medium.

Technology will continue to rapidly advance and change society in ways we can't predict. Audiences are diversifying, with media becoming ever more tailored to the interests of individual viewers and players. Within a few decades, the line between books and games may become blurred. We might one day see a VR edition of *The Hunger Games* that lets readers compete alongside their favourite characters.

Until then, video games can be embraced as a fun and accessible way of nurturing important storytelling skills, because gaming isn't just an interactive story experience – it's a gift to storytelling, not a threat to it.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morgan Owen is an author; her latest book, *The Boy with the Haunted Heart*, is available now (£8.99, Scholastic)



## 5 EXERCISES



- 1** *The Sims 4* base game (without optional add-ons) is available to play on PC for free. Use the character creator to build the protagonist of a story – a character that you've invented. Choose a relevant aspiration and three personality traits from the menu the game provides. Think about how their facial features, walk style, voice, clothes and accessories will express their personality. As an additional task, decorate a bedroom for this character.
- 2** In the game *Animal Crossing*, players can travel to a location called Harv's Island to stage a photo shoot. A tutorial teaches you how to use props, costumes and villagers as extras when setting up a scene. Take three pictures – one to represent the beginning of a story, one for the middle and one for the end. Use these photos like panels in a comic strip to create and illustrate a short visual sequence without using any words.
- 3** Describe the contents of your inventory in a video game you're currently playing. Think about what the objects represent and how they function within the game's universe. Then write a scenario in which your character uses one or more of these items to create a positive change in the world.
- 4** Write an essay about the fictional kingdom of Hyrule, the setting of the *Legend of Zelda* games, as if it were a real place. You don't necessarily need to know the games, since there's plenty of reference information about it to be found online. Summarise its culture, mythology, biology, geography and history, before concluding with a paragraph comparing it to our own world.
- 5** Write a short story with three different endings, depending on the actions taken by your character. For example, what would happen differently if they stayed to fight the villain, ran away from the villain, or attempted to befriend the villain?



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### In this issue:

**SEND and school trips** – 5 steps to ensure your trip is inclusive

**How learning in the natural world** today helps children adapt to the challenges of tomorrow

**Planning a school trip abroad?** Here's 10 things you should know!

**High-quality learning experiences** are within every school's reach, find out more here



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We shouldn't let monolithic absence stats blind us to the often complex and deep-rooted psychological reasons as to why some students don't want to attend school

# Natasha Devon

*"The thing is,"* the mother whispered to me, having sidled up after a parents' talk I'd delivered in her child's school, *"I get it. And that's why I can't argue with her."* We were discussing the fact that her child couldn't see the point of school, and was increasingly refusing to attend.

To be clear, this woman's child didn't fall into the significant cohort of young people who are suffering with untreated symptoms of mental health issues, who are neurodiverse or who find their school experience too overwhelming. That's the problem with the statistics stating that persistent absenteeism is up 117% since COVID. Those million or so young people won't be a monolith, and their reasons for not attending school will be wide-ranging.

However, on my visits to schools (and, indeed, during discussions on my Saturday evening LBC radio show) I'm increasingly being told by young people, teachers and parents that pupils 'just don't see the point'.

## A world on fire

This crisis, then, is at least partly one of ennui. And who can blame them? Young people are growing up in a neoliberal, hyper-individualistic and competitive society where smartphones can – at least ostensibly – give them access to more information than any of the adults in their community. No wonder they feel disconnected.

Furthermore, they're presently participating in an archaic education system that appears to be preparing them for jobs that either don't exist any more, or which won't by the time

they enter the employment market.

And even if they do excel, and end up in a highly paid profession that somehow enables them to move out of their parents' house before the age of 30, the world's still on fire and we're on the brink of World War III, with the very real possibility that millions will die. Any survivors will be engaged in an ongoing conflict for limited resources, in which our GCSE grades won't matter.

If a teenager presented me with those kinds of arguments, I don't think I'd be able to completely dismiss them. So, how *do* we make children and young people more enthusiastic about the prospect of going to school?

## Resource restoration

The first, and most obvious answer is that schools – which have been battered by multiple rounds of austerity since 2010 – need their resources back. That includes everything which makes schools safe (nurses, counsellors, TAs), as well as the stuff that makes them fun and engaging (sport, arts, music).

When speaking with young individuals during my school visits, I'll usually talk about how education gives them choices. They might not see how every single thing they're learning is directly applicable to the life they lead now, or even the one they aspire to later, but having a decent clutch of exams under your belt gives you more choices for the next phase of your life.

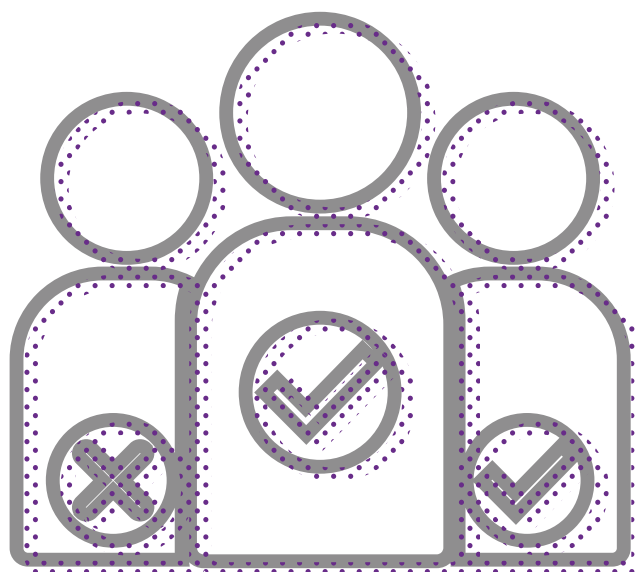
On the day I spoke to that aforementioned parent, though, a different line of argument occurred to me: *"Tell them that this is what they're doing, right now. Either way, they're going to have to get through it, so they should try and get as much value from it as they can."*

## Vital perspective

This is how I persuade myself to do stuff that I find tedious – finances, miscellaneous admin, cleaning my bathroom, spending time with friends who moan endlessly about things that don't matter. We all have to engage in activities we don't enjoy.

I often think of a line from *Bridget Jones' Diary*, in which our protagonist paraphrases a Buddhist sentiment she once read, which says that 'The joy and purpose to be gained from chores was not that you were getting the washing up done, but simply that *you are doing* the washing up.'

This is, of course, a form of mindfulness. And in a world where we're being constantly distracted, acting like lab rats chasing little dopamine rewards with no sense of perspective or purpose, I suspect that '*This is what you're doing, right now*' is something that young people really need to hear.



Natasha Devon is a writer, broadcaster and campaigner on issues relating to education and mental health; to find out more, visit [natashadevon.com](http://natashadevon.com) or follow @NatashaDevon



## ASK THE EXPERT

# “A concrete measure of progress”

Emma Smith, Assistant Headteacher at Fullhurst Community College in Leicester, shares her experience of taking part in a standardisation trial for new KS3 Maths and Reading assessments

### What attracted you to being part of a standardisation trial for these new tests?

We'd known for some time that we'd like to use standardised tests on our KS3 cohort, so when the opportunity arose to become one of the schools whose data is used to create measures such as standardised scores and reading ages, we jumped at the chance. It's great that the tests were available as printed papers or online and auto-marked, and the data we got back has helped us track progress and plan interventions.

### What is a standardisation trial?

Trials are how test publishers gather all the data that will sit behind these new KS3 tests. Our students sat all of the papers, along with thousands of others, to ensure a nationally representative sample of schools. The process is really rigorous, with statisticians analysing all the test data to produce measures that every school can rely on.

### What are the key benefits of using standardised tests, in your view?

At KS3, there's very little comparative data out there, so it can be really difficult to know how your students are performing in comparison to others nationally. The Access Reading Tests and Access Mathematics Tests are super flexible, so can give you standardised scores, age-standardised scores, reading and maths ages, and other progress measures too, at any time of year. Also, we can identify gaps by topic and strand to plan our teaching, and then test again whenever we need to and have a clear and concrete measure of progress made.



### EXPERT PROFILE

**NAME:**  
EMMA SMITH

**JOB TITLE:**  
Assistant headteacher

**AREA OF EXPERTISE:**  
Applying standardised assessments in the classroom

**BEST PART OF MY JOB:**  
Helping students progress their Maths and Reading skills as they move through KS3

### How will you use the tests in practice?

They're really versatile. The new tests can be used from the very beginning of Year 7, and then again at the end of the term or year to baseline, identify gaps in learning and track progress. The same goes for Year 8 and Year 9. And because they test underlying skills in maths and reading, rather than a specific curriculum, we will also use them for new students joining throughout the school year, to get a sense of their attainment level. Our SEN department will use them flexibly, too - they're not designed for a specific year group, so older students can sit papers that would often be used in younger years, to ensure they can access the content.

### How do you feel the tests help you most?

The icing on the cake for us is that they come with an interventions package called Shine. It's optional, but we will subscribe to it because it enables us to see exactly where gaps in learning are, and then click through to targeted learning materials for specific areas. These are super easy to use, so our TAs will pick them up, as well as some being used in full class settings where there are common gaps in knowledge.

## ASK ME ABOUT

- **STANDARDISED TESTS** - using national data to understand progress and plan interventions
- **PROGRESS TRACKING** - using enhanced reporting, to easily see how the standardised measures we provide show progress
- **INTERVENTIONS** - tailored content for each student that addresses gaps in knowledge and is easy for all staff to pick up and use



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# THE TS GUIDE TO... ASSESSMENT

This issue, we look at how schools can weigh up the valuable insights and feedback they get from assessment, with the levels of time and effort needed to make it work as it should

## IN THIS SECTION

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Is it possible to assess students too often - and if so, how can you tell where the limit should be?

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Mock exams are a standard part of every school's GCSE preparations - but the closer you can get to simulating the real thing, the better, writes Ama Dickson....



## IN FIGURES: HOW DO TEACHERS FEEL ABOUT THE TIME THEY SPEND ON ASSESSMENT TASKS?

**56%**

of teachers believe they spend too much time on recording, monitoring and analysing data relating to pupil performance

**46%**

of teachers feel that they spend too much time on marking pupils' work; 43% feel the amount of time they dedicate to the task is 'about right'

**63%**

of senior leaders feel they spend about the right amount of time on data analysis tasks; 30% feel they spend too much

Source: 'Working lives of teachers and leaders 2023' survey carried out by the DfE

### ACCESS READING TESTS / ACCESS MATHEMATICS TESTS

Access Reading Tests (ART) and Access Mathematics Tests (AMT) are new standardised assessments from Hodder Education. Both assessments empower teachers to quickly and accurately benchmark and track student progress in KS3 maths and reading with parallel tests, enhanced reporting and optional intervention software.

The assessments are incredibly flexible, and can be used at either end of interventions that span an academic year, a school term or other intense period of learning. Each set of parallel tests becomes increasingly demanding, matching the content students are expected to know in their respective school years. AMT and ART gather the data you need to target your teaching, understand your students, reduce your workload burden and improve learning outcomes.

For more information, visit [hoddereducation.com/assessment](https://www.hoddereducation.com/assessment)



# What's your data TELLING YOU?

**Kit Betts-Masters** explains how the stories told by your assessment data can lead to constructive learning conversations with your students

**D**elivering training to trainees and ECTs never fails to rekindle the enthusiasm I have for teaching – even for some of the more mechanical things we do in school.

If you're not all that interested in data, feel free to... keep reading. Because really, you *should* care about the power that today's cutting edge analytical tools now afford us.

## Not complex, but valid

During a session on assessment I led recently, the trainees and ECTs in attendance loved the idea of using data to inform their learning conversations with individual students, in ways that could tell the story of each kid's progress, and provide them with a detailed understanding of exactly what's going on in their classes.

We began by dispelling the myth that data needs to be complex, while driving home the point that the assessment itself needs to be right for the data to be valid.

Sometimes, data can be as simple as the feeling you have for how well a class has grasped a particular topic. This could come from in-class questioning, mini quizzes, exit tickets – it's what you do with said data that counts.

My attendees came up with examples of how they were already using formative assessment in their classes:

- If a class is struggling with a couple of calculations, perform a quick bit of 'live marking' using your visualiser and set them a few more examples.
- If they've 'got' what you're teaching but aren't yet secure, make a note to recap it next lesson and then schedule in a quick

quiz next month

- If their answers lack detail, teach them how to mark each other so that they know what examiners will be looking for.

This model of implementing actions based on data also applies to summative assessment – and perhaps to whole school, or even whole trust exams.

Once the data has been collected and the databases have been populated, (which even at this early stage will already involve considerable effort), what you do next will be crucial.

## Progress 8

Progress 8 can still seem somewhat mystifying to many teachers working at the coalface, though in my experience, new teachers are keen to know more about it.

Put simply, it's a massive national data collection and analysis process, based on students' progress – that being a measure of the difference between the grade each individual student receives, and what those students with similar KS2 results received nationally.

For example – a student attains a grade 7 in GCSE geography. Their KS2 scores were above average – let's say 110 – in both English and maths. Around the country, students also scoring 110 at KS2 received, on average, a GCSE grade of 6. This student would have a progress score of +1.

This measure might not seem all that obvious at first, but the practice of comparing

individual grades to national averages soon becomes second nature. See for yourself – what progress score would a student with that same 110 KS2 score get if they received a grade 5?\*

The overall progress 8 score assigned to each student is then calculated from an average of – wait for it – 10 progress scores...

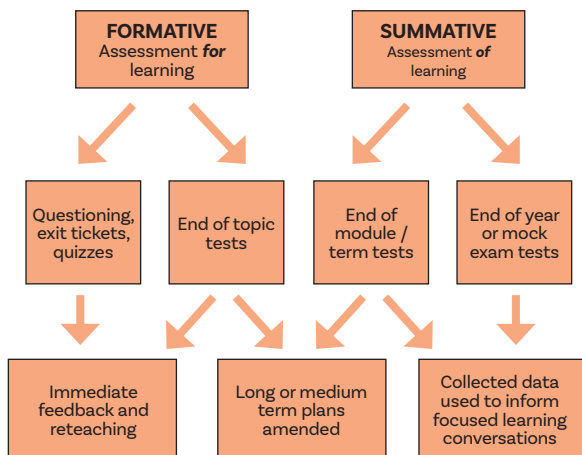
## Graded subjects

Hold on, why not 8 progress scores? Well, you have to



## FORMATIVE VERSUS SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The differences between them, and what you can do with the data from each...



make up a group of 8 subjects for each student. 3 of these are in the ‘open bucket’, which can be any GCSE or accredited equivalent. A further three then make up the ‘EBacc bucket’, which can only comprise subjects included in the English Baccalaureate (namely the sciences, humanities and languages).

Finally, you must include the best English result and the maths GCSE result, making a total of 8 *subjects*, but 10 *grades*, since English and maths count as double.

Take all the individual progress 8 scores across Y11, average them and you have the progress 8 score for your school. As I tell my teacher learners, this overall progress 8 score is arguably the single most important indicator of the quality of education at a

given school, and perhaps the number that SLT are most

likely to lose sleep over...

When discussing this with trainee teachers, it doesn’t take them long to realise that if their classes return a grade better than average, it can have a huge impact on their school’s overall performance.

This is why rich databases of assessment scores like SISRA exist, and it’s why SLTs are so keen for their staff to identify and focus on key groups of students within their classes or subject areas.

### Data-driven teaching

Being a data-driven teacher is a great way to stand out and further your career.

Indeed, I hope that my own training has helped to empower new teachers to be more analytical and better placed to use the rich data at their disposal.

In one recent exercise, we examined data from some of my own classes, focusing on two key indicators – the *residual grade* and the *subject progress index* (SPI), both of which can be extremely powerful when embarking on impactful learning conversations with students.

The SPI is the closest that third-party databases get to being Progress 8 equivalents,

challenges that you can play a part in addressing.

### Irrefutable evidence

In one of my classes, two students were underperforming against national averages in my subject, but doing fine in their other subjects.

These were students I needed to do something about, and I was happy to admit responsibility for failing to adequately engage them. I have since had those conversations to find out what I can do next to help them, and believe it’s worth modelling this practice to junior teachers.

Data tells stories. Personally, I enjoy the process of analysing my own performance, and using insights from those stories to modify and hopefully improve my practice.

Those assessment scores – be it Progress 8, SPI, residual grades – are all irrefutable pieces of evidence that attest to the quality of the learning taking place in your classroom. When you achieve above average Progress 8 scores for your class, it’s something to be proud of.

You need to understand what the data returned by your groups is telling you. You should be able to see progress over time and fully account for your students’ grades. Those numbers you see in the spreadsheets? Each one represents a genuine improvement in the life opportunities of real people. We’re all in it together, and everyone counts.

**“The Progress 8 score is arguably the single most important indicator of the quality of education at a given school”**

being a measure of your students’ GCSE performance against their peers across the rest of the country. If it’s negative, that means they’re underperforming, given their ability.

The residual score, on the other hand, tells you how well a student is doing against themselves in other subjects. Some of my current Y10s, for example, are underperforming against their peers nationally (low SPI), but doing better in my subject than in other subjects at our school.

That’s good from my perspective, as the causes of their underperformance probably stem from wider issues that I have less agency over. The students can, however, be praised and encouraged – “*Well done in physics – if you can do it here, you can also do it in maths and English too!*”

Keeping both of these scores in mind can give you insights into both the performance of your students, and broader



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kit Betts-Masters is a lead practitioner for science and produces physics, education and technology videos for YouTube under the username @KitBetts-Masters. For more information, visit [evaluateeverything.co.uk](http://evaluateeverything.co.uk)

# 4 REASONS TO BRING CLASSES TO Future Makers

Why you should bring your students to this annual schools music concert at the Royal Albert Hall – that's here to inspire the next generation of music makers

**1 INSPIRE YOUR PUPILS**  
Following auditions, acts in Y10 to Y13 will perform their own original music on the main stage of the Royal Albert Hall, with the chance to win a year of tailored support from music industry partners.

**2 TEACHER RESOURCES**  
The concert will be supported by a specially produced resource pack intended to help your pupils create their own music.

**3 ARTS ACCESS**  
Student spectator tickets for the Future Makers event are priced at £3 each, making it affordable to bring along music



classes who might not yet have experienced the wonder of live music for themselves

**4 EXPERIENCE THE HALL**  
Future Makers takes place in the Royal Albert Hall's iconic auditorium, in which a multitude of world-renowned musicians have previously performed.

## At a glance

- + Future Makers is an annual schools concert held at the Royal Albert Hall
- + A teacher resource pack is available to bring the joy of music making into classrooms
- + Tickets are priced at £3 per student (in At a Glance and Arts Access)



**Contact:**  
Book your tickets at [royalalberthall.com](http://royalalberthall.com), or email [engagement@royalalberthall.com](mailto:engagement@royalalberthall.com) for more details

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Centre for Evaluation & Monitoring

## Not all assessment data is equal

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The high-quality baseline assessment data from Cambridge CEM provides schools with the insight to help their students succeed. Cambridge CEM's assessments give the most accurate benchmark of student potential.

[www.cem.org](http://www.cem.org)

# How much is too much?

With assessment demands often figuring high in teachers' complaints regarding workload, exactly how much assessment is too much? **Al Kinglsey** offers his thoughts...

**I**s there such a thing as too much student assessment – and if so, how can you tell where the limit should be?

Assessment will continue to be a crucial pillar of the education system, since being able to measure, track and benchmark what and how well students are learning is vital for ensuring they're getting the most from their education.

That said, however, the annual gauntlet of exams, and the extent to which they influence a young person's education pathway, should prompt us to reflect on whether we're currently getting the balance right when it comes to assessment.

## Lost amid the noise

Assessment's dual role as both a gateway to the next stage of student's educational journey and a means of gauging a school's performance has become so dominant that its core purpose – *assessing how well students have been learning* – can get lost amid the noise.

In December 2023, the House of Lords Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee published a report that reflected on the current system of KS4 assessment (see [bit.ly/ts136-AK1](https://bit.ly/ts136-AK1)). This included the finding that GCSE students are taking up to 30 hours of examinations, alongside testimonies from both students and teachers that the existing assessment system has given rise to increased workloads and heightened stress levels.

As well as expressing concerns regarding the subsequent impact of this on

the wellbeing of students and staff alike, the report's authors suggested that the existing system places 'undue emphasis' on exam preparation, with as much as one-sixth of the potential learning time in Y10-Y11 being spent on elements such as teaching exam rubrics and exam technique.

Based on this evidence, it would seem the structure of the current assessment system is causing valuable teaching time and resources to be concentrated on teaching students how to pass exams, rather than enhancing their subject knowledge and skills in more meaningful ways. Teachers have reported having to cut short discussions of topics students find interesting in favour of covering exam content, thus leaving less time for fostering students' natural curiosity and encouraging their enjoyment of learning.

## Just a snapshot

There's an age-old argument that says sitting final examinations at the end of the school year or Key Stage cycle can be unfair, amounting to just a snapshot of a student's performance on one arbitrary day. Yet this position is perhaps more relevant than ever, given the changing circumstances of the modern world, and growing recognition of the need to support the development of the whole child.

If we want to genuinely empower all young people and see them flourish, then we must guarantee that the education system – and by extension, our assessments – reflect the new realities of the world, prioritise student wellbeing and accommodate

student's individual needs and strengths.

We should ensure that students are being provided with skills that the current system of assessment isn't so adept at measuring – such as critical thinking and creativity, which will undoubtedly grow in importance as technology plays an ever-greater role in shaping our world.

## An holistic overview

The harnessing of technology in and of itself may actually provide a solution to the overburdening of teachers – by automatically logging a student's learning journey, for example, thus helping teachers evaluate their progress and arrive at an holistic overview, without the need for extra formal assessments.

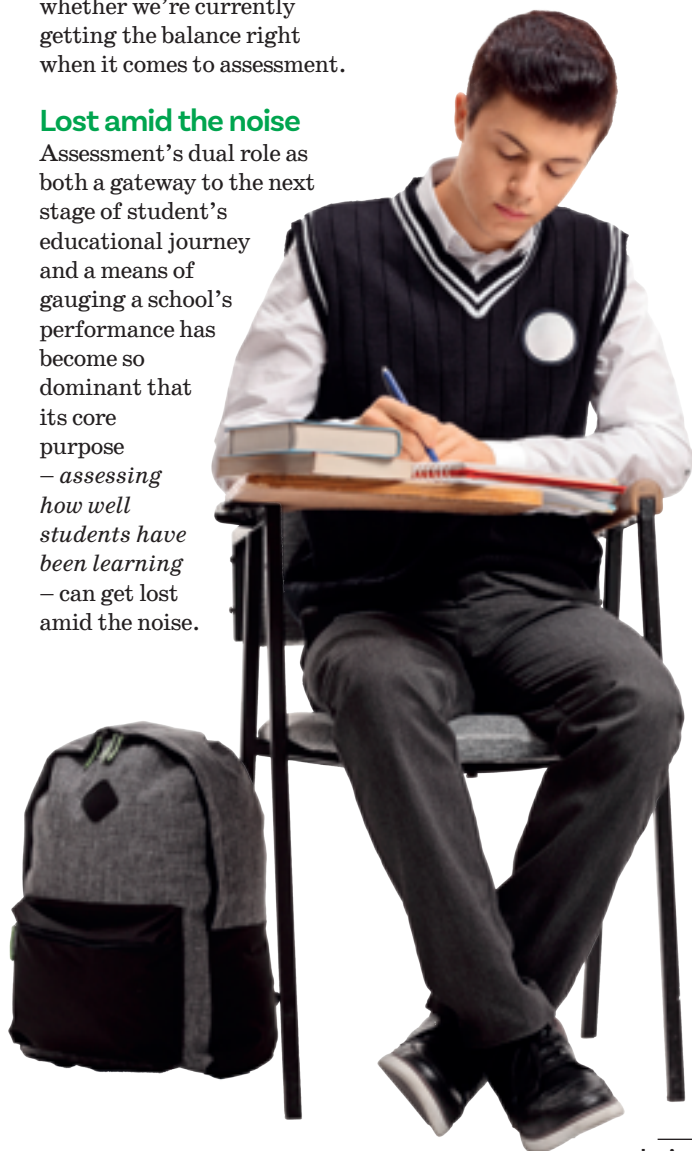
This would allow for a much more flexible approach to assessment, potentially resulting in a more accurate understanding of student progress, while letting teachers respond to struggling students with additional support based on their learning needs.

As educators, our goal is to prepare learners to enter the world as confident, curious and competent young adults, capable of rising to any challenge. Overloading them with a treadmill of examinations risks jeopardising that goal.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Al Kinglsey is a multi academy trust chair and CEO of NetSupport; for more details, visit [netsupportsoftware.com](https://netsupportsoftware.com)



# “Just like we rehearsed...”

Mock exams are a standard part of every school’s GCSE preparations – but the closer you can get to simulating the real thing, the better, writes **Ama Dickson**...

**O**n the day that GCSE exams take place, it’s down to the students to showcase everything they’ve prepared for, up until that moment. Sitting in the exam hall, there’s no other time besides now in which to perform as best as they possibly can, if they wish to achieve that grade they’ll have often worked so hard for.

Teachers and support staff no longer have any role to play at this point (bar invigilating). After completing all of those past papers, and after all the walkthroughs they’ll have practised and completed, it all comes down to this one moment in time.

## That big moment

That said, given how the vast majority of school students will be sitting papers for multiple courses over exams season, it’s not so much that there will be just *one* moment they’re reliant on, but many, across all of the subjects they’ve studied – decisive moments in which they’ll need to showcase their grasp of knowledge before applying it as accurately as they can.

It’s therefore perhaps best to see GCSE exams – from the students’ perspective, at least – as a process of putting on a range of distinct performances. Each 90-minute or 2-hour period students are given to complete their exam paper is akin to a make-or-break moment.

In the same way that actors

will carefully prepare and rehearse for that big moment when the curtain goes up, sensibly scheduled and rigorous exam rehearsals will afford students important

and overwhelming they can be. Maintaining focus in such large environments can be difficult enough as it is, and the high stakes involved don’t exactly help.

**“Students will want any external factors that could affect their performance to be accounted for and controlled”**

opportunities for practising and perfecting the skills that will be required of them in the exam hall, and therefore hopefully help them avoid any unpleasant surprises on the day.

## Stress responses

Needless to say, exams can be an incredibly stressful time. It’s not easy to go from sitting in a class of around 30 of your peers, to sitting in a large exam hall with up to 150 students, or even more.

Once the exam itself is underway, the invigilators will typically pace up and down the silent exam room, occasionally stopping for breaks. They’ll be trying to move as quietly as possible, so as not to disturb the other exam entrants, but their presence can’t help but feel unfamiliar, strange and perhaps even intimidating.

Past papers aside, might it therefore be worth holding one or more full exam rehearsals in the final run-up to the big day(s)? The environment of an exam hall can easily provoke stress responses, given how large

Rehearsing the time that students will be spending in such environments can help them become more familiar with how things will be on the day, which could be of huge benefit. When it matters most, virtually all students will want any external factors that could affect their performance to be accounted for and controlled. Most will agree, however, that it’s the amount of study and revision they’ve done that will likely do most to determine how well they perform, beyond anything else.

## Time management

Full exam rehearsals can be valuable for the insights they provide students with regards to their timekeeping. An individual’s grasp of time management (or lack thereof) can, and will directly affect their overall

grades and outcomes. They might not have been able to attempt all the questions, or cover all the points in their written response that they otherwise would have done, simply due to running out of time.

Teachers will, of course, thoroughly walk their students through a number past exam papers beforehand, and usually provide exemplar responses during revision lessons – but advice specifically relating to the skills of *timing* that students will have to pull off





can sometimes be overlooked.

Through rigorous practice and rehearsal, students can learn how to better manage their time 'in situ', and thus become more informed as to precisely how much time they'll need to allocate to each section of the paper.

Teachers can certainly offer some helpful input, but every exam is ultimately a solitary and individual experience. Timing strategies that work well for one student might not be ideally suited to the next.

When carried out in tandem with regular completion of past papers, exam rehearsals can get students fully accustomed to the structure and format of GCSE exams. Completing past papers will help students learn how questions are typically worded, the types of instruction given and how exam papers are laid out, but it's in the 'doing' that students will become properly aware of their *own*

exam techniques, and how these can be refined to improve their performance.

What's the best way of approaching multiple choice questions? How should their essay response be planned and structured? Should they use diagrams or graphs in their answers, and if so, how?

It's also important to remember that presentation matters. Repeated practice will help students improve the quality of their handwriting under timed conditions, and hopefully ensure that they can write quickly, yet legibly.

### Close simulation

Exam rehearsals provide students with opportunities to assess what they do, and more importantly *don't* know. The close simulation of exam conditions can expose hitherto unnoticed strengths and weaknesses, help to highlight any areas needing rapid improvement and give

students a reliable way of targeting knowledge gaps.

From the teacher's point of view, exam rehearsals can shed useful light on areas of need within different classes, streamline the process of choosing what to cover in revision lessons, and flag up those parts of the paper where students are gaining and losing the most marks.

Rehearsals will be used to ensure that a theatrical production proceeds seamlessly, by identifying the potential for errors and reducing the likelihood of them occurring on the night. Just the very act of rehearsing itself can help to reduce performers' anxiety, and open up the possibility of making adjustments in response to constructive feedback.

Mock GCSEs may already occupy a spot on virtually every school's academic calendar, but the extent to which a school's mock exams emulate the real thing can and should be explored further. It could be helpful for mock exams to be held more frequently, entail

lower stakes and play more of an active role in reducing students' anxiety.

Because what this is ultimately all about is ensuring that students are both mentally and physically prepared to perform at their very best during their final exams.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ama Dickson is a maths teacher and contributor to Collins' series of maths revision guides; she also regularly posts maths instruction videos to TikTok as @mathscrunch

## INCLUDE EVERYONE

Another benefit of exam rehearsals is how they let students with additional needs familiarise themselves with different adjustments and find out what works for them. Some examples include...

► **Extended time** – Some students may require extended time for SEND- or SEMH-related reasons. Exam rehearsals can help to identify students who might be eligible for such support, and then give them a chance to practice managing the increased amount of time they'll have.

► **Supervised breaks** – Exam rehearsals can help to show students how any breaks they might be entitled to can be best utilised. It could be time spent stretching, using the bathroom or simply closing their eyes. Rehearsals allow for the trialling of different ideas to see what works.

► **Exam aids** – Enlarged exam papers, magnifiers, coloured overlays and prompters are some examples of the aids that certain students may be entitled to use during exams. Exam rehearsals can show students how and when to use such aids in the most efficient and effective way possible.

► **Supportive devices** – The use of a typing accessory, dictionary or other communication aid can be practiced as part of exam rehearsals to build confidence in its use before the final event of an exam.



# FINDING THE FIRE

**Karen Wilson** explores how teachers can help learners with SEND retain and further develop their love of reading during the primary to secondary transition

**L**ove books, but hate reading? That was certainly the case for my daughter. Having always enjoyed reading myself, this apparent contradiction was an intriguing, and somewhat alien one.

Reflecting on my years in the classroom, I wondered how many other children I'd encountered who appeared disengaged with the act of reading, but actually harboured a secret love of books. How could two such seemingly polarised views be held at once? Why would my daughter – who otherwise devours stories, dissects plotlines and holds characters dear – find reading itself so unenjoyable?

For her, as for many young people, the barriers to reading can be complex, varied, and easy to overlook in a busy classroom or home. As a summer-born baby, later followed by the disruptions of COVID, we had every reason to believe that reading for her would just take some time to 'click.'

She was achieving well in other curriculum areas, she was articulate and enjoyed learning. Yet as we neared the end of KS2, it soon became apparent that she saw picking up a book and enjoying reading for pleasure as simply not part of her world.

## Exhausting and frustrating

There was no official diagnosis, though we did have our suspicions. Ongoing difficulties with spelling and a family history of dyslexia pointed to a likely area of need. She also found

single-channel focus challenging, which made silent reading frustrating for her.

Even when listening to a bedtime story, she would often require a fiddle toy, or need to do some mindful colouring before being able to focus and relax.

As a teacher, I thought about the way I approached my silent reading and class story sessions at school, and wondered how many of my pupils might benefit from similar forms of sensory input. Cognitive barriers – like dyslexia, memory issues,

impressive, really!

She found the intense focus needed to complete a reading test or extended task so exhausting that she would come home drained and emotional. All of which did little to encourage her enjoyment of reading – yet we persevered.

## Lighting the spark

We took a collaborative approach to addressing her barriers. An optician prescribed reading glasses and a coloured overlay ruler to reduce visual stress. We found decodable adventure

**“Would those barriers to my daughter’s reading remain in place as she entered KS3?”**

ADHD and physical/visual impairments – as well as psychological barriers, such as low self-esteem and stress, can all significantly impact upon a child’s engagement with, and enjoyment of reading.

Regardless of any clearly labelled needs in our case, though, the most important thing to understand was what reading was actually like for my daughter. Why was picking up a book the last thing she wanted to do?

As she matured through primary school, she would articulate that reading felt exhausting and frustrating. She admitted pretending to read during silent reading sessions, and avoided reading aloud in class.

In reading tests, she would deploy her own carefully developed strategies to work out the answers without actually reading the full text – which seemed quite

books with clear progression, starting at lower levels, to build her confidence. Her school introduced paired reading strategies, which we implemented at home with positive results.

We let her lead, reading more on some days and less on others. Her subsequent role as a 'reading ambassador' for her school boosted her self-esteem, through the support she gave to younger readers.

One notable turning point occurred when a local author, Sophie Cleverly, visited her school. My daughter is a natural problem solver, and these mystery books with a hint of thriller captured her interest.

A spark was lit, and real enjoyment began. She wanted to read on after each chapter and even started to sneak books out at night to find out what happened next.

## An engaging lure

Thinking again about my past pupils, I wondered what different approaches might have worked for them. Which books would have suited their personalities and interests? Would giving them easy access to coloured overlays, reading rulers or books with dyslexia-friendly fonts have helped?

I'm certain that for the older Y6 learners, accessible novels covering more mature topics would have helped to boost their self-esteem while capturing their interest. In hindsight, graphic novels – which were frowned upon by some colleagues – could, and perhaps should have been afforded more prestige in classroom reading areas, where they might have been an engaging lure for reluctant or struggling readers.

In our case, at least, we had finally found the fire – or at least a definite bright spark – needed to ignite a love of reading. But as the transition to secondary school loomed, we faced some uncertainty as to how this journey with reading might continue.

Would those barriers to my daughter's reading remain in place as she entered KS3? Would her secondary school be able to recognise and support her needs? Could they continue to feed the fire, or would these burning embers slowly smoulder and fade away?

### New opportunities

The move to secondary school brought additional challenges as she navigated peer pressure, teenage hormones, technology-driven distractions, social media, and perhaps most significantly, the shift to having multiple teachers rather than just one – some of whom would only see her once a week. We wondered if

and how they might be able to know and support her in the same way.

Fortunately, the secondary school she attends has a strong reading culture that actually opened up new opportunities for her. Her transition visits from primary school included multiple trips to the library, sending a clear message that this particular secondary school valued reading. She was even able to spot books by her favourite author on display, and was excited to find that their latest title was already there.

The school's amazing librarian prides himself on learning all 250 of the new Y7s' names within the first few weeks of term. He also gets to know pupils' interests and likes, and will enthusiastically recommend books in between organising weekly Y7 library lessons, student book clubs, author visits and regular book fairs. These events remain open to all, with attendance eagerly encouraged.

### Productive partnerships

Interventions and support for pupils with SEND are carefully woven into the timetable, ensuring that space is given to additional reading skills and seeing to it that students can access the curriculum to the best of their ability. Technology is carefully used to enhance and support pupils' learning, with regular assessments to track and monitor progress over time. Parental involvement is also encouraged through workshops, parents evenings and celebratory events.

Productive partnerships between primary and secondary schools are hugely important for ensuring a continuity of reading progress for students with SEND during the transition period. Primary schools will know their pupils incredibly well, giving secondary schools a rich depth of knowledge that they can and should draw upon.

Repeat visits and regular



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dialogue with students and their primary schools, dedicated transition booklets and joint reading projects can all help to give your younger students the best possible start to their secondary reading journey.

Learning from the strengths each phase can offer, close collaboration and positive reading cultures can help to smooth the process of transition for everyone, but especially those with additional needs.

My daughter will always face challenges, but the springboard that primary schools can provide, combined with the wealth of opportunities and experiences that a good secondary setting can offer, may just be the perfect combination for starting a reading fire that burns bold and bright.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Wilson is an experienced SENCo, SEND lead worker, deputy manager and class teacher, currently developing support for learners with EAL and SEND within Across Cultures and the Learning Village; for more information about Across Cultures, visit [axcultures.com](https://axcultures.com)

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understanding of fractions, you know to spend more time and resource teaching skills related to fractions.

### 4 SAVE TIME WITH TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

Once your cohort has taken AMT, you can access Shine Interventions (available to purchase as an additional add-on) for targeted interventions specific to a student's identified area of struggle.

Using the enhanced reporting tool, simply click on the student's profile and the software will present you with the relevant learning sequences and activities, which can be implemented in a group or one-to-one setting, and be accessed by TAs and other support staff. Our leading maths pedagogy experts – researchers and former teachers – have

authored learning sequences that tell you exactly what is needed for individual students to progress.

### 5 IDENTIFY STUDENTS NEEDING EXTRA SUPPORT

The assessments can also be used to help identify learners who might need additional interventions, such as students with SEN. You will be able to co-ordinate with your SEN team and TAs to ensure that SEN students receive tailored support and better learning experiences.

The parallel forms will then empower you to track the impact of these interventions. What's more, if you're using Shine Interventions, your chosen interventions can be delivered by TAs, SENCOs and other support staff.

## Key Points

All standardised data informing Access Mathematics Tests was gathered from 15,000 test submissions, from a representative UK sample in the 2023/24 academic year.

Access enhanced reporting features – enabling you to view cohorts at individual, class or group level – to inform your lesson plans and intervention strategies.

Three sets of age-appropriate parallel forms let you track the progress and impact of interventions as learners move between school years.

The assessment takes 30-45 minutes to complete and can be administered in one lesson. Extra time can be added for students who will benefit from it.

# Time for action

We hear what one teacher training provider is doing to tackle some of the most urgent issues behind the continuing teacher recruitment crisis

**T**he challenges surrounding teacher recruitment and retention remain a frequent topic of debate across the profession. According to the DfE's 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (see [bit.ly/ts136-ECT1](https://bit.ly/ts136-ECT1)), over 20% of new teachers leave within two years, and 33% within the first five.

The DfE's efforts at revamping its induction processes – which included re-accrediting initial teacher training providers, and introducing a new three-year Early Career Framework induction period – were still in their infancy when Rishi Sunak called the 2024 General Election.

ill-equipped to deal with the wide-ranging needs of the learners in their care.

Despite some generous tax-free DfE bursaries for certain 'shortage subjects', all secondary subjects bar three under-recruited in 2023/24. Physics achieved just 17% of its target – despite boasting a £28,000 bursary – while business studies (with no attached bursary at all) achieving only 16% of the target set.

As a school-centred initial teacher training provider located the heart of Milton Keynes, we're seeking to tackle the crisis through a variety of initiatives (with the fact that 92% of our trainees remain in the profession beyond five years

surprising, considering that English recruitment for 2023/24 was around a quarter below target. Consequently, we've gone from having a strong cohort of English trainees in 2023/24 to being unable to recruit a single English trainee for this academic year.

## Expertise and training

To combat this crisis, we've taken the decision to offer £3,000 bursaries ourselves for all non-bursary subjects throughout the 2025/26 recruitment cycle. This will provide

**“Many trainees have had to hold down part-time jobs alongside their full-time ITT studies”**

Yet as the National Foundation for Educational Research's 'Teacher Labour Market Annual Report' points out, secondary ITT recruitment across 2023/24 saw the DfE reach only half of its targets, with leaving rates having returned to pre-pandemic levels (see [bit.ly/ts136-ECT2](https://bit.ly/ts136-ECT2)).

## Cost of living

Some oft-cited reasons for the ongoing recruitment and retention crisis include unruly behaviour, unmanageable (and growing) workloads, funding shortfalls and rising rates of SEND, with teachers new to the profession feeling

indicating that we're having some success).

Perhaps the most striking recruitment challenge we're seeing is the lack of financial support. Amid the ongoing cost of living crisis it's been increasingly difficult to recruit in PE, history and business, none of which offer any bursary incentives. We're aware of many previous trainees specialising in these subjects who have had to hold down part-time jobs alongside their full-time ITT studies.

At the same time, the 2024/25 recruitment cycle saw the English bursary slashed from £15,000 to £10,000 – which seems



## SEND AND ITT - A 5-POINT APPROACH

At Tommy Flowers SCITT, trainees are provided with a 5-point approach to developing their SEND knowledge and skills. It's a model that's evolved through national research, professional experience and student feedback, building each year on our prior understanding of what worked, and what aspects we need to change.

**Point 1:** In their second week, the cohort is divided into teams tasked with creating research projects around different SEND needs. Their final presentations must include a series of top tips, plus a practical strategy on how to make SEND part of their CPD throughout their career.

**Point 2:** Between weeks 3 and 5, the cohort are allocated research time for their group

presentations, and are required to help create shared leaflets and participate in discussions around classroom strategies. This will involve desk research, as well as speaking to practitioners and parents.

**Point 3:** By week 6, all trainees have presented their research findings to their peers and a SEND expert and received shared feedback for growth. The SEND expert will demonstrate how to manage multiple needs in the classroom, before giving all trainees a mini briefing on 'Working Memory in the Classroom', based on theoretical understanding through metaphors and practical strategies. All trainees then finish their first term with in-depth knowledge of at least 8 to 10 different types of need (e.g. ADHD, anxiety disorder, dyslexia, visual impairment, acquired brain injury, etc.)

**Point 4:** Throughout their placement year, trainees will be encouraged to connect with their school's SENCo and discuss any specifics around the learners in their class and how to meet their needs.

**Point 5:** In the cohort's fifth term, a local SENCo will be invited to talk to the trainees about their role and how, as teachers, they can help to support a school's SENCo and wider SEND processes. This is a comprehensive training process, giving all trainees a rounded approach to SEND while adding to the body of knowledge through interactive dialogue and research. Most of all, it helps to re-shape the mindset of the qualifying teachers so that they actively embrace inclusion as part of their professional standards.

**Anita Devi is a former SENCo, senior leader, school improvement advisor and LA SEND advisory teacher**

incomes of £300 a month across our 10-month training courses, to help support our trainees with everyday expenses such as transport and the purchasing of resources. Though a modest amount, this £3,000 may at least mean that these trainees need no longer secure part-time employment during their training, thus improving their work-life balance and wellbeing.

As a SCITT, we also have access to four flats that we offer out to trainee teachers and ECTs who are new to the area. The flats are provided at reduced rents to give these teachers time to settle into the area and save some money during those early years, when incomes can feel particularly tight.

Another key recruitment and retention challenge is the aforementioned increase in

the number of students with SEND. In light of the many varied and growing needs across the Milton Keynes education landscape, we ensure that trainees undertake an extensive training programme throughout the course on how to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all the learners within their care.

To guarantee that trainees are able to develop into confident ECTs, we'll provide them with access to local expertise and training that spans a diverse array of areas, including adaptive teaching strategies, literacy, ASC and dyslexia. We also work regularly with SEND specialist Anita Devi, who facilitates sessions that prepare our trainees to plan and deliver presentations on specific areas of SEND to their peers.

Moreover, from September 2024 we will be introducing an Adaptive Teaching Intensive Training and Practice week, during which trainees will be able to work with local experts to hone their skills in low stakes settings and environments. Having these opportunities to plan, rehearse and receive feedback on strategies that they've trialled helps to ensure that ECTs can develop the necessary experience to support students with SEND before putting what they've learned into 'live' practice with a real class.

### Constant refinement

As we enter a new academic year, concerns regarding recruitment and retention remain at the top of the agenda for our SCITT. With a new government now in place, it will be interesting to see what incentives they might offer to help deliver Labour's manifesto pledge to recruit 6,500 new teachers. While we wait for those initiatives to be revealed, we remain committed to developing our own incentives via bursaries for any subjects that lack existing government-funded bursaries, our subsidised rental properties for ITTs and ECTs, and enhanced SEND training.

Education is ever-changing, meaning all teacher training providers must step up and embrace these changes. Moving forwards, we recognise that it's vital to regularly reflect on and further refine our programmes, so that they don't remain static but are fit for purpose in the long-term.



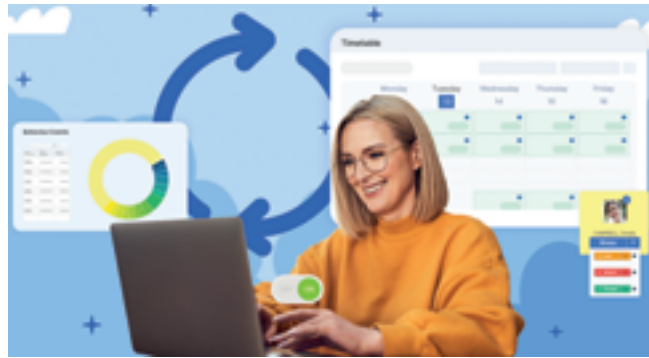
#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Newton is secondary partnership manager at the Tommy Flowers SCITT provider of primary and secondary PGCE and apprenticeship courses

## ASK THE EXPERT

# Tackling the MIS dilemma

If you plan ahead, switching your MIS can be smooth and straightforward, says **Ali Guryel**



- 1 DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE**  
Switching your MIS can be a simple, safe and secure process, but it's important to leave yourself enough time. If you're thinking of putting it off until later in the year, you could find yourself battling for migration slots alongside thousands of other schools, or locked into a contract renewal with a MIS that's not fit for purpose. If your school or MAT is with a MIS provider that isn't meeting your needs, don't suffer in silence. It's better to switch to a solution now that's going to meet your long-term requirements and goals.

- 2 FOCUS ON OUTCOMES FIRST**  
Think carefully about how your current MIS is falling short, and how you want your new system to improve

outcomes. Doing this early gives you more freedom and flexibility when choosing your start date, as well as more control over your MIS rollout. If you have a MIS that can adapt to your unique needs and greatly simplify administrative tasks, the time saved can be put towards initiatives that lead to better educational outcomes.

- 3 EXPLORE PROVIDERS**  
The first stage of the process is to decide on which solutions you want to explore and see in action, while identifying where your current MIS is falling short. This can usually take up to four weeks, and will involve talking to your colleagues – and maybe other schools – as you discover which features are required, before selecting the best MIS for your needs.

- 4 SET A REALISTIC TIMEFRAME**  
Your current provider will require a 12-week notice period, allowing plenty of time to prepare and begin onboarding discussions with your new MIS team. You will need to outline the timeframes involved, any requirements on the part of staff and your plans for managing the attendant risks. This can take, on average, a minimum of 8 weeks for primary schools and up to 12 for secondaries.

## At a glance

- Switching a MIS is simple and safe
- Engage with the right partner
- Give yourself enough time

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# Future-proofed PROTECTION

**Nicola Pearce** explains how building cyber-resilient schools requires a certain level of awareness on the part of staff and students alike

**I**n the current digital landscape, technology has become an integral part of education. With this reliance, however, comes a series of security risks.

Now more than ever, schools are becoming targets of cyber incidents – be it phishing attempts at stealing passwords, or ransomware attacks that encrypt files – with the result that they can't afford to overlook the importance of cyber security.

## Safe digital habits

Cyber threats continue to present increasing challenges, because as technology evolves, so too does the threat risk – meaning that the best time to act is *now*.

That said, cyber security improvements should be a collective staff effort, due to the widespread impacts they can have, rather than just remaining the sole responsibility of IT staff.

Cyber security helps to instil safe digital habits, so while your IT staff does have a crucial role to play in implementing and maintaining technical defences, one of the most reliable ways of mitigating such risks is to provide suitable education and training for *all* users – admin staff, teachers, and students.

## New devices

It pays dividends for schools to employ the latest technologies. For students, getting hands-on experience with devices and software they'll likely use beyond school will ensure that their learning is 'future-proofed',

while for teachers and staff, interactive displays and other such hardware can improve their operational efficiency.

Aside from not providing as many functions, or being as relevant to future workplace applications, older devices are also more likely to create security loopholes that leave schools more vulnerable to external attacks and data leaks, thanks to outdated firmware and apps. All systems must therefore be kept up to date, so as to ensure optimal device performance and data security.

For schools, this is critical. Not only is there likely to be a large number of devices connected to the network, there will also be a range of cases where multiple users are regularly logging in and using the same device – with classroom displays or library laptops, for example – potentially putting students, teachers and staff at risk.

## Protective measures

Secure prevention practices can be implemented to guard against any tampering with, or accessing of assorted settings, user files, and folders. With the aid of secure Account Management System (AMS) and Identity and Access Management (IAM) software, IT administrators can create and manage user accounts by setting unique permissions for individuals or groups, while simultaneously restricting any sections of the network containing sensitive data – such as academic information and

student records – to authorised personnel only.

These, combined with a single sign-on (SSO) authentication method, will enable users to securely access multiple platforms using one set of credentials, while ensuring that only approved users can retrieve sensitive information.

Yet while SSO is an effective method for making logins easier, there can be a danger of some devices using SSO less securely. Interactive displays that allow for SSO via Google and Facebook accounts, for example, can result in students being able to sign in using their own personal accounts, and from there, obtaining access to the wider internet.

## An inevitable challenge

The same goes for when devices are left unattended and unlocked. It's possible for individuals to take advantage of this, and access private data on a device while a user account is still logged in. Some AMS and IAM systems allow administrators to prevent this by remotely configuring an 'idle session logout time', so that if a teacher ever forgets to log out of their device, the AMS or IAM will log the user out of their account automatically after a certain period of time.

Above all, to allay any security concerns, manufacturers and software

developers must be able to provide relevant details of how their 'smart' products comply with all minimum-security requirements and obligations.

The periodic introduction of new technology is something all schools will now inevitably need to manage for the foreseeable future. As such, cyber security education will remain a necessity for protecting against the numerous online threats and risks that staff and students will surely encounter.

However, through appropriate implementation of robust security measures – such as account management systems, multi-factor authentication and regular over-the-air security updates – everyone within your school can collectively minimise those risks and help to create a safer learning environment.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**  
Nicola Pearce is head of education at BenQ



# A critical MISSION

Your students are more interested in the news than any generation before them – but how are they supposed to know which narratives to trust, asks **Nicky Cox**...

I was recently speaking to a friend of mine who teaches science at a North Essex state secondary. She's a seasoned educator, and not one who can easily be 'played' by her students.

So when she told me that the previous week, she'd spent a good five minutes of a Y11 revision session trying to persuade an utterly convinced teen that *'No, the Earth really isn't flat'* – to no avail – I knew this wasn't a case of opportunistic time-wasting.

That young person in question, who was on track for 7 to 9s in all her GCSEs, had 'done her research', and no amount of 'facts' were going to change her mind.

## Dangerous information

As founding editor-in-chief of the UK's first and only weekly newspaper for children, you might expect me to be a champion of giving young people the facts, and I am, of course. But 18 years after launching *First News*, I'm now seriously starting to wonder whether that's enough.

Because I'll be honest – the sheer volume of information, unchecked and unfiltered, with which our kids are now bombarded on a daily basis is terrifying to me.

Children are introduced to smartphones at an increasingly young age, putting them before algorithms designed to serve up content that grabs user attention and encourages sharing. A process that also promotes misleading

clickbait, conspiratorial rhetoric and harmful mis/disinformation.

The line between what's fun and edgy, and what's harmful and dangerous, is a blurred distinction that even adults can struggle to perceive. Mis/disinformation can range from satire and parody to dangerous

politicians are presenting TV shows and social media influencers are pushing policy agendas – how are today's teens supposed to know which news source to trust?

Literacy is rightly championed, along with numeracy, as a priority for our education system; but

**“If a school really is ‘Good’, shouldn't its pupils leave with a healthy level of scepticism towards things they're being asked to accept and believe?”**

conspiracy theories, producing outcomes that span the mildly irritating to extremely serious – even to the point of people dying.

## Blurred lines

Back in 2018, the UK's Commission on Fake News and Critical Literacy in Schools found that only 2% of children and young people possessed the critical literacy skills needed to judge whether a news story was real or false.

60% of teachers surveyed at the time believed that fake news was having harmful effects on children's wellbeing in the form of increased anxiety, damaged self-esteem and skewed worldviews.

From what our readers tell us – not to mention what we experience as media consumers ourselves – navigating this volatile landscape is only getting more challenging. When

what about critical literacy? I believe that equipping children with the knowledge and skills needed to separate trusted sources from dubious ones – identifying bias and agendas, and triangulating data to create as accurate a picture as possible – should be woven into any curriculum designed to do more than simply enable students to jump through assessment hoops.

Whether you're of the opinion that 'critical literacy' should be taught as a discrete subject or not, I'm sure few would argue that simply absorbing prescribed chunks of information in order to regurgitate them later, on demand, represents a truly meaningful and empowering learning experience.

## Healthy scepticism

The good news, which will come as no surprise to teachers, is that the skills required for critical literacy



are already being developed in classrooms everywhere.

Right from the first time they tackle a multiple-choice question with deliberately plausible wrong answers, through to ‘guesstimating’ the solution before using a calculator, examining the historical contexts in which plays, poems or novels were written, and replicating age-old experiments in science labs to see whether the conclusions still stand, pupils are taught, over and over, to *check their work*.

I wonder, though, whether this aspect of teaching should be made even more explicit, or even somehow worked into accountability measures. If a school really is Good, or even Outstanding, shouldn't its pupils leave

with a healthy level of scepticism towards the things they're being asked to accept and believe?

I'm not suggesting there should be endless debate around every single name, date or equation presented for students to learn (although, my most memorable lesson ever was when our brilliant Y6 maths teacher cut a paper circle into segments, then rearranged them in a rough oblong by way of proving Pythagoras' theorem to us – so much more powerful than just committing the formulae to memory).

Rather, it's about consistently encouraging students to reinforce their learning independently, evidence their opinions and

question their sources. Exactly what I expect, in fact, from every journalist writing for *First News*.

Knowledge may well be power, and the transfer of it is absolutely the core business of schools, but I'm convinced that being able to separate the truth from an attractive or convincing falsehood is a superpower to which all our young people should be entitled. And that it should be a priority for everyone involved in education.

Because the more teachers are able to address this – in corridors and playgrounds, as well as classrooms – the harder it will be for bad actors to persuade people, of any age, that the Earth is flat. Or worse.

### 3 CRITICAL LITERACY ACTIVITIES

**1** Organise the students into groups, giving each a different page or spread from a suitable newspaper. Ask them to decide together which of the stories they can see is the most interesting/important/credible, then rotate the groups and repeat the exercise until all have seen every page. Discuss their choices as a class, insisting that they justify them where necessary. Has anyone changed their mind? Why/why not?

**2** Share a selection of short news articles with the headlines removed and ask students to come up with appropriate titles. For an additional challenge, specify the target audience of the publication. This exercise can also work in reverse, with learners trying to predict the content of a story (and again, for extra challenge, the intended audience) from the headline alone.

**3** Find coverage of the same story from a variety of newspapers. Ask the learners to compile a list of similarities and differences between the reports. Are there any details which are exactly the same, regardless of the publication? Which 'facts' do they trust, and why? Can they think of any ways in which they could confirm their choices?



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicky Cox MBE is editor-in-chief of *First News*, a weekly newspaper for readers aged 7-14. To find out more about the paper and its accompanying free resources, visit [tinyurl.com/TSFirstNews](http://tinyurl.com/TSFirstNews)

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# Off the Shelves

Brilliant titles for you and your students to explore



## Coderspeak – The language of computer programmers

(Guilherme Orlandini Heurich, UCL Press, £20)

The underlying assumption of *Coderspeak* is that programming is a purely objective-based affair that involves identifying a problem, breaking it down into its component parts and writing some code to address the issue. In the real world, however, there's rather more to it than that, as this examination of the field from an anthropologist's perspective makes clear. Conway's Law, for example, states that an organisation's systems reflect the way people within that organisation communicate with one another. Heurich goes on to also consider whether code should be 'beautiful' or 'brief', and when it's best to simply ditch legacy code rather than continue building on it. This book won't necessarily help a student pass a computing exam, but it will almost certainly make them a more aware, and thus better programmer.

**Reviewed by Terry Freedman**  
(see [bit.ly/Eclecticism](https://bit.ly/Eclecticism) for more details)

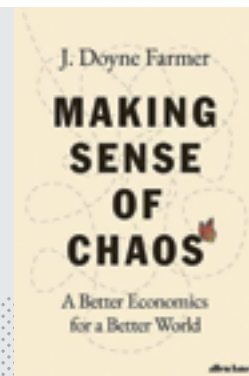


## Bjork & Bjork's Desirable Difficulties in Action

(Jade Pearce & Isaac Moore, John Catt, £12)

There's a fine line between making something too easy for students, and so hard that they just can't get it. The original work on which this volume is based has perhaps been honoured more in the breach than in the observance. What Pearce and Moore have therefore done is summarise recent research concerning four main desirable difficulties, while providing practical guidance to inform teachers' practice and students' independent study. There are plenty of examples of how the theory can be applied – and across a range of subjects, at that – but while the authors' concision is to be admired, there's a sense that not everything is quite as fully explained as it could be. That said, there's an extensive list of references for anyone wishing to go deeper, and overall, it comes across as a very useful work. Highly recommended.

**Reviewed by Terry Freedman**



## Making Sense Of Chaos – A Better Economics for a Better World

(J. Doyne Farmer, Allen Lane, £25)

According to traditional economic theory, consumers act perfectly rationally, aided by perfect information. Needless to say, real-world behaviour can be relied upon to throw up a few...exceptions to this view of the world. Farmer's position is that we can no longer rely on traditional economic theory, due to the modern prevalence of both powerful computers and huge datasets. Thus, we should instead embrace 'complexity economics', which entails the running of sophisticated computer simulations to discern likely outcomes in different scenarios – especially when it comes to 'surprise' shocks, such as the COVID pandemic. The contents might not be the best set text for GCSE economics students, but it presents a highly readable and convincing case against the economic status quo, and would make for a great supplementary text.

**Reviewed by Terry Freedman**

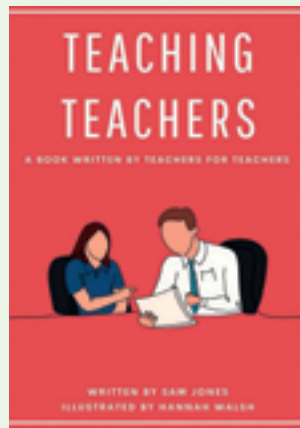
## ON THE RADAR

**Teaching Teachers***(Sam Jones, UK Book Publishing, £13.99)*

It's not uncommon for some teachers to get to a certain point in their career and decide to share their accumulated knowledge with their professional peers by writing a 'how to' book on teaching – but typically not when they're barely four years out from qualifying.

While Jones freely admits to his relative lack of experience in the intro, what makes *Teaching Teachers* worth reading is that it consists largely of hard-won nuggets of wisdom gathered from a number of Jones' veteran colleagues, compiled and presented in conversational prose, with an overall tone that could perhaps best be described as 'reassuring'. Jones sets himself the task of focusing on those practical, workaday strategies regarding teaching and pastoral support that are unlikely to come up in PGCE seminars, but which quickly assume sharp relief once confronted with the daily demands that the job entails.

To that end, the book's concise chapters are smartly organised into nine distinct sections, all thematically mapped to the chunks of time that make up a teacher's standard working day (registration, periods 1 to 8, lunch and break, extracurricular activities) – a conceit that lets readers quickly navigate the book's considerable scope. ECTs will be those best served by *Teaching Teachers*, but it could also potentially provide senior staff with valuable insights into those parts of the job their younger colleagues are likely to struggle with the most.



## Meet the author

## SAM JONES

**Why write a book about teaching so early on in your career?**

During the teaching practise I did as part of my training, I found myself gravitating towards the teachers with more experience, and asking for their tips and advice on the sort of things we weren't being taught about in our lectures. That's not to say that what we were being taught wasn't good – more that when you're actually on the job, there's a whole other kind of practical knowledge that you need.

The premise of the book isn't that I'm an expert and have all the answers. I've curated information and advice that other teachers have learnt over the course of 5-, 10- or 30-year careers that will hopefully help teachers entering the profession now, so it's a very collaborative book.

**Were your colleagues aware that you were writing it?**

Oh, I've bored them to death about it, but everybody I've spoken to has been hugely helpful. When I was appointed a head of Y9 at the end of my first year of teaching, the first thing I did was meet with all the existing heads of year to get their advice, and that was the start of it all. I quickly realised that I was using their advice on how to hit the ground running all the time in my day-to-day practice.

At the same time, I was part of several group chats – with others who had been on my training course, colleagues from school – where people would ask for, and share advice. Eventually, I started sending out these group emails to staff, where I'd assemble all this knowledge, and got some positive feedback. A few of the teachers I regularly socialise with in school thought it was hilarious when I talked about maybe putting all this knowledge in a book, which was a kind of motivation in its own way...

**Has writing the book made you think any differently about the training you received?**

Not necessarily. I went to a teaching university, and the education I got there was invaluable. The broader issue is that while on placement, you'll often be given the 'good' classes, and perhaps be working a one-third full timetable at most. It's a good taster of what a teaching career will be like, but you won't get to see the full depth of what it's like to teach weaker classes, deal with interruptions, keep track of meetings – all those parts of daily school life that you won't be fully exposed to until you're actually there.

**Sam Jones is a technology and design teacher based in Northern Ireland**

**The Notebooks of Sonny Rollins***(Edited by Sam V.H. Reese, NYRB, £16.99)*

When we watch the performances of musicians at the very top of their game, we witness near-perfection. What we don't see are all those endless hours of practice, assorted difficulties and the persistent self-doubt. Anyone teaching or learning a musical instrument may therefore take some solace from the frank personal notes recorded by legendary saxophonist Sonny Rollins, wherein we learn that he isn't happy with his high notes, and see him observe that breakthroughs often come right at the point when a learner is considering giving up completely. Rollins' field was the saxophone, but his quest for mastery applies more generally – being not just matter of practice, but also healthy living and attention to detail. His declaration that, 'No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up' is pretty good advice in any circumstances. A fascinating glimpse into the mind and development of a true virtuoso.

**Reviewed by Terry Freedman**

**Brave New Words**  
How AI Will Revolutionize Education (and Why That's a Good Thing) ✨  
Salman Khan

**Brave New Worlds***(Salman Khan, Allen Lane, £25)*

You may have heard of Khan Academy – the successful online tutoring provider founded in the mid-2000s by Salman Khan. What you might not know is that Khan's advice was sought by the leadership of OpenAI, making him one of the first people in the world to witness ChatGPT in action. Here, Khan ruminates on the possibilities and implications presented by AI-driven education, touching on how AI is already reshaping schools' and colleges' approaches to pedagogy, strategies for dealing with plagiarism, and how generative AI could serve a useful role as a facilitator for large-scale collaborative learning. The book is quite US-centric in outlook, and Khan's arguments probably won't sway determined AI sceptics, but it does present some interesting ideas as to where things might be going, and adds a welcome dose of positivity to the ongoing wider discussion of AI's merits – which at times can sometimes feel stiflingly dystopian.

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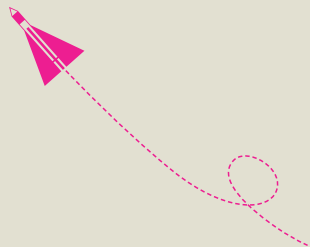
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## [ MATHS PROBLEM ]

# SPEED CALCULATIONS

Students often have trouble calculating speed, distance and time, says **Colin Foster**

In this lesson, students learn how to work out any one of speed, distance or time, when the other two quantities are given.

A scooter travels at a steady speed of 5 km per hour.  
How far will it go in 15 minutes?  
How long will it take to travel 2 km?

Another scooter travels 10 km in 1 hour and 20 minutes.  
How fast is it going, on average?

Students may be unsure how to answer these questions, or give incorrect answers from 'playing around' with the numbers, such as  $\frac{15}{5} = 3$  km, or  $2 \times 5 = 10$  minutes, or  $10 \times 1.2 = 12$  km/h.

## THE SOLUTION

The key idea for all of these questions is that speed is a **multiplier** that converts time into distance: distance = **speed**  $\times$  time. Speed is how much distance we get for each unit of time.

It can be helpful to treat this **multiplicative relationship** as the basis for everything, because you can get either speed or time from this equation in just one step, without needing to use 'formula triangles'. If you instead begin with speed defined as a **quotient**, then rearranging to obtain time will require two steps.

Beginning with distance written as a product may therefore be easier.

We can use this relationship to work out anything we want. We just need to make sure that the units match. The questions we started with contained both hours and minutes, so we'll need to work in just one of those units – say hours.

To find out how far the scooter will go in 15 minutes, we have to think of 15 minutes as  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an hour. We can work out that it's  $\frac{1}{4}$  by writing  $\frac{15}{60} = \frac{1}{4}$ , because there are 60 minutes in an hour. The distance travelled will therefore be  $5 \times \frac{1}{4} = 1.25$  km. Encourage students to always sensecheck their answers; the answer should be far less than 5 km, because 15 minutes is much less than an hour.

To find out how long it will take for the scooter to travel 2 km, we need to **divide by the multiplier** (speed), because we're using the relationship in the **inverse** direction. We work out  $\frac{2}{5} = 0.4$  hours. To convert hours into minutes, we multiply by 60, so we obtain 24 minutes. Again, sense checking, this is a bit less than half an hour, because 2 km is a bit less than half of 5 km.

To find out the scooter's average speed, this time we need to divide both sides of the equation by **time**. We turn 1 hour 20 minutes into  $1\frac{1}{3}$  hours – not 1.2 hours, which would be 1 hour 12 minutes! We then work out  $10 \div 1\frac{1}{3} = 7.5$  km/h. (Students may need assistance in inputting this correctly into the calculator, or doing the fraction division by hand.)

### Checking for understanding

Make up 6 questions involving speed, distance and time (two requiring each of the three quantities). Make them about as difficult as the ones we've looked at today.



Colin Foster (@colinfoster77) is a Reader in Mathematics Education in the Department of Mathematics Education at Loughborough University, and has written many books and articles for mathematics teachers; for more information, visit [foster77.co.uk](http://foster77.co.uk)

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ABSENCE | SUSPENSION | PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT



## *A persistent* PROBLEM

**P**ersistent absenteeism in English secondary schools is a significant concern, with approximately 25% of students categorised as ‘persistently absent’ at the time of writing.

That designation applies to students who miss at least 10% of school sessions – equivalent to around 19 school days or more annually. The implications of such high absence rates are alarming, and based on current trends, it’s unlikely that we’re going to see any imminent improvement.

### The scope of the problem

Persistent absence affects a substantial portion of the student population. According to DfE data, 25% of secondary school students fell into the category of persistent absentees during the 2022-2023 academic year; a troubling statistic, given the strong correlation between attendance and academic performance. Studies have consistently shown that students who attend school regularly are much more likely to achieve higher academic outcomes compared to their frequently absent peers.

There is, however, a significant disparity in absence rates between students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Statistics show that children eligible for free school meals have higher rates of absenteeism – such

as during the 2022-23 academic year, when 34% of students eligible for FSM were persistently absent, compared to 20% of those who weren’t eligible.

And yet, I refuse to accept that the problem is explicitly linked to poverty, disadvantage or socio-economic background, since absence figures still remain historically high for students who come from more privileged backgrounds.

The absence rates for this group of students, while comparatively lower, should still concern us all. In the 2022-2023 academic year, some 15% of students from higher socio-economic backgrounds were persistently absent, indicating that the absenteeism we’re seeing is, in fact, a multifaceted problem influenced by various factors beyond socio-economic status alone.

### Punitive measures

Now, at this point I could spend the next few paragraphs listing all kinds of suggestions as to what we school leaders should do in response, such as starting breakfast clubs to encourage students to attend school. I could explore the use of incentives to reward good attendance – ‘Film of the Month’ tokens, fast passes for dinner lines and so on.

Or I could swing the pendulum the other way, and instead look at punitive measures – threats of detentions or exclusions, or in the very worst cases,

using the prospect of external agency referrals as a fear tactic. But we know what happens. All these measures and more have already been tried and tested, over and over, up and down the country, and they simply don’t have any lasting impact.

My own proposed response to this growing problem can be summed up in one word: curriculum.

### Voting with their feet

We all know it, but no one wants to admit it – schools are outdated. Sure, there has been plenty of innovation and creativity shown by many school leadership teams, but the reality is that they never quite go far enough to meet the needs of all students, whatever those might be.

Until we have a complete reform of the current model, transformational change and sustained impact won’t be achieved. *‘Arrive at this time; go to these places; aim towards these qualifications; learn this information; provide evidence in this format...’*

It doesn’t work.

Students have been telling us for years that they don’t find this model engaging, relevant or purposeful. And guess what? They haven’t been telling us in the latest round of ‘student voice’ activities; they’ve been voting with their feet. Because they can.

Standing in front of the school, chastising and berating students who are late, and constantly nagging non-attendees and their families will simply drive a deeper wedge between home and school. Instead, why not truly *listen* to what the students feel passionate about, and then facilitate

this by developing a qualification that's as meaningful to them as possible?

### Student agency

At the same time, let's not pay lip service to what the student desires by diluting it with other subjects that serve no real purpose to the individual. Too often, I've seen schools pretend to respond to the interests and needs of their students with boasts about how they build 'real life' and 'work' content into subjects like English, maths or geography. That's not the solution

either. It has to be the other way round.

If a student wants to develop their computing skills, or their metalworking skills, then that is what they should be doing for at least 75% of the time they're in school. The other 25% of their time can be used to develop wider skills and knowledge – but even then, this should be consistently linked to what they're actually aspiring to qualify in before leaving school.

What frustrates me even more is that despite the evolution of liberal approaches to tackling general student

behaviour, the full impact of this on school culture over the past 30 years has never been fully evaluated.

We have spent vast amounts of time and energy promoting the rights of the child and giving students an equal, if not greater say in every aspect of school life. So why are we so surprised and perplexed to have now arrived at a point where students are asserting their rights regarding attendance?

At some stage, all parents will need to grapple with a certain form of repeated questioning from their children – usually some variation of 'Why do I have to?' or 'Why should I?' It's hard to see why school staff should expect to see anything different. Everything we've promoted and protested regarding children's rights and student agency has led us here – so is it time to finally admit that we've brought this on ourselves? If so, then we ought to stand by our



## PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT – THE KEY TO SOLVING THE CRISIS?

Since the relaxation of restrictions imposed during the pandemic, there has been a concerning increase in pupils exhibiting high levels of absence of school. According to our own survey of 498 UK schools (see [bit.ly/ts136-HT1](https://bit.ly/ts136-HT1)), a worrying 70% have seen increases in pupil absences over the past two years.

It's widely felt that the damage wrought by the pandemic – on children's mental health and wellbeing, relationships between schools and parents, and the overall culture of school attendance – will take years to fix.

A major contributing factor to this rise in absence is the growing number of families taking holidays during term times. According to the survey, such cases are up in as many as 68% of schools. Additionally, many schools have seen marked drops in attendance on Fridays, with some families opting to take 'long weekends'.

### Changing perceptions

This has prompted schools to consider whether perceptions among parents have changed, to the extent that many now see their children as no longer needing to attend every day – with the result that previously strong partnerships between home and school have significantly deteriorated.

Where possible, schools must therefore demonstrate a genuine desire to understand families' concerns – with all due sensitivity and care, yes, but also in the spirit of professional curiosity, so that barriers to learning can be removed and absence rates reduced.

One tool that schools can turn to when tackling persistent absence issues is their MIS. An increasingly common feature within modern, cloud-based MIS packages are 'parent portals', which can provide real-time data on students' attendance via a web browser or app, and potentially make a huge difference to the quality of your communications and levels of parental satisfaction.

This transparency will keep parents informed, while encouraging them to take an active role in facilitating their child's school attendance. Used well, they can also help to address the parental disengagement we're seeing, resulting in better outcomes for students, parents and staff alike.

### Early detection

By granting parents ready access to their child's attendance rates, behaviour and assessment reports, plus other key communications, truancy challenges are more likely to be detected early on and prevented. Through such portals, parents can receive live updates regarding their child's school attendance at lessons throughout the day, thus making it easier to spot potential problem areas.

School staff already do amazing work in encouraging pupils and making their attendance more consistent, but there are still limits to the difference they can make. What would make even more of a difference over time would be for schools to foster a supportive culture, raise expectations, and deploy their systems and data in increasingly innovative ways in order to keep things on track.



Ali Guryel is executive chairman and CEO of Bromcom



## THE ATTENDANCE ROUTE MAP

In July this year, the education charity School Home Support (SHS) set out what it described as a 'route map' for addressing the attendance crisis, and laid down a challenge to the recently elected Labour government – to commit to a 'moonshot goal' of seeing every child in school and ready to learn by 2050.

The route map breaks down the first 100 days, year and five years of an ambitious plan to make the education system more inclusive. Building on research SHS carried out last year with Public First (previously published in the 'Listening to, and learning from, parents in the attendance crisis' report – see [bit.ly/ts127-NL2](https://bit.ly/ts127-NL2)), it proposes investing in whole family support, having strategies aimed at tackling child poverty cover matters of school attendance, publishing parental engagement plans and having checks of attendance form part of new annual safeguarding inspections.

Said report's recommendations included carrying out a review into how absence fines are administered and levied upon parents, with a view to potentially abolishing them if evidence indicates that they have not had a substantive impact on improving attendance rates. It also called for improvements to school-level monitoring systems to ensure the accuracy of information shared with parents, and for closer, more holistic partnering between (better funded) schools and CAMHS with welfare/housing agencies.

In the view of SHS chief executive Jaine Stannard, "We welcome the Government's commitments to breakfast clubs and mental health support in secondary schools, but like many current approaches these rely on children being in school to benefit and may not address the underlying issues. We must go further and faster to reconnect with families to turn the school attendance crisis around."

The 'Every child in school and ready to learn by 2050' route map and accompanying report produced by SHS can be downloaded via [bit.ly/ts136-HTA1](https://bit.ly/ts136-HTA1)



**“The problem is the learning model and rigid curriculum design that even the most forward-thinking and creative schools remain trapped within.”**

reasons for heading down this path from the start, and take one more step forward – towards acceptance of the idea that students should have the same say in their attendance as they do in any other matter.

### Pushy salespersons

What I say next may sound counter-intuitive, but we need to shift our expectations of the amount of time students should actually spend in school. From the age of 14, students should be able to learn in a place of their choosing. A blended in-school/online experience ought to be provided wherever possible, as this is much more likely to be the nature of their future studies or careers.

It's far better to promote attendance as something that young people will want to actively buy into, rather than continuing to try and force an outdated model of education that essentially still views teenagers as incapable of thinking for themselves, and lacking the ability, commitment, and responsibility to lead

and manage their own learning and development.

Nobody likes a pushy salesperson. Why should we assume that young people will feel any differently over having to buy into a model that they ultimately have little choice or control over?

The problem with non-attendance isn't 'cultural'. Nor is it just a residual impact of COVID-19, or the result of mental health decline. The problem is the learning model and rigid curriculum design that even the most forward-thinking and creative schools remain trapped within. Big changes are needed, and soon – or else, more and more of our 21st century learners will simply continue to turn their backs on what we have to offer.



Ed Carlin is a deputy headteacher at a Scottish secondary school, having worked in education for 15 years and held teaching roles at schools in Northern Ireland and England

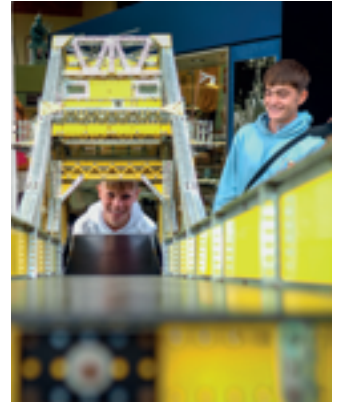
## ASK THE EXPERT

# Reinvent blended learning

Madeleine FitzGibbon, Travelbound's Head of Product, highlights the enhanced outdoor learning experiences on offer at the Château du Molay, Normandy



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**4 CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SYNTHESIS**  
After visiting sites such as Pegasus Bridge or the D-Day Museum, facilitate a discussion during an on-site barbecue or fancy dress event. The informal setting allows students to reflect on their experiences, fostering a deeper connection to the material through shared insights and relaxed dialogue.

## At a glance

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## CLASSROOM LIFE

# Relieving the burden

In February 2022, Welling School in Kent was rated Inadequate. Headteacher **Brian Griffen** and director of maths **Dominic Roberts** give their accounts of what happened next...



**Brian Griffen,**  
headteacher

*Trained as a PE teacher, before later becoming a trust deputy specialising in school improvement; subsequently appointed as headteacher of Welling School in April 2023*

I spent the first three years of my teaching career in quite a challenging school, and from there, started to actively seek out challenges involving school improvement. As well as improving standards and outcomes, this has previously involved rebuilding that sense of connectivity between children and the school they attend – I've always got a real buzz from that kind of work.

## Unstructured time

When entering a school in difficult circumstances, it's important to quickly gain an understanding of its unique context. The precise nature of the

challenges it faces will be very specific, and the stakeholders will be markedly different from those you may have dealt with previously.

During my first visit to Welling School, I sought to understand where the school was by entering classrooms, walking the corridors and paying particular attention to unstructured time – breaks, lunchtimes, how students entered and exited the school. When you're formulating an initial plan in your head as to how you're going to approach the improvement process, those are the key indicators.

Prior to my arrival, Daniel Hatley (executive headteacher) and his colleagues had got the school to a place where we were ready to take the next leap. Things were calm, but what was needed was *drive*. Early

on, I made a point of arranging 10- to 15-minute one-to-one meetings with every member of staff, in which I asked them to tell me something about the school that was great, and something that needed to improve. I then fed these views into an action plan I presented to SLT during that first week.

The next step was to expand the capacity of the school's pastoral team, and then sharpen up habits around





## BITESIZE SESSIONS

Taking the form of four sessions scheduled on Wednesday mornings and four on Friday mornings, Welling School's Bitesize Sessions are conceived as short 20- to 25-minute CPD seminars, focusing on pedagogy and teaching practice. These are predominately led by teaching staff, as a way to encourage the cross-departmental sharing of knowledge and best practice. Presenters are regularly rotated, and have previously included lead practitioners, ECTs and all roles in between.

arrivals at lessons by introducing a late bell, and drawing on some standard 'tricks of the trade' to impart a sense of pace, urgency and expectation into the school day.

### Reset, refocus

It was clear from my early findings that behaviour at the school had been difficult to manage. Behaviour tended to be managed within classrooms, with the ultimate sanction – after some warning – being removal from the classroom, into a different classroom. Unfortunately, however, the disruption would often continue.

I wanted to get to a situation where the school could remove all the barriers preventing teachers from making great progress in their classrooms, one of which was evidently behaviour. We therefore instituted a simple on-call system, whereby teachers could request that someone from the school's

12-strong behaviour team visit the classroom and remove the student, but then take them to our Refocus Room for a period.

This was a room that had already been designated for behaviour purposes at the school, but with the help of two new deputies who joined the school alongside me, we reinvented the room as a learning space where students could take some time out, and at the end of that period, try again, with the process being tracked and monitored.

What's crucial about this system is that once a teacher has had a child removed from their classroom and logged the incident, *that's their part done*. They're not setting detentions, they're not calling home – they're freed from those burdens.

Instead, we've established a centralised detentions system that's run after school by our pastoral team. Moreover, we've introduced same day graded detentions of 30- 60- or 90-minutes in duration (which obviously necessitated putting in place robust communications with parents to ensure that they're appropriately notified).

### Learning behaviours

Another key aspect of our behaviour system is the use of daily reports. The pastoral team for each year group download a daily report at the end of the day, detailing any issues that may have been encountered. They will then phone parents that same day regarding any concerns, log what's raised in those discussions – maybe a change in seating plan, a student having had a bad day – and enquire whether there's anything further we can do, or any meetings we can arrange.

Those reports are then sent through to the school's deputy and myself,

resulting in a systematic check-in of all behaviour within the school and how it's being tracked. Introducing this system involved changing some responsibilities – particularly for staff who were formerly heads of year and are now Achievement Team Leaders, whose roles require them to distinguish between students presenting negative behaviours, and those presenting negative *learning* behaviours.

Once some parents began receiving what were essentially daily phone calls, much of what I'd term as the school's low-level negative behaviour soon disappeared. In effect, you're bringing those issues to the stakeholder's door and saying, '*This isn't actually good enough – we need to start doing things differently.*'



### Dominic Roberts, director of maths

*Joined the school in 2021, having previously been head of a school in China*

When you're part of a staff body and you get judged Inadequate, whether you agree with it or not, you can't help but

## ASPIRE, AMBITION, GRAMMAR

At Welling School, KS3 students are assigned to one of three different streams:

- ▶ **Aspire stream:** A comparatively small group of students two to three years behind their cohort in terms of progress, who receive additional English and maths support
- ▶ **Ambition stream:** A mixed ability group that includes the majority of KS3 students
- ▶ **Grammar stream:** A smaller group made up of more able students





feel labelled.

Speaking personally, some of the work I've done within the past two years has just been on rebuilding my confidence. You have to be confident in what you're doing when facing 30 kids in the classroom. You have to be confident when walking the corridors, and in your routines and processes.

There are good people around the

school now who can back that up. There were previous attempts to put behaviour support in place, but what we have now feels steady. In terms of the current staff body and how we function as a school, we can only get stronger. We've had a few false dawns before, with lots of upheaval and change, only for staff to feel, one year on, that they're doing the same thing again, just with someone

else's curriculum documents.

We're doing a lot of work at the moment, but people are supportive of it. They know that what we're doing is going to stay put for a while, because the leaders are going to stay put. There's consistency now. In a year's time, we won't need to redo things, like we did previously – we'll actually be able to build on what we've achieved so far.

## STUDENT ROUNDTABLE



### Tasbir

"I really like Welling School. I like my lessons and my teachers, because they're really helpful – and fun."



### Jesse

"There used to be just one block of toilets downstairs, but now they've changed it so there are toilets upstairs and downstairs for different year groups. That makes things much easier, as we don't have to queue as long, which made us late to lessons."

### Mahmut

"There used to be teachers who couldn't control their lessons and couldn't move on – but now they have the ability to control their lessons, and continue with what they were doing before being interrupted."



### Connie

"When I started, the bullying was quite bad. Nowadays it's quite rare."



### Leo

"The teachers are amazing – they really help you out. If you think something's impossible, they're good at getting us to challenge ourselves and get to the place we want to reach."



### Abigaël

"There are more clubs now, less subs, more teachers and the classes are much better, with less noise."

# Autumn school trips

Educate, inspire, amaze and reward your students by exploring these best-in-class destinations



## 1 SCIENCE MUSEUM

Bring science, technology, engineering and maths to life this autumn term with a trip to London's Science Museum.

Get hands-on with job-related, interactive exhibits in *Technicians: The David Sainsbury Gallery* and experience what it's like to operate a robot or analyse blood samples in a laboratory. Mark Black History Month and Green Careers Week with free, 60-minute *Careers Uncovered* sessions led by technicians from top UK organisations.

Round off your visit with an extraordinary journey through Earth's ocean highways with *Ocean Odyssey 3D* in IMAX – the new educational film for school groups. Explore all of these out-of-this-world activities and more this autumn, only at the Science Museum. For more details, visit [sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups](https://sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups).

## PGL UNITE!

Uniting classes at the start of the school year is important for creating learning environments in which students can feel comfortable, included and engaged.

That's why PGL's UNITE! Relationship-building adventures were developed with teachers to start the school year right. What's more, there are options to suit all budgets at 15 centres located conveniently across the UK. With 95% of schools in the country no more than a 2-hour drive from their nearest PGL centre, a relationship-building adventure is never too far away!

Visit [schoolsandgroups.pgl.co.uk/reach-unite](https://schoolsandgroups.pgl.co.uk/reach-unite) to find out more about the awesome autumn adventure awaiting your students!



## 3

## PARADOX MUSEUM

Paradox Museum – a global brand celebrated for its groundbreaking approach to experiential learning – is now open in Knightsbridge, London.

Paradox transforms learning into an unforgettable adventure by crafting captivating, engaging and enlightening experiences that inspire and enthrall every visitor. Students will marvel at the powers of gravity in the zero gravity room; contemplate their perception of space and distance in the Ames room; and be mesmerised by the science of light and reflection in the giant kaleidoscope – plus so much more!

Don't miss your chance to ignite curiosity, inspire exploration and empower your students to question the world around them. For more information, visit [paradoxmuseumlondon.com](https://paradoxmuseumlondon.com)





4

### KEW GARDENS

Bring your KS4/5 class to one of the most biodiverse places on Earth – the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Kew welcomes over 90,000 pupils each year, connecting school groups with the wonder and diversity of plant life.

Led by experienced Kew teachers, inquiry-based education sessions get pupils involved in hands-on investigation in the Gardens' iconic glasshouses and varied landscape. They'll be inspired by Kew's scientific research, exploring nature-based solutions to some of humanity's greatest challenges.

The KS4/5 sessions on offer complement the GCSE and A/AS level biology and geography curricula across all exam boards, as well as BTEC and IB. For more information, visit [kew.org/learning](http://kew.org/learning)

### IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

See war through the eyes of the people who lived it. Be moved. Be inspired. Be transformed. 'We Were There' at Imperial War Museum London, IWM North and IWM Duxford offers a unique chance for students to meet veterans and eyewitnesses of conflict. An experience designed for KS2 to KS4, students will explore the consequences of war and the impact of conflict on people's lives.

Through personal stories, question-based learning and conversation, students will have the chance to get to know the people who were there, living through conflict, making for a unique and truly unforgettable school visit. For more details, visit [iwm.org.uk](http://iwm.org.uk)



5

### NATIONAL HOLOCAUST CENTRE AND MUSEUM

A visit to the National Holocaust Centre and Museum invites children to consider big questions relating to identity, courage and kindness, hatred, how we can think for ourselves and more.

Both primary and secondary school pupils can learn from Holocaust survivors, access museum artefacts and objects, and take part in workshops led by a team of former teachers. The workshops are age-appropriate and delivered sensitively and challengingly.

For groups unable to visit in person, it's also possible to book a session with the museum's outreach education team, wherever you are in the country. Find out more at [holocaust.org.uk](http://holocaust.org.uk)



6



7

### AIRHOP

Whatever the weather's doing, your group will have fantastic fun on a trip to one of AirHop's 17 UK Trampoline and Adventure parks. Energetic activities abound – from fast and furious games of dodgeball, to sessions in the challenging Clip'n Climb and Wipeout zones, not to mention the wall-to-wall opportunities to get bouncing.

Whether you're planning a reward trip or focusing on fitness, the parks' skilled staff will be on hand to help you get the very most from your day. Bespoke visits can be created to meet your requirements, with pre- and post-visit project packs also available. Find out more at [airhop.co.uk](http://airhop.co.uk)

# Stories of respect

Introducing this excerpt from the new book, *Black History for Every Day of the Year*, Dr Yinka Olusoga shines a spotlight on two exceptional Black individuals whose accomplishments deserve far wider recognition...

**W**riting *Black History for Every Day of the Year* felt like pulling on a tiny thread and being met with an avalanche of creativity and community.

For me, the highlight of the process was uncovering the histories behind Black contributions to culture. Have you ever played with a Super Soaker? Then you have inventor Lonnie Johnson to thank. For the three way traffic light, it's Garrett Morgan.

Have you ever heard the phrase 'Young, Gifted and Black'? Or the title 'A Raisin in the Sun'? You can read about them in the entry about the brilliant playwright, Lorraine Hansberry, and learn of her connections to Black singers, actors activists and more...

## LORRAINE HANSBERRY

On 11th March 1959, history was made at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York, when the first Broadway play written by an African American woman was performed. The playwright was Lorraine Hansberry and at the time she was only 29 years old.

Her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, was named after the line in the Langston Hughes poem 'Harlem: A Dream Deferred', and tells the story of a working class Black family in Chicago. Its cast was led by the actor Sidney Poitier and the director was Lloyd Richards, who that night became the first African American to direct a Broadway play.

The play was nominated for four Tony awards and named the best play of 1959 by the New York Drama Critics Circle, making Hansberry the youngest American to win the award. In 1961 it was turned into a film, starring the original Broadway cast.

Hansberry was the youngest of three children born to an accomplished African American family living on the South Side of Chicago. She became interested in theatre and politics and moved to New York to study. She started writing for *Freedom* – a monthly African American newspaper that featured columns by its co-founder, the singer and activist Paul Robeson, as well as articles

Weldon Irvine co-wrote the song 'To Be Young, Gifted and Black' about Hansberry, who had been godmother to Simone's daughter.

## ROBERT SMALLS

If there's one word to sum up Robert Smalls, it's 'audacious'. Once you read his entry, you may, like me, ask why you weren't taught about it at school – and why on earth no one has bothered to make a movie about it?

On the evening of 12th May 1862, aboard the Confederate transport ship *The Planter*, an enslaved man named Robert Smalls set in motion an incredibly daring plan that would transform his life.

**“Once the families were aboard, Smalls and the enslaved crew members seized their chance...”**

by the scholar and activist, W. E. B. Du Bois.

Hansberry identified as a lesbian, but homosexuality was illegal in New York at the time. In 1953 she married fellow activist Robert Nemiroff, and although their romantic relationship ended a few years later, he remained one of her closest friends.

Her only other play to be performed during her lifetime was *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. It closed on the day she died, at the tragically early age of 34 from pancreatic cancer. In 1969 Nina Simone and

white officers.

In April of 1862, Smalls became worried that the Confederate side seemed to be winning, and would succeed in their goal of establishing a separate slave-owning republic.

remaining enslaved crew to visit them aboard that night. Relyea agreed, on the condition that all family members would be off the ship by the time of the evening curfew, when all Charleston residents needed to be inside their homes.

### A daring escape

Once the families were aboard, Smalls and the enslaved crew members seized their chance. The plan was explained to the families, who then pretended to return home, but instead went to hide on a steamer ship moored at Charleston's North Wharf. At 3am on 13th May, Smalls and seven of the eight enslaved crew commandeered *The Planter* and set sail for North Wharf to collect their families.

Reaching the Union forces meant having to sail past six Confederate harbour forts, which would need to be convinced that Captain Relyea was still in charge, and that nothing strange was happening.

So Smalls put on a captain's uniform and a hat. He remained calm, sailing slowly past each fort in the dark at the normal distance. Each time, he gave the correct steam whistle signals while impersonating Captain Relyea's mannerisms, and was let through. After passing Fort Sumter in the final port, they changed course away from a Confederate harbour at Morris Island, and towards the fleet of the Union Navy. By the time the guards at

Fort Sumter realised their error, *The Planter* was already out of range of their guns.

The ship was then soon spotted by the Union ship *USS Onward*, which began preparations to fire upon them. Quickly, Smalls had the crew take down the Confederate flag and hoist up a white sheet to show their wish to surrender. He was then able to hand over *The Planter*, its cargo and vital intelligence about the Confederates' naval security to the Union side. His plan had worked, and Smalls had gained freedom for his family, his crew and their families.

Smalls subsequently became the first Black man to serve as a pilot in the United States Navy, before eventually being promoted to captain and given command of *The Planter*. He fought in 17 battles on the ship during the Civil War, winning prize money that enabled him to return to Beaufort in 1864, and buy the house of his former owner in an auction of property seized from fleeing Confederate supporters.

### A new career

The 12 years following the war became known as the Reconstruction Era – a time when Americans tried to bring the Confederate and Union states together again and rebuild a society without slavery. Smalls now began his second career as an activist and Republican politician, after being arrested in Philadelphia for riding on a racially segregated streetcar.

Smalls immediately rallied support for a boycott, which then led to the desegregation of public transport in Philadelphia in 1867. He was later elected as a South Carolina state representative in 1868, and became a state senator in 1872.

In 1874 he was elected to the United States Congress,

and went on to serve for five terms in the House of Representatives. During this time, Smalls fought for racial equality, campaigning against racial segregation in education, transport and in the armed forces. He retired from national politics in 1887, and was given the post of Collector of Customs in Beaufort, which he held for the next 20 years.

### A life celebrated

After Smalls died on 23rd February 1915, his military and political careers, as well as the economic and social successes Beaufort experienced in the Reconstruction Era, were largely forgotten. In the 2000s, however, Smalls' life and works began to be celebrated. His house is now a National Historic Landmark, and in 2017 President Obama issued an executive order that led to the creation of the Reconstruction Era National Monument in Beaufort, recognising Smalls' contribution to American history.

*"My race needs no special defense, for the past history of them in this country proves them to be the equal of any people, anywhere. All they need is an equal chance in the battle of life."*  
– Robert Smalls, 1st November 1895



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Yinka Olusoga is an author, lecturer and course director of the BA in Education, Culture and Childhood at the University of Sheffield; *Black History for Every Day of the Year* is co-authored by David and Yinka Olusoga, illustrated by Kemi Olusoga, and is due for publication in September 2024 (Macmillan, £25)

He began talking with the enslaved crew (except for one man he didn't trust) and making plans to escape to the Union side of the Civil War and to freedom.

On 12th May 1862, the three white officers were preparing to leave the ship at Charleston's Southern Wharf and spend the night ashore. Smalls asked the captain, Charles C. J.

Relyea, for permission for the families of the

# 4 REASONS TO TRY... British Army Supporting Education resources

Celebrate Black History Month with these free KS3/4 resources from the British Army Supporting Education programme

## 1 EMPOWER YOUR LESSONS

The British Army's Black History Month education resources aim to honour and recognise the significant contributions of Black British, African, and Caribbean individuals throughout the history of the British Army. Seamlessly integrating with the history and citizenship curricula, these digital materials include an assembly presentation and a detailed lesson plan, enriched by the expertise of The Black Curriculum and BlackPoppyRose.

## 2 UNCOVER UNTOLD STORIES

Highlighting the often overlooked stories of Black service personnel, these resources explore their legacy

and impact. The materials feature diverse case studies, including the significant, yet under-reported roles of Black women during WWI, ensuring students gain a comprehensive view of history.

## 3 FOSTER CRITICAL DISCUSSIONS

Designed to spark thoughtful discussions, these resources emphasise the importance of Black History Month and broader Black history inclusion within education. Reflection questions and insights from currently serving Black soldiers encourage students to connect historical narratives with contemporary conversations on race and diversity.



## 4 COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION

As part of the British Army's commitment to addressing inequalities, these resources raise awareness about the contributions of Black service personnel, both past and present. They provide educators with valuable tools to start necessary conversations and foster a more inclusive educational environment.

**BASE** BRITISH ARMY SUPPORTING EDUCATION

**Contact:**  
Access the free resources via [jobs.army.mod.uk/base/lessons/black-history-month/](https://jobs.army.mod.uk/base/lessons/black-history-month/)



## At a glance

- + Comprehensive resources that integrate seamlessly with existing curricula
- + Expert collaboration with The Black Curriculum and BlackPoppyRose
- + Modern perspectives from serving Black soldiers

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# THE WOW FACTOR

Step into the fascinating world of STEM careers at *Technicians: The David Sainsbury Gallery* at the Science Museum, London



Recreating the workplaces of technicians across multiple sectors – health science, creative arts, manufacturing and renewable energy – your class will get hands-on with interactive exhibits that simulate technical, job-related tasks. The Science Museum has collaborated with Marvel Studios, the NHS, the National Grid and others to create this unique careers gallery. Your pupils will experience what it's like to create visual effects on a blockbuster film set, analyse blood samples in a medical laboratory, fix a fault on a wind turbine and much more.

**SCIENCE MUSEUM**

**Contact:**

03300 580 058

[info@sciencemuseumgroup.ac.uk](mailto:info@sciencemuseumgroup.ac.uk)

[www.sciencemuseum.org.uk](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk)



## TECHNICIANS GALLERY

At the *Technicians* gallery, your class will learn how technicians work behind the scenes to save lives, make energy greener, provide entertainment, create everyday items we couldn't live without and much more. They'll have the chance to operate a robotic arm, solve technical problems on top of a wind turbine and assist with the creation of lifesaving medicine.

## MEET AN EMPLOYEE

KS3 and KS4 groups can also book places on a free hands-on workshop. These are held in the *Technicians* gallery, and will give pupils the chance to meet real-life technicians and ask them lots of questions. The workshop will help your pupils to see how they can use their existing skills to become problem solvers and make a difference.

## CAREERS TRAILS

To support your visit, the Science Museum has created a fun, careers-themed activity trail that will help lead your pupils around the museum. Pupils will get to explore '*Medicine: The Wellcome Galleries*' and '*Mathematics: The Winton Gallery*' – where they will be able to learn how real-life technicians have helped to design and build the world around us.

## GATSBY BENCHMARKS

A visit to the gallery will support productive careers conversations with young people by offering an informal, yet educational encounter with a huge range of technical career pathways. A visit could also support efforts at meeting Gatsby's Good Career Guidance benchmarks, by providing students with opportunities to experience workplace environments.

# INTREPID EXPLORATIONS

**Steve Brace** serves up a primer on the crucial ingredients and processes that produce effective fieldwork for geography students

**F**ieldwork is one of geography's key elements. As Dr David Lambert, one of my predecessors at the Geographical Association, once wrote, "*It is absolutely essential... It expresses a commitment to exploration and enquiry, and geography's concern to discover and to be curious about the world.*"

Geographical field explorations can take place in a school's grounds, local area, elsewhere in the UK or further afield. Regardless of location, duration or setting, fieldwork helps young people apply their geographical understanding and skills to better understand the real-world interrelationships between people and their environment.

## Thinking like geographers

And yet, fieldwork is under pressure, with a 2023 Teacher Tapp survey of secondary teachers finding that 40% reported seeing reductions in their fieldwork since COVID. Additionally, Ofsted has identified that fieldwork is 'underdeveloped' in almost all schools (see bit.

ly/ts127-G3), rarely extending beyond the requirements of exam specifications, with little differentiation between a 'field trip' and *fieldwork*.

A focus on the latter is what will deliver the greatest impact on the ability of pupils to think – and work – like geographers. So what exactly elevates fieldwork beyond simply 'visiting' a place?

The answer lies in fieldwork's emphasis on *geographical enquiry*. As geographer Dr Margaret Roberts notes (see bit.ly/ts136-FW1), there are a series of key questions through which you can frame your fieldwork – those being 'Where...?', 'What...?', 'When...?', 'What ought...?', 'What might...?', 'Who...?', 'Why...?' and 'How...?'

You'll also need to carefully consider precisely where your fieldwork should take place and why. What location will best support the learning you want your pupils to achieve, and what are the cost and time implications of organising a visit there?

If your school (and your students' parents) are willing and able to organise a first-hand experience of

tectonic processes for your pupils, Iceland may well be the perfect location. If, however, you want to explore flood risk, then you might not need to expend the costs and time required to travel to an iconic fieldwork site. Conducting fieldwork at a local river will be cost effective, and could even be more relevant (especially since 10,710 schools in England have been identified as being at risk from flooding, according to the DfE's 'Sustainability and climate strategy' – see bit.ly/ts117-TP1 for more details).

## Repeat visits

Many teachers will schedule repeat visits to familiar sites. This can be helpful in building up your department's depth of experience and knowledge concerning a particular place and its processes. It will also enable your pupils to explore geographical change over time – by, for example, comparing land use data gathered from their local high street to





equivalent data recorded at the same location the previous year.

Do, however, remember that although it's a repeat visit for *you*, the same won't necessarily apply to your pupils. It's not uncommon for pupils' first visit to the UK's coastline being due to their school's fieldwork.

If your fieldwork site is somewhere unfamiliar to your pupils, try to schedule in some time for them to 'take it in' and orientate themselves to it – perhaps commencing with a field sketch of the site and its features, before getting stuck into more detailed data collection.

### Scheduling and logistics

You might now have your initial geographical enquiry, permissions and risk review in hand, but there are some other, crucially important areas to consider when devising a plan for your fieldwork. First off, how will your pupils' fieldwork enquiry build on their prior learnings and be contextualized in the fieldwork site itself?

We shouldn't forget (not that many geographers will) the valuable part that Ordnance Survey maps and Esri UK's geographic information system can play in helping you 'place' the site.

This becomes especially important if it will be any pupils' first visit to what, for them, will be terra incognita. You'll need to be well-stocked with all the necessary

fieldwork equipment – which as some teachers will tell you, might include a class set of wellies.

You'll then need to think about the schedule you'll be observing when carrying out the fieldwork, and how this will relate to the data you'll

life of your school).

Looking beyond the requirements of GCSE and A Level specifications, we shouldn't lose sight of the wider benefits of fieldwork, including its capacity to help young people better develop their skills. Asking older

## “Fieldwork helps young people better understand the interrelationships between people and their environment”

be collecting and other wider practicalities. What contingencies will there be in the event of inclement weather? What facilities will there be for toilet breaks? Will the fieldwork you have planned be fully inclusive, given your pupils' needs? (It's worth reading Catherine Owen's thoughts on this via [bit.ly/ts136-FW2a](http://bit.ly/ts136-FW2a).)

Nor can we discount the challenges posed by unexpected and unwelcome events. Pupils from Manchester Academy, for example, recently had to deal (admirably) with comments of 'Stop the boats' being directed at them when they disembarked at their fieldwork location (see [bit.ly/ts136-FW3](http://bit.ly/ts136-FW3)).

### Subject advocacy

Then there's the question of how the fieldwork will be written up, built on and taken forward in your pupils' subsequent work (and potentially even the wider

pupils to share their fieldwork experiences with their younger peers can turn out to be some of the best subject advocacy you could wish for, come options time.

However, not all teachers will be sufficiently knowledgeable and confident in running their own fieldwork events.

As previously noted, Ofsted has identified a clear lack of professional knowledge in this area, which effectively limits teachers' options and potential opportunities in what should be an important part of the work they do.

If you feel that you need to develop your fieldwork skills, then I would strongly encourage you to draw on the support provided by Geographical Association, the Field Studies Council, Discover the World, The National Education Nature Park and numerous other educational organisations.

### Out in the field

Whatever you end up doing, any fieldwork you undertake is worth celebrating. This is why the Geographical Association runs an annual #NationalFestivalofFieldwork in the summer term, during which schools are encouraged to share their fieldwork experiences. This year's festival saw thousands of pupils investigating their schools' grounds, nearby beaches, rivers and high streets, local parks and forests, and receiving their fieldwork certificates upon completing the fieldwork in question.

If there's one place where a geography teacher should let their geographical enthusiasm for their subject run wild, it's in the field. Your enthusiasm for investigating the geography that surrounds us can be infectious, and provide an important spark for your pupils' interest in our subject.

Even so, we can occasionally be guilty of overdoing things a little – as with the moment at the end of a long day in Snowdonia, when I was once met with a noticeably weary response of “*Not another lovely U-Shaped Valley...*”



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Brace is chief executive of the Geographical Association; for more information, visit [geography.org.uk](http://geography.org.uk) or follow @The\_GA

## Q&amp;A

# “Our reading age gains are rapid”

Sarah Ledger reflects on the growth of literacy business Lexonik, as it celebrates its 15th birthday



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

Lexonik is a leading literacy intervention provider, achieving outstanding reading age gains. It's staffed by literacy experts and former teachers, and delivers innovative tech to track progress.

### How does Lexonik transform lives through literacy?

We are an intervention provider, led by the belief that nobody should be limited because they can't read.

Back in 1999, our founder, Katy Parkinson, began a decade of research into how an effective tool could be created to help students learn how to decode and comprehend words more effectively. Her work led to our suite of programmes, which have since been acknowledged by the National Literacy Trust and the Department for Education.

### What are the programme options?

We have Leap, which resolves phonics gaps for those who find literacy a particular challenge (and is also great for EAL students). It's based on an initial diagnostic assessment and then small-group delivery.

Lexonik Advance rapidly improves reading fluency, comprehension and spelling – resulting in an average reading age gain of 27 months in just six weekly one-hour sessions.

Vocabulary Plus is a school-wide teaching tool for explicit vocabulary instruction.

### Do teachers reap the benefit too?

Absolutely. Our teachers tell us that they love the training and



gain confidence from it. They really take great pride and joy in seeing how much more engaged their students are afterwards – not just in reading, but across their academic work as a whole.

We stay in touch with teachers, providing them with regular training and support, and of course, they can access students' progress via our online platform.

### Tell us about your company's journey to date...

We are still headquartered in the North-East, but have grown



Sarah Ledger,  
CEO of Lexonik



**Contact:**  
email [phil.luke@lexonik.co.uk](mailto:phil.luke@lexonik.co.uk),  
quoting **TEACH SECONDARY**

significantly in recent years and currently have more than 40 employees. We now teach and implement our programmes around the world too, with a growing foothold in the USA and Dubai.

We're currently delivering on a DfE grant, and are soon to reveal some even more exciting aspects to our tech offer.

### And now you're celebrating your birthday with something special?

We're marking our 15th anniversary year with the launch of our Awards, which will celebrate the amazing literacy progress stories of our customers, and acknowledge other schools that have great libraries, wonderful literacy cultures or great reading teachers.

We're also launching a very special award, in honour of our founder, Katy. You can find out more at [lexonik.co.uk/awards](http://lexonik.co.uk/awards).

## Need to know

- + An intervention provider with a literacy focus, achieving average reading age gains of 27 months in 6 weeks
- + Enables schools to easily implement a culture of literacy, alongside support and training for staff
- + Is currently celebrating its 15th birthday with the launch of an Awards scheme, aimed at recognising schools that are embracing literacy

# FOCUS ON: ENGLISH

We look at how students can apply some imaginative flair to their non-fiction writing, the language lessons that can get lost between primary and secondary – and how much grammar knowledge students *really* need...

**What creative approaches can we adopt when teaching the more technical and mechanical aspects of English use?**

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# Just the facts

Who says factual writing has to be dry? **Meera Chudasama** shows how your students can get creative with their discursive writing...

If students are to become good writers, then they will need to familiarise themselves with a range of different non-fiction texts – such as documentaries, newspaper articles, blogs and vlogs.

Just as with fiction, your students' writing can be made far richer if they try drawing on their own personal experiences when producing it. So with that in mind, let's look at how you can use different writing prompts and resources to expose your students to a range of different writing experiences.

## Documentaries

Documentaries are a great way of showing how written dialogue, scripts and essays can convey different human experiences from all around the world – whether they're as abstract as the Samskara of Indian philosophy, or as real and upsetting as the stories of children separated from their parents due to violence in Myanmar, as explored in the National Geographic documentary film, *Lost and Found*.

You can find plenty of classroom-appropriate documentaries by searching YouTube. You could share playlists of documentaries with students who can then watch them in their own time, or keep a classroom playlist to which students can add other documentaries they would recommend.

Engaging with non-fiction texts like this gives students a bank of words that they can potentially use in their own writing later. The activities that follow are all based on students viewing pre-chosen documentaries (though obviously ensure that you

watch them first, and are familiar with any documentaries you go on to use as the basis for classroom activities and discussion).

## Task 1: Changing perspectives

Students choose a person or animal featured in a documentary they've seen, and then consider the subject's experience – what can they see, hear, feel, taste and touch? This exercise gives students opportunities to explore non-fiction texts by 'living' inside the subjects and events they portray.

**Example:** Watch the documentary *Lost and Found* (runtime 20 minutes approx., see [bit.ly/ts136-DW1](https://bit.ly/ts136-DW1)) and write a short summary of the events it shows. Then consider the role Kamal Hossain plays in the Rohingya tribe, and how the children's feelings are likely to change between being lost and being found.

Finally, think about what the overall message of the documentary might be. What view of the world would a young child have, having been separated from their parents? How would their parents feel, having lost their child?

Once they've decided on who they want to write as, it may be worth having students watch the documentary again and create a word bank containing any nouns, adjectives, adverbs they might wish to use.

## Task 2: Storyboarding

Have students 'create' a new portion of an existing documentary. Begin by giving students a storyboard template comprising six frames, each with spaces for

writing immediately beneath. The storyboard has to show a clear idea, with each frame giving students the stimulus to write two to three sentences (see 'Free Resources' panel).

You can take this activity a step further by challenging the students to extend their writing. Make each frame a paragraph of their discursive

writing piece – a great activity for visual learners who like to draw.

A follow-up activity could then see the students write mini-scripts for their short documentaries, undertaken as an individual, paired or grouped task. You could even have the students attempt to film them. To keep things



focused, produce a short brief that incorporates all essential safeguarding measures.

**Task 3: Silent debate**

If the students in your class struggle to share their opinions, then a great way of starting any non-fiction writing unit can be to hold a silent debate.

First, generate a range of topics that would be of interest to them. Then write a series of statements or debate prompts on different pieces of A3 paper, place these sheets around the room and get students engaging with each statement with

their pens. These statements and prompts could include, for example:

1. Students should be graded for their handwriting
2. Should the death penalty be allowed?
3. Autonomous drivers will make our roads safer
4. Are mobile phones truly safe?
5. Social media should have a stricter age limit
6. Vaping should be banned

This activity can be scaffolded for lower ability classes by adding sentence starters below each opening statement, such as ‘*I agree*

*with ...*’, ‘*I disagree with ...*’, ‘*It’s clear from ...*’ and ‘*Evidence suggests ...*’

These sentence starters will encourage students to agree, disagree and draw on their own knowledge as evidence.

To challenge the students further, try playing Devil’s Advocate by walking around the classroom and adding some extra questions and comments of your own for the students to engage with. This way, they will be encouraged to develop their arguments further.

I would, however, recommend talking through each statement at the start of the lesson, so as to ensure that the students clearly understand the topics being debated. This will also allow you to open up ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ arguments, such as ‘*Some may say that ...*’ and ‘*Whilst others may think that ...*’

Having completed your silent debate, sheets of paper can be given to writing pairs or individual students, depending on how many statements you have printed out. Students could then write a complete piece, using the ideas written on their pieces of paper.

**Task 4: Snapshot!**

Thanks to TikTok and Instagram, young people are now used to seeing how short videos and images can quickly spark controversy. You can harness this awareness by downloading a photo related to a story currently in the news, and having your students write a short newspaper article based on what the image shows.

Alternatively, you can inspire your students by creating opportunities for *purposeful writing*. Try contacting some local businesses and influential individuals who would be happy to engage with young writers – maybe the headteacher of your school, a local magazine or someone at



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**RESOURCES**

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storyboard template  
[bit.ly/ts136-DW2](https://bit.ly/ts136-DW2)

‘Writing for purpose’  
planning template  
[bit.ly/ts136-DW3](https://bit.ly/ts136-DW3)

your local newspaper.

You can also open up space for young people to share their work with a wider audience by setting up a class blog (though it may be wise to check with your school’s DSL first, to see if and how you can set up a restricted blog for viewing by approved readers only). Have the class choose a topic, then task them with writing a series of blog posts (individually, in pairs or in groups) over time.

**Featured objects**

One further task can be to issue students with different physical objects (or printed out pictograms) and instruct them to feature said object(s) in their writing. Model what you would expect them to achieve with 20 to 30 minutes of writing time and let them work in pairs, before later sharing the writing produced as a group.

If you’re looking to support students’ writing in preparation for their GCSEs, I’ve prepared a planning sheet (see ‘Free Resources’ panel) that includes a range of five writing tasks for them to choose from.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Meera Chudasama is an English, media and film studies teacher with a passion for design and research, and has developed course content for the Chartered College of Teaching



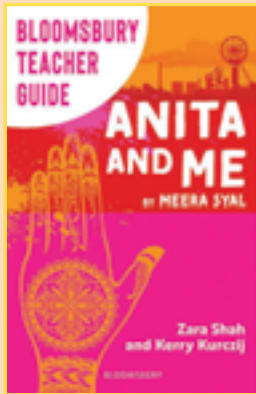
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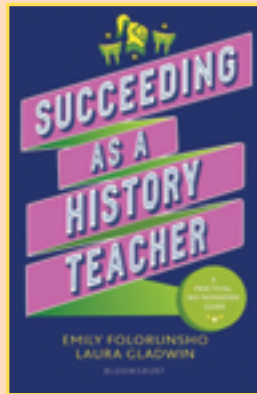
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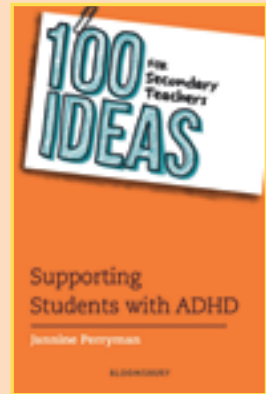
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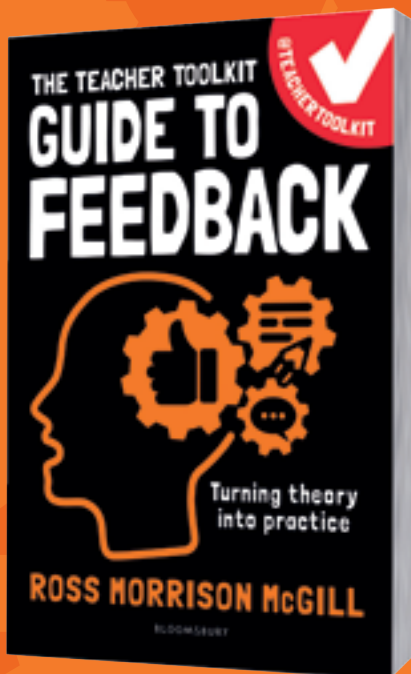


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# Whose language is it, anyway?

There's a stark disconnect between how SPaG is taught at primary and how we approach it at secondary, warns **Jenny Hampton**...

**I**n July this year, my professional and personal lives collided when I received my daughter's Y6 SATS results with a raw score and a scaled score (out of 120).

Paper 1 of the SATS is a grammar, punctuation and vocabulary test marked out of 50. My genuinely humorous daughter – an avid reader who has a brilliantly wide range of vocabulary – achieved 35 marks. I'm not sure if it was the English teacher or the parent in me who was more intrigued by those missing 15 marks...

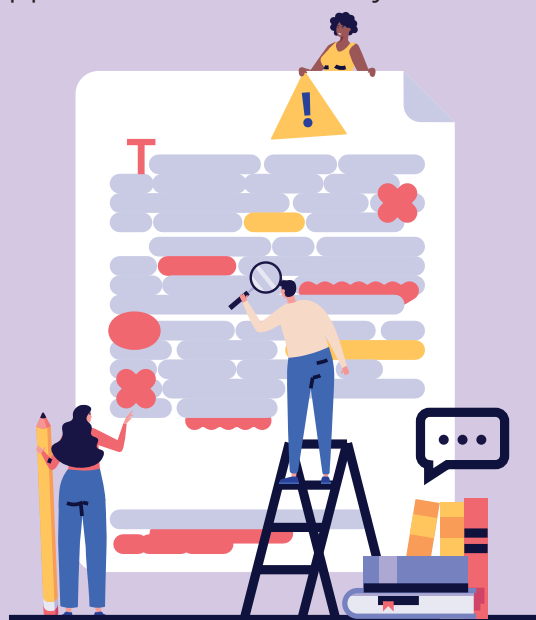
And so, for the first time, I actually attempted paper 1 of the Y6 SATS myself. For most of it, the English teacher in me nodded and thought 'Yes, this is useful, this is what they need to know; yes, this provides a shared language – word types, sentence types, tenses...' But who is *actually* sharing the language?

## Crisis in confidence

This year, 72% of students reached the expected standard when paper 1 was combined with the spelling test, which means 28% of students are quite simply not sharing the language. So what about the secondary school English teachers who will be the next stop for these outgoing Y6 students? Are *they* sharing this language?

Because, if I, an English teacher of almost 20 years and mother of a Y6 student, only properly examined the SATS papers in question on results day, how many other English teachers aren't aware of the language our students supposedly enter our classrooms with?

Could it be that we're



## “Why are we constantly going back to word types in Y7 to Y11?”

awarding grade 9s in Y11 to students when many of us couldn't really state with confidence what a 'noun phrase' is? Every English teacher will be familiar with what a preposition is, but many won't be as confident explaining what a 'preposition phrase' is, and will happily (albeit quietly) admit to not using that precise terminology when teaching, assessing, feeding back on writing, or indeed when analysing text.

And yet, both these phrases and more formed part of the paper 1 taken by Y6 students across the country. So why are we constantly going back to word types in Y7 to Y11? Why are we returning to the basics of sentences? Why is correct use of tense virtually always part of our feedback for creative writing in each year across KS3 to KS4?

## A lack of sharing

The reason is that it isn't working. The language isn't being shared. The knowledge isn't being retained. In the summer of 2023, The national average GCSE grade for English language was 4.5.

In the highly likely scenario of both primary and secondary assessment undergoing major changes in the coming years, there's no risk of any babies getting thrown out with the bathwater, given our current progress in making young people effective and accurate writers, or sparking their interest in grammar.

When the Joint Council for Qualifications published its A Level trends in the summer of 2023, English Language was among those subjects showing a decreased number of entries, while English Literature saw a slight

increase (though this was in the context of a steady decline in numbers).

## Taught with joy

It's indisputable that we need language to discuss language. It does, however, need to be a *consistent* language, accessible by all teachers and students – not one that shifts and changes form across different settings and Key Stages.

Should you find yourself in conversation with one of this year's many incoming Y7 students, ask them what a 'relative clause' is. Should you then find yourself in the company of a secondary school English teacher, ask them what an 'adverbial' is. The answers will be interesting.

This type of querying and discussion is what we need to be doing more of, and not just within our schools. We should be asking similar questions of the wider profession, within universities and even among employers.

When it comes to grammar and punctuation, students need to possess real skills and employ a shared language that's been taught and learned with joy. Our educational landscape is shifting – let's hope that something suitably seismic happens in terms of how we use language to talk about our language.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenny Hampton (@brightonteacher) is an English teacher, literacy lead and former SLE (literacy)

# What if...?

Screenwriting employs its own unique language, reflects **David Wolstencroft** – one that your students may well benefit from getting acquainted with...

**W**ho told the *first ever story*? Seriously, it must have happened *somewhere*. That one story that has shaped the way we approach all stories since.

It probably went something like this: *“Hey! I went to the valley last night. There was a huge creature there. Hairy. No, not like Tharg – even hairier. It ran at me with huge fangs. I threw a rock and ran away. Stay away from that valley, especially at night!”*

These first tales no doubt served vital purposes – to impart information, warnings, recommendations, fun holiday recipes for the whole family (okay, maybe not) – but at the bottom of it all would have been *stakes*; the magic word of all storytelling. The things that makes a story matter.

## Creating a blueprint

Stories are probably one of the reasons we’ve survived this long. A critical learning tool used across the millennia. Which is

why storytelling is taught so intensively in schools. Right? *Right...?*

To be clear, I love prose. I love books. I wouldn’t be a writer at all if my imagination hadn’t been sparked by Dr. Seuss’ wordplay, or Douglas Adams’ genius in *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. My latest book, *The Infinite Minute*, is a middle grade adventure that plays with time and time loops – inspired, no doubt, somewhere deep down by Adams again.

But those first stories weren’t written down, or even narrated. They would have been *performed* – most

likely with visuals.

I’ve been a professional screenwriter for over 30 years now (*gulp*), with most of my career having been spent writing for the screen. And at no point in my education did I ever learn how to do that.

Our first story had to have had gestures, visuals, dialogue... which sounds a lot like a screenplay.

Have you ever read a screenplay, or tried to write

one? The screenplay isn’t, at first glance, a literary medium. It’s closer to a blueprint, intended to show the movie in the mind of the reader and elicit emotion within its unique format. Screenplays paint pictures in the mind using spare language, structural discipline and psychological insight.

## Dialogue and visuals

Movies, TV shows, games – these, like it or not, are what make up our dominant storytelling culture. Pupils are exposed to them, or interact with them, far more than books. And while we don’t want pupils to read

fewer books, we do want to encourage them to write creatively in ways that they can relate to.

So what’s the difference between prose and screenwriting? Firstly, there’s the format. Screenwriting utilises a different kind of language, almost like coding, as you can see in the example opposite.

Secondly, screenwriting is all about *economy*. With a screenplay, the goal is simple – create the biggest emotional and visual impact in the least amount of words.

Thirdly, **VISUALS**. Screenwriting limits you to description and dialogue.

There are no internal thoughts allowed, and hence no lines like *“David thought for a moment about that last sentence. Was it too boring?”* Prose lets you into a character’s mind and heart. In screenwriting, we have to create every emotion without that cheat code.

## From sheet to screen

Screenwriting is a language of expression that requires discipline, economy, structure and focus. I believe it should feature as part of the curriculum

We can inspire young people to express themselves by letting them into what can seem a closed shop – the world of entertainment.

What if they saw how desperate studios are for their points of view? What if they could envision their ideas transferring from 12-point courier font to a TV screen?

Luckily for them, in screenwriting that ‘WHAT IF...?’ is the starting point of every single story.

What would yours be?



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Wolstencroft is a multi-award-winning screenwriter and author, and creator of the BBC spy drama, *Spooks*; his latest YA book, *The Infinite Minute*, is available now (£7.99, Scholastic)





## LET'S MAKE A SCENE

###

INT. MIDDLE OF THE PAGE - DAY

David looks up from his laptop, clears his throat and looks at the reader. He wipes a bead of sweat from his brow.

His Starbucks cup is half-finished.

DAVID

See, this is what a screenplay format is. You have only two ways to show the reader what your intentions are: dialogue and action lines.

David gets up. Scribbles on a piece of paper. He lifts it up to show the reader. It reads: THIS IS AN ACTION LINE.

The reader's hand reaches in and takes the paper from David.

READER

Yes, that's all very well, but how on earth do you teach something that has a format like a screenplay? It's like learning a new language. And I don't have time for that.

DAVID

I appreciate it's probably alien to many. But. It's really not that hard, and honestly quite fun. There are online resources that let you deconstruct famous scenes from movies, shows and games, while displaying the screenplay alongside them. It lets you see how powerful simple words can be.

Look - here comes another scene heading --

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A class jabbars to itself. DAVID walks in, still sweating.

DAVID

Hello, look, I'm sorry to interrupt, but we need a new superhero.

CLASS

...What?

DAVID

Yes, I just got off the phone with the Marvel people. And they told me they really need you.

CLASS

Excuse me, where's our normal teacher?

DAVID

No idea. Look. About the Marvel call. Apparently, everyone's a bit tired of the adults writing these things and they felt another generation might help... improve things. Make it more... creative? Relatable? Not sure what they said, the line wasn't great.

CLOSE ON Yasmin, a shy young 12-year-old at the back of the class Her report card next to her shows low marks in English. She hasn't found her thing yet. But her school jotter is a BEWILDERING KALEIDOSCOPE of images, characters, scenes.

She listens intently. Then her hand shoots up.

YASMIN

How do you actually do that though?

DAVID

Write a new superhero, you mean?

YASMIN

Write something that's a film. I mean... If you have ideas?

DAVID

Do you have ideas, Yasmin?

Yasmin glances down at her jotter. Yup. She nods.

DAVID

Simple, then. You start with the scene. Where you are. INTERIOR or EXTERIOR. The name of the location. And whether it's night or day.

Then - your characters appear in the middle of the page, and what they say appears below it. When characters move, or other things happen, you add it in action lines... like this. A bit like how we're doing this now.

YASMIN

Now?

DAVID

Sure. Didn't you know you're a character in a screenplay, too?

YASMIN

This is getting really meta.

Back at the head of class, David turns back to the reader.

DAVID

Good point. Anyway, you get the idea...

###

# Grammar matters

Elaine McNally reflects on the difficult balance of rules and creativity at play within the typical English lesson...

**T**ake a stroll through Twitter/X, or simply sample the opinions within your English department, and you'll likely encounter some lively debate concerning grammar instruction at KS3 and KS4.

On one side are those who argue that focusing on prescriptive grammar technicalities stifles creativity. Countering this are the grammar enthusiasts, adamant that a solid grounding in grammar is essential for successfully understanding and manipulating language. So where does that leave our students?

## The grammar dilemma

Critics of traditional grammar teaching contend that reducing language to a set of rigid rules disconnects it from meaningful communication. Many will also maintain that writing should prioritise authentic, personal responses over the ticking of grammar checkboxes and completion of abstract exercises.

Anyone who has ever encountered the dreaded fronted adverbial or the subordinating conjunction may sympathise. How many students can confidently recognise an imperative verb, but will struggle to write a coherent essay?

It's true that the rote learning of terminology won't translate into better writing or reading, because words are *slippery*. In real world contexts, the same word can perform different functions and shimmer with multiple meanings.

## Empowered students

However, there's a powerful counter-argument to this. Grammar knowledge



**“Any discussion around how writers employ words is a discussion around grammar”**

ultimately empowers students to write with clarity within the rules, and to write outside of them in original ways.

To write creatively, students must be able to understand the building blocks of language, discuss their choices and analyse the impact of those choices.

It's important, however, to see grammar as not merely the naming of parts, but as encompassing syntax, semantics, genre, style and content. With secure grammar knowledge, students can embellish or simplify sentences purposefully. Grammar should always be in service of extended writing, not a substitute for it.

Knowledge of grammar also enables students to read for meaning. If they're not provided with this strong foundation at KS3, students

may struggle to clearly express complex ideas, or appreciate the nuances of more demanding GCSE texts later on.

Understanding the syntactic impact of “Reader, I married him” in *Jane Eyre*, for example (which depends on the arrangement of subject and object to foreground Jane's remarkable agency), deepens an appreciation of its boldness and economy.

## Valuing all voices

When grammar teaching becomes overly prescriptive, it risks marginalising those students whose linguistic backgrounds don't align with normative expression. Instead, grammar instruction ought to support students with developing and incorporating their own voices – the key is finding that balance.

Any discussion around how writers employ words is a discussion around grammar – though be cautious of any labels that risk shrinking the rich polysemy of language to dull word classes.

## Creativity killer?

Labels matter less than an awareness of *what the language is doing* in the text. Effective grammar instruction must integrate theory into meaningful contexts – via, for example...

- 1. Contextual learning** Use literature and students' own writing as contextual models to teach grammatical concepts in a purposeful way, encouraging students to talk about grammatical choices
- 2. A rich diet of reading** Discuss grammar in a wide range of texts to reveal language's flexibility
- 3. Practical application** Teach students how knowledge of grammar can enhance their writing

Grammar isn't a creativity killer; it's a means of enhancing communication. Words are supple, and grammar instruction offers the joy of language play. We nurture better writers and more insightful readers by blending theory and practice.

Teach grammar in a way that doesn't constrain, but empowers. Remember – grammar *creates* style and *serves* communication. That's knowledge our students deserve.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elaine McNally (@mrsmacteach33) is an English head of department; for more information, visit her blog at [mrsmacteach33.wordpress.com](http://mrsmacteach33.wordpress.com)



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## At a glance

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# ON YOUR MARKS...

**James Crane** considers the forms of feedback that PE teachers will find most helpful – and those likely to do more harm than good...

**A**s PE teachers, we should be using a variety of feedback strategies for a number of different purposes. Ultimately, feedback has four main roles – to show students what they need to aim for, to keep them on the right path, to let them know whether they have got there or not, and to point them in the direction of the next step or target.

The key component of any type of feedback is that it is a two-way process. It should not be seen as something the teacher simply delivers to the student. It is a process in which the teacher and the student pass information back and forth between each other.

## Closing the gap

As teachers, we identify the ‘learning gap’ – the space between where students are now in their knowledge and skills, and where we want them to be – and then provide feedback aimed at closing that gap. The feedback we get from the students helps us to know exactly how to close that gap and enables us to plan what to do next.

We should always use the feedback we get from students about how they are performing in our lessons to inform our future planning. One thought to keep at the forefront of our minds, articulated succinctly by Dylan Wiliam, is that “Feedback should be more work for the recipient than the donor” (see [bit.ly/ts136-PE2](http://bit.ly/ts136-PE2)). The feedback strategies we use should fit these principles:

- Feedback that simply tells students what to do is unhelpful – ‘*When doing high jump, drive up with your inside knee.*’ This type of feedback compounds dependency.
- Feedback should make students think about their work and how they could improve it – ‘*What do you need to do to ensure your lead leg doesn’t clip the bar on your way up?*’ This type of feedback develops

## “Too often, PE teachers use ‘non-doers’ as coaches, or to provide feedback for a partner”

- autonomy.
- Feedback should make students do something to improve. If it doesn’t achieve this, then it is a waste of time – ‘*Now you have identified that the lead leg is too close to the bar, re-mark your run up, practise the take-off element and correct your distances.*’

## Self-checking

In both practical and theory PE, there are some things that are either correct or incorrect (e.g. labelling the cardiac cycle, serving in badminton, definitions of the components of fitness, a lay-up in basketball).

In theory lessons, the most efficient way to give students feedback is to go through the answers with them, asking them to check their work as you go. Students should get into the habit of amending their mistakes as you work through the answers. In practical lessons, this is usually down to the outcome of the skill. The feedback

should be on the teaching points, so that students can self-check which teaching point they aren’t getting right, therefore impacting the success of the skill.

In both practical and theory lessons, the teacher can scan the room and see how the students are getting on. From this, you can see if there are any common misconceptions or mistakes that the students have made, reteaching the topic or

(as individuals and as a whole class), requires students to address their mistakes, and most importantly, is manageable and sustainable for the teacher.

## Live Marking

Live marking is a highly effective strategy in both practical and theory PE. We want to give students feedback about their understanding of a specific concept or skill there and then. This will also limit the chances of misconceptions becoming embedded. While students are answering questions, look in their books, focusing on the current key learning for that lesson.

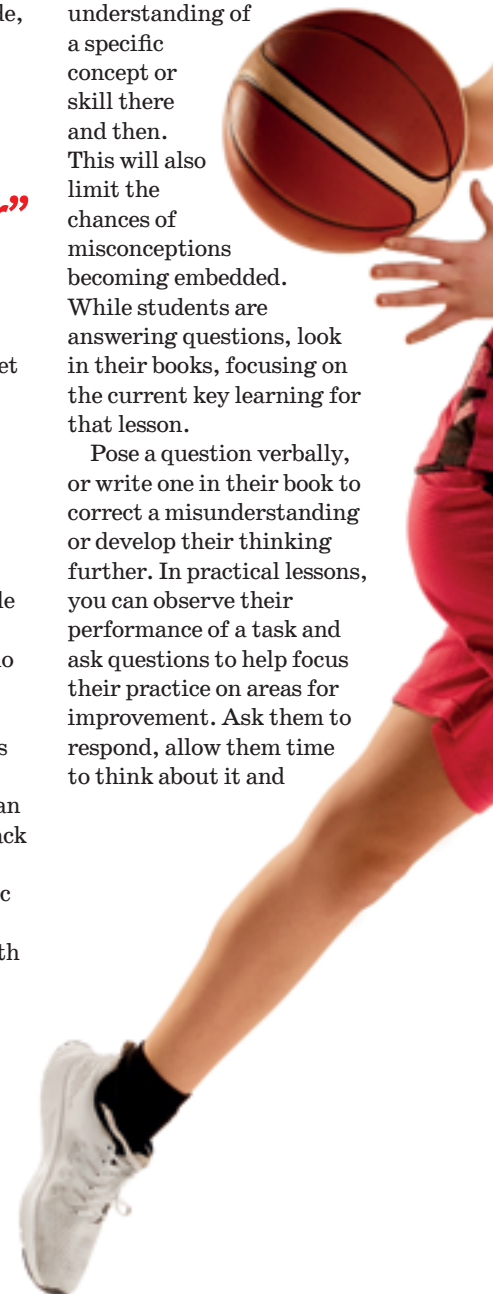
Pose a question verbally, or write one in their book to correct a misunderstanding or develop their thinking further. In practical lessons, you can observe their performance of a task and ask questions to help focus their practice on areas for improvement. Ask them to respond, allow them time to think about it and

providing whole-class feedback if required.

Following retrieval practice quizzes, you can get more detailed feedback on how the class has done by simply asking them how many out of ten they got correct. The point here is that we don’t just want to know how many a student got right; we want to be able to know where students struggled, what students do and don’t know.

This can be developed further by asking for hands up for a correct response after each question. This can be useful, as it gives feedback to the teacher on whether there is one particular topic or question that a lot of students are struggling with in terms of recall or understanding. This may require immediate intervention from the teacher.

This approach is an effective form of feedback, as it gives both the teacher and the students instant feedback on performance



Step	Action	Completed?
1	Box the command word, circle the marks, identify the correct structure of the response	
2	Underline the key words and the sport. Define the key words.	
3	Apply the key words to the relevant sport.	
4	Give five AO3 sentences, leading to a well-rounded conclusive comment.	



move away. Come back in a few minutes to check that they have responded. This is a useful feedback strategy, as it requires immediate action from the student.

Obviously, it is unrealistic to think that you will be able to do this for every student in every lesson. However, once you get into the habit of doing this while circling the classroom, over the course of a week or a unit of work you will be able to get around every student.

### Checklists

All too often, PE teachers use 'non-doers' (students who are injured or otherwise unable to take part in the practical lesson) as coaches or to provide feedback for a partner. Understanding assessment criteria or identifying areas of weakness in a practical performance, however, requires expert subject knowledge.

Understanding and articulating the specifics about how to improve is hard enough as it is for some adults. It could therefore be reasonably suggested that students might struggle to provide accurate, detailed and correct feedback. There is a very real risk that by misinterpreting the criteria, students will give *incorrect* feedback to either their peers or themselves and embed misconceptions.

A way to try to alleviate this is through the use of

checklists. If they are concise and specific, they can be given to students who are tackling problems – perhaps a theoretical concept or task in a theory lesson, or the development of a certain skill in a practical lesson – to help them ensure that they are responding appropriately. The checklist will provide students with an evaluative resource which they can use while completing their work.

For example, students often struggle with answering 9-mark questions. Rather than waiting for them to make the mistakes and having to provide individual feedback later, why not first provide students with a checklist form they can use, like the example pictured above?

### Whole-class feedback

When I think back to my NQT year, I would spend a lot of time walking around the room giving students feedback on individual mistakes that they were making. If I had paused and taken a step back, I would have noticed that the mistakes could have been rectified by stopping the task and giving some *whole-class feedback*.

Besides the obvious time-saving benefits, this gives you more control over the interpretation of your feedback. If you offer 32 different pieces of feedback, it is very difficult to control how they're interpreted, or what is done with them.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- ▶ Do you ensure that students respond to the feedback that you give them?
- ▶ Does your feedback help to inform your planning?
- ▶ Are students given sufficient time and guidance to interpret and use your feedback?
- ▶ Are your feedback techniques manageable and sustainable?
- ▶ How do you ensure that the feedback you give is actioned by students?
- ▶ Do you use formative assessment strategies to support your targeted feedback?

Whole-class feedback can help you restore this control by, for example, letting you tweak a drill so that the focus of the students' practice is sharpened in line with the feedback you have just given.

The power of feedback lies in what students do with it. Following verbal feedback, it is therefore important to check students' understanding of what they have been told, and how they are going to use it to change something in their work.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Crane is assistant headteacher at Durrington High School and deputy director at Durrington Research School; this article is based on excerpt from his book, *Making Every PE Lesson Count – Six Principles to Support Great Physical Education Teaching* (£14.99, Crown House Publishing)

# What's New?

Our pick of the latest solutions and innovations for secondary education

## 1 Resit success

Have you thought about how to support students who didn't make the grade this summer? Absence rates were high during the last academic year. Many students missed out on crucial components of their KS4 studies, with some students failing to achieve the grades they needed to access courses or careers.



At Academy21, post-16 students can prepare for their GCSE resits in our safe online environment, away from the stigma of joining younger year groups, while continuing with their further learning or vocational studies.

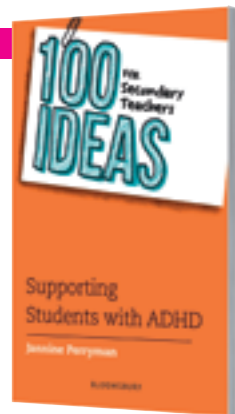
If you're interested in learning how Academy21 can benefit your students, improve their grades in core subjects and meet their goals, then speak to our team today – contact [contact@academy21.co.uk](mailto:contact@academy21.co.uk) or visit [academy21.co.uk](http://academy21.co.uk)

## 2 Ideas worth sharing

The *100 Ideas* series offers teachers practical, easy-to-implement strategies and activities for the classroom. Each title is authored by an expert in their field who is passionate about sharing best practice with their peers.

*100 Ideas for Secondary Teachers: Supporting Students with ADHD*, from experienced teacher and ADHD Wise ([adhdwise.uk](http://adhdwise.uk)) founder Jannine Perryman, is packed with evidence-based, tried and tested strategies for supporting neurodivergent learners, as well as those they share a classroom with.

Save 30% on this series and more in the Bloomsbury Education Back to School Sale – visit [bloomsbury.com/B2Ssale](http://bloomsbury.com/B2Ssale) for more details. Ends 30th September.



## 3 Literary inspiration

Bring your pupils, teachers and librarians closer to the award-winning and groundbreaking books from publisher, Hachette Children's Group with:

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- Contact with authors for events at your school



Our extensive range spans fantastic non-fiction to well-loved authors, including Cressida Cowell, Kes Gray, David Almond, Patrice Lawrence and Matthew Syed. Did you know that schools also receive a 30% discount when they buy directly from us? Find out more at [hachetteschools.co.uk](http://hachetteschools.co.uk)



## 4 Unlock your potential

The History Teacher Development Programme is an online course aimed at teachers who want to refocus their attention on teaching ambitious and rigorous history.

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Engage with mentors and peers nationwide, gain insights from experts and rediscover the joy of teaching history. Empower yourself to excel and inspire your students by visiting [history.org.uk/go/HTDP](http://history.org.uk/go/HTDP) or by calling **0300 100 0223**.



## 5

### The thrill of learning

Mount Cook Adventure Centre is a unique venue for exciting residentials designed to boost independence, confidence and communication among secondary school students.

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**6 Free AI resources**

Experience AI is an educational programme that provides cutting-edge resources on artificial intelligence and machine learning to teachers and students aged 11 to 14. Developed by the Raspberry Pi Foundation in collaboration with Google DeepMind, the programme offers a range of free teaching resources, including

adaptable lesson plans, slide decks, worksheets and videos. All our resources are designed to get young people passionate about the subject, and are accessible to all educators – regardless of subject expertise or technical experience.

Ready to inspire your students? Download our Experience AI resources today at [experience-ai.org](http://experience-ai.org) and help prepare the next generation of AI innovators.

**7 Free space education**

As part of the UK Space Agency’s Space to Learn programme, the National Space Academy is offering space science workshops, careers conferences and space camps to UK secondary students – completely free of charge.

Space Camps are taking place across the UK, providing students with exciting and immersive space science experiences that feature hands-on activities and talks from STEM professionals. The one-day Careers Conference events, meanwhile, allow your students to explore the huge variety of space careers out there, and hear from real space industry professionals.

Finally, the Space Masterclasses are delivered by specially trained science teachers, who can visit your school to conduct a curriculum-linked workshop of your choice. Learn more and apply at [nationalspaceacademy.org/space-to-learn](http://nationalspaceacademy.org/space-to-learn), or email [spacetolearn@spacecentre.co.uk](mailto:spacetolearn@spacecentre.co.uk).



**8**

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Featuring over 200 hours of research-based professional development modules from leading practitioners – including Sue Cowley, Jon Hutchinson and Susie Spolander – BlueSky Learning offers flexible CPD for teachers and school staff.

Designed to enhance current knowledge, develop new skills and improve strategies to support classroom teaching, the library covers literacy, behaviour management, metacognition, supporting SEND, safeguarding, instructional coaching, staff wellbeing and much more. Each evidence-based module includes interactive supporting activities to embed learning.

An annual subscription to BlueSky Learning starts at just £375, providing unlimited access for your entire school workforce. You can also get a sense of what to expect by streaming the first two episodes of the BlueSky Learning Literacy podcast through Spotify, via [bit.ly/ts135-BSLP](http://bit.ly/ts135-BSLP); For more information, visit [blueskylearning.co.uk](http://blueskylearning.co.uk)



**9**

**Diabetes support**

The InDependent Diabetes Trust offers support and information to people with diabetes, their families and health professionals on the issues that are important to them. Its helpline offers a friendly, understanding ear when the going gets tough. IDDT supplies information packs to parents and teachers so they understand the needs of children with diabetes in school, and provides much-needed aid to children with diabetes in developing countries.

Diabetes can cause serious long-term complications, with a cure still elusive, which is why IDDT also funds essential research. As a registered charity, IDDT relies entirely on voluntary donations. For more information or to join, visit [iddtinternational.org](http://iddtinternational.org)



**10**

**Shakespeare workshops**

Deepen your students’ understanding of Shakespeare with workshops and teacher training from Shakespeare’s Globe. Students can enjoy Lively Action workshops, which can be tailored to the play and learning objectives of your choice, and are packed full of practical exercises aimed at helping to unlock Shakespeare’s language and characters. Workshops can take place at Shakespeare’s Globe on London’s Bankside or in your school – find out how to get a 20% discount on workshops booked at Shakespeare’s Globe on page 76 of this issue.

Teachers can also acquire new tools and techniques for bringing Shakespeare to life in the classroom with the help of our Continuing Professional Development sessions held at Shakespeare’s Globe or online – for more details, visit [shakespearesglobe.com/learn/secondary-schools](http://shakespearesglobe.com/learn/secondary-schools)

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# LEARNING LAB

## IN THIS ISSUE

- + What it takes to keep your school's reputation safe
- + Why keeping your word is a cornerstone of effective behaviour management
- + The school that created its own 'Global Issues' curriculum
- + Are A Level students getting a sufficiently broad education?
- + The key factors behind Burnage Academy for Boys' academic and pastoral success
- + A lesson in how Black soldiers shaped the British Army
- + New approaches to perennial behaviour issues

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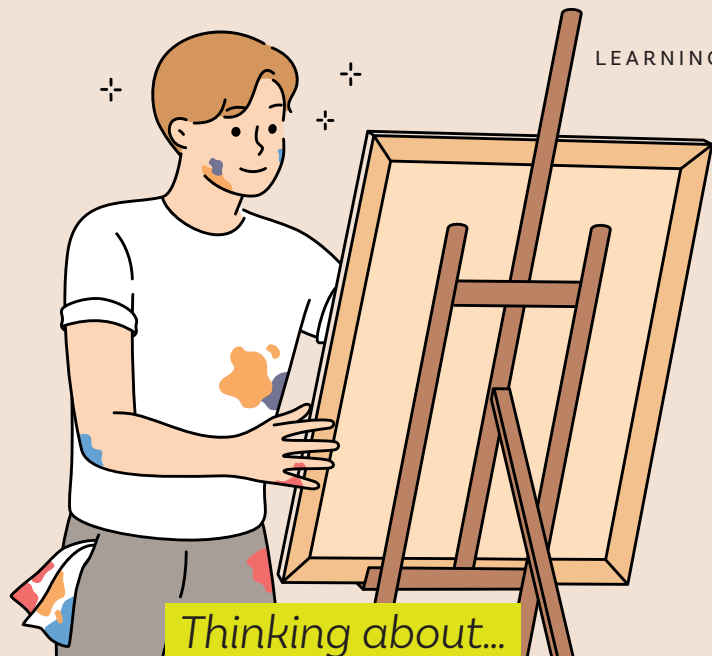
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## THE LEARNING LEAP IN ART

As with any subject, art demands a step up from KS3 to KS4. This is the point at which a student's contextual references, choice and use of media, and personal evaluation all need to demonstrate reflective thought.

Contextual research is a great place from which to help students move on from opinion and towards analysis. Make sure they know the background, reason or meanings behind the pieces they are studying, so that they can drop the 'I like' comments in favour of discussing whether the work is *successful* or not, as assessed against why the work was made.

Does the work communicate what the artist intended? Can they back up their conclusions, based on direct observations of the work? In pieces such as Picasso's 'Guernica', the message is blindingly clear – students can easily identify elements within it to back up their analysis – but with other pieces, such as a Rothko's 'Colour Fields', this will be much more challenging.

When it comes to developing students' skills, it can be tempting to provide lists of processes, as this can be a great way of helping them to build a range of work. What we must avoid, however, is *only* giving them lists.

What I therefore do is schedule in 'Golden Weeks' – so called because they're designed to give students a week during which they can create work that is truly theirs, and thus exciting and personal to them. The

students get to select from the processes they'll have been introduced to so far, and then proceed to revisit them in ways relevant to what they're working on.

This can be tied back into the contextual change described above – 'What are you, the artist, wanting to achieve? How will your media choices, and the ways you use them, help you to meet that objective?'

Remember – what we're looking to cultivate here is not the students' ability to express their liking for something, but their capacity for *critical reflection*. A word of warning, though – some students will fly when tasked with doing this, while others may fall completely.

Making your own critical and purposeful choices is hard, but doing this will give your most able students the chance to take real ownership of their work. Others can be supported in making progress through scaffolding. Creative subjects expect this level of autonomy, which is what makes them so powerful and important.

When the students' final pieces are completed and evaluations are being written, at least some can hopefully now assess their work and developmental experiments from the start, just as an artist would. I certainly hope that they *like* their work – but if they can lay out their objectives and clearly discuss their successful (or otherwise) outcomes, then you will have produced art students of the highest caliber.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hannah Day is head of art, media and film at Ludlow College

## CLOSE-UP ON... SAFEGUARDING YOUR REPUTATION



For education providers, maintaining a positive reputation isn't just about good publicity – it's about securing and maintaining the trust of students, parents, staff and the wider community.

I've witnessed first-hand the critical importance of safeguarding reputations and nurturing trust within education communities during times of crisis. From data breaches to tribunals, effective and sensitive communication isn't just desirable, but imperative. Here are six practices schools can adopt to strengthen their relationships when navigating a crisis:

### 1. PLANNING

Proactive planning is the foundation of effective crisis management and communications. A school's SLT should anticipate challenges and develop communications strategies tailored to their audiences and priorities with links to their critical incident plan and risk register. Present these annually to all staff and support them with regular

training for key personnel to ensure clarity around your crisis response.

### 2. COLLABORATION

Schools shouldn't operate in isolation. Partnering with advisors – legal experts or crisis communications specialists, for example – can provide SLTs with invaluable skills during tough times. Institutions can then later leverage these partnerships for impartial expertise and advice on how to navigate complex issues with confidence, while focusing on the day job of educating their students.

### 3. TRANSPARENCY

In a crisis, educational leaders must prioritise honest, open and timely communication with all stakeholders, acknowledging any challenges and their impacts, while also articulating a clear pathway forward.

### 4. EMPATHY

Every crisis has a human dimension. Leaders must approach communications

with empathy and sensitivity, recognising the emotions and concerns of those affected. By demonstrating compassion and understanding, providers can foster a culture of inclusivity and support.

### 5. REFLECTION

Crisis communications plans and procedures should be regularly reviewed and evaluated to identify any areas for improvement. Through a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, schools and universities can enhance their resilience and responsiveness to evolving challenges.

### 6. EMPOWERMENT

Building trust is an ongoing effort that requires SLTs to actively engage with their communities and empower them to participate in relevant decision-making processes. This will enable schools to forge yet stronger bonds of trust that will ultimately stand the test of time.

## DO THIS

### STICK TO YOUR WORD

Exercise better class control with these tips from Robin Launder...

The old adage is true – actions really do speak louder than words. But it's also true that if you actually do what you say you're going to do, then those words will be as convincing as your actions.

If you tell the class you're going to return their homework on Tuesday, then return it on Tuesday. If you tell a student you're going to phone his mum to let her know how hard he's working, then phone her.

If you tell another student that you'll be able to help her with her project at break, then be there waiting.

The same applies to sanctions. If a sanction is stipulated in your school behaviour policy or classroom contract, or you've said it's going to happen, then make it happen.

When what you do is what you say, then what you say will carry the weight of what you do. So stick to your word.

**Robin Launder is a behaviour management consultant and speaker; find more tips in his weekly Better Behaviour online course – for more details, visit [behaviourbuddy.co.uk](http://behaviourbuddy.co.uk)**



**SOPHIE BAILLIE IS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, HEAD OF CLIENT SERVICES AT CONSCIOUS COMMUNICATIONS – A PUBLICITY AGENCY THAT REGULARLY WORKS WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS; FOR MORE DETAILS, CONTACT [SOPHIE.BAILLIE@CONSCIOUSCOMMS.COM](mailto:sophie.baillie@consciouscomms.com)**

# 57.8%

The proportion of schools participating the 2023/24 National Tutoring Programme – down from 76% at the same point during the 2022/23 programme

Source: DfEh

Maths teachers can take comfort from a report recently produced by the maths tutoring and intervention specialist Axiom Maths, which would seem to upend the widespread perception that a general antipathy towards maths exists among the wider population.

Drawing on survey data gathered by Public First in March of this year, the report notes that 45% of respondents stated that they actively enjoyed maths, compared to 26% who said they didn't and 28% who felt indifferent towards the subject.

One telling finding was that 46% of the respondents believed themselves to be 'better than average' at mental arithmetic, versus 17% who happily admitted to being worse than average. Irrespective of their own perceived abilities, however, there was broad consensus regarding the importance of maths, with 76% of those polled agreeing that maths was 'an essential part of everyday life'.

Nor does the popular stereotype of the 'maths geek' seem quite as entrenched as it once was, with only 15% agreeing with the statement that 'mathematical people tend to be antisocial' and 51% disagreeing. And maths teachers may be more heartened still to hear that respondents

were more likely (58%) than unlikely (20%) to go on a date with someone they knew was 'really interested in maths'. Though one interesting statistical anomaly was that those most likely to perceive mathematicians as being anti-social were also those most likely to want to date one...

Axiom's 'Maths education in England 2023-24' report can be downloaded in full via [bit.ly/ts136-LL3](https://bit.ly/ts136-LL3)

## WHY WE CREATED...

### THE 'GLOBAL ISSUES' CURRICULUM



Discussing complex and sensitive subjects and events with young people can be difficult – particularly when it comes to some of the opinions shared on social media, and the rapid spread of online misinformation.

As educators, we have a responsibility – alongside parents – to help students discern fact from fiction, while providing them with a platform for sharing their views and expressing themselves in a way that's safe, supported and respectful.

It's for this reason that we at Judgemeadow Community College wanted to go beyond our classroom discussions, by creating something new that could both help students better understand the world around them, and empower them through meaningful social action.

These efforts commenced in 2021, coinciding with an outbreak of violence between Israel and Palestine and the initial imposition of COVID-19 restrictions. Our students were expressing feelings of confusion, frustration and angst – and while these issues wouldn't ordinarily be topics we would cover in the curriculum, we wanted to provide a safe space for them to explore and talk about them.

These discussions would need to take place in a controlled environment, with fidelity to the facts against a well-informed context, while also ensuring that

exchanges would be largely non-partisan and de-politicised. In doing so, we quickly recognised just how passionate our students were about making an impact on causes that mattered to them.

Alongside staff from across the Trust, we therefore developed our own 'Global Issues Curriculum'. As part of our personal development curriculum, we dedicate one lesson per term to a series of topics and themes.

Since being implemented, these topics have included the refugee crisis, women's rights, the conflict in Ukraine and climate change. The lessons involve 30 minutes of teacher input, followed by questions intended to spark classroom debate and further explorations.

We then decide on what social action to take, thus giving young people opportunities to make their voices heard. Past examples have included silent vigils, penning letters of hope, visiting food hubs and taking part in an eco-rally (pictured above).

We want to help students achieve academically, of course – but it's also our mission to support them in developing socio-emotional skills. We want them to have the knowledge and skills needed to identify facts, as well as a sense of confidence that their actions can positively impact upon wider society and the world around them.



DILAN SAVJANI IS DIRECTOR OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AT JUDGEMEADOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE, PART OF LIONHEART EDUCATIONAL TRUST

# 25%

of disadvantaged pupils achieved grade 5 or above in their English and maths GCSEs in 2022/23, compared to 52% among those not known to be disadvantaged

Source: 'Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged children' report by the National Audit Office

## Need to know

A new report from the National Foundation for Educational Research has found that post-16 students are opting to study a significantly narrower range of subjects than was the case 20 years ago.

Researchers identified a sharp reduction in the range of subjects taken at A Level starting in 2015/16, coinciding with reforms that saw AS Levels no longer counting towards overall A Level grades. At that time, 56% of AS or A Level students were studying at least one humanities subject; by 2021/22, that proportion was down to 38%.

The report also highlights a growing homogeneity among students' KS5 subject choices, with more students taking AS and A Levels from a single subject group, such as social sciences or STEM. It estimates that the proportion of students making 'single subject group' course selections rose from 21% in 2015/16 to 36% in 2021/22.

As for why this is happening, the report points to a gradual narrowing of the subject choices available to students as a key factor. Virtually all post-16 providers offer courses under the banners of humanities, social sciences, the arts and so forth, but multiple individual subjects have seen precipitous declines in entries – particularly French.

The report can be accessed in full via [bit.ly/ts136-LL2](https://bit.ly/ts136-LL2)



## WHAT WE DO... BURNAGE ACADEMY FOR BOYS

Burnage Academy for Boys is unique, yet not in the ways you may expect. Our Manchester school is impacted by a range of social issues tied to the inner-city, and we navigate a moving landscape on a daily basis.

With over 40 languages spoken by our 1,000 boys, we're diverse and we're vibrant. Like so many other schools, staff here work tirelessly to make sure that pupils reach their potential. So far, not so different. Aside from relative rarity of being a non-selective school for boys, what makes Burnage Academy for Boys stand out?

### CARING FOR ALL

We don't claim to have all of the answers. What we do works for our context and for our boys, and right now they need support, given the gap in performance between them and girls.

Why do we believe we were named Tes Secondary School of the Year? What made us go from being rated Requires Improvement by Ofsted in 2016, to Outstanding in 2018 and again in 2024?

One of our school values is 'care,' which applies to our staff, pupils and families. It's crucial that staff feel valued and that they're given the tools they need. Termly 'wellbeing days' are given to all teaching staff, where they can take a day out of school, providing the majority of their lessons can be voluntarily covered from within their department.

Staff are happy to cover for each other, as they know the favour will be returned. This way, they can attend those important family occasions, or simply take some time for themselves. Planning time is furthermore protected, team-teaching is the norm, resources are shared and feedback policies are devised with a focus on efficiency for both staff and pupils.

This all fosters a team ethic that has been described as being like a family, and which filters through to pupils, who see that their

teachers work closely together and are being supported.

In terms of how we extend care to the pupils, we're proud to have been awarded the Educate North Award for mental health and wellbeing. Our pastoral structure – with 'Houses' rather than year groups – means that pupils have the same House Leader for their five years with us, creating strong relationships between the school, our pupils and their families. A team of mentors, therapists and counsellors, as well as regular collaborations with experts, mean that all aspects of wellbeing are covered, which the boys can talk about openly during their weekly 'personal development' lessons.

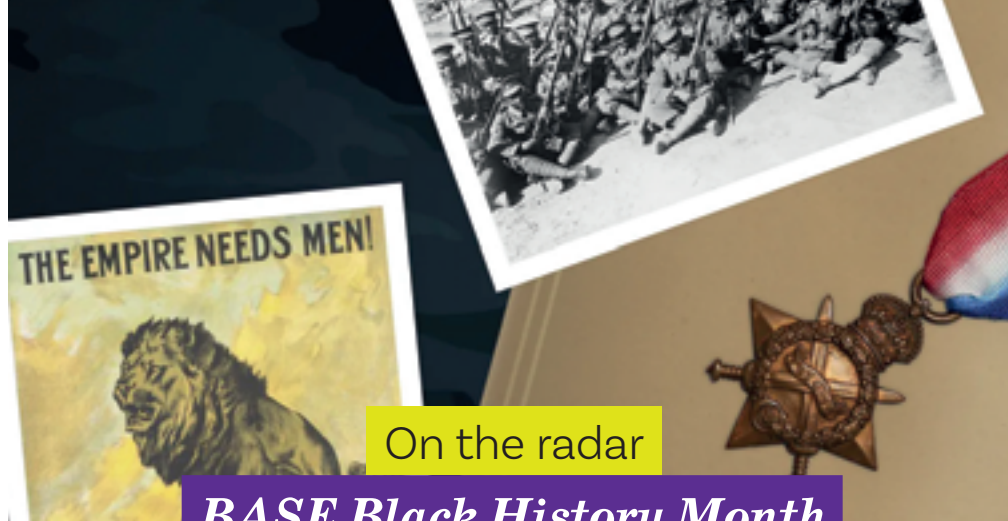
### FOCUSING ON THE BOYS' NEEDS

Putting this together and focusing on each pupil as an individual results in incredible outcomes. Staff have developed superb relationships with pupils, and the boys know they can trust their teachers.

The progress of boys at Burnage is consistently amongst the highest in the country, demonstrating that no matter the starting point, boys here *will* reach their potential. We recognise the fact that many pupils don't have the chance to develop their cultural capital outside of school, so we devote significant curriculum time to taking pupils out and broadening their horizons. This activity includes visits to the countryside, museums and local historical sites, and further afield, courtesy of our partner school in France. Our extra-curricular offer gives pupils the chance to try a wide range of activities outside of class too, which does just as much to support their academic development as excellent teaching.

A school community that feels cared for. Pupils that trust their teachers. A curriculum that looks outwards, and not just to exam results. These all combine to give boys at Burnage the passport to future success.

**GREG MORRISON IS ASSOCIATE ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER AT BURNAGE ACADEMY FOR BOYS, WINNER OF SECONDARY SCHOOL OF THE YEAR AT THE TES SCHOOLS AWARDS 2024; FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [BURNAGE.MANCHESTER.SCH.UK](https://burnage.manchester.sch.uk)**



On the radar

## BASE Black History Month

The ways in which Black History has shaped the British Armed Forces can be a fertile topic to prepare for classroom discussion, especially as Black History Month gets underway.

The British Army Supporting Education team has developed free modern educational resources intended to help teachers do precisely that. The PSHE/ wellbeing- and citizenship-linked resources are aimed at KS3/4 and contain materials for organising a themed lesson, with an accompanying assembly.

The resources seek to

explore the stories of Black British, African and Caribbean service personnel, highlighting the contributions made by Black Army personnel throughout history – including shedding light on the significant, yet underreported roles of Black women.

The lesson takes students on an illuminating tour of diverse experiences faced by Black soldiers during WWI, interspersed with thoughts and observations from currently enlisted Black soldiers. The assembly is meanwhile conceived as a springboard for conversations

around Black History – be it as part of an event to specifically mark Black History Month, to coincide with your school's Remembrance Day activities, or as a reflective general assembly. Linked to KS3 history and KS3/4 citizenship, the assembly celebrates historically unsung Black heroes who served in the British Army, and reflects on how their stories have informed the experiences of Black soldiers serving in the present day.

For more information, visit [bit.ly/ts136-LL1](http://bit.ly/ts136-LL1)

## TRENDING

Our pick of the recent resources and launches teachers might find useful...

### SAFEGUARDING STARTER

E-learning provider High Speed Training has made a safeguarding INSET day pack available to all schools as a free download. The pack contains presentations, videos and staff handouts that cover how to identify concerns, report issues and cultivate an effective safeguarding culture, among other areas.

[bit.ly/ts136-LL4](http://bit.ly/ts136-LL4)

### HAVE YOUR SAY

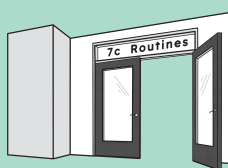
A team based at the University of Northampton is currently seeking the views of parents and carers of children removed from mainstream schooling. The 20-minute survey will form part of a wider research project, examining the barriers and enablers affecting children and young people's access to education.

[bit.ly/ts136-LL5](http://bit.ly/ts136-LL5)

## TEACHER WALKTHROUGH

### REFRAMING BEHAVIOUR – PART 5

PART 5 OF AN ILLUSTRATED EXPLAINER, BASED ON A BLOGPOST FROM @TEACHLEADAALI



1

#### RELENTLESS AND RIGOROUS ROUTINES

Positive behaviour starts with a reliable framework. Routines are as important as any behaviour management you might employ and should never change.



2

#### SILENCE IS YOUR FRIEND

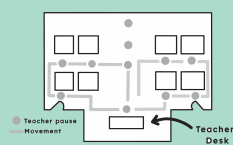
Use silent tasks to set the tone of the lesson. Starting or finishing with a quiz or test in silence helps build the right environment for students to learn appropriately.



3

#### TONE AND BODY LANGUAGE

Be mindful of how you use your voice when teaching – a careful use of tone and body language is hugely important when creating positive behaviour in the classroom.



4

#### MOVE AROUND THE CLASSROOM

Be deliberate with your movement and try to visit each desk at least once per lesson. Positioning during tasks is an effective tool when dealing with low level behaviour issues.



5

#### CONDEMN ACTIONS

Modelling behaviour and expectations to the class, rather than highlighting individuals, will give students more opportunities to correct their behaviour.

ZEPH BENNETT IS A PE TEACHER AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT LEADER WITH 25 YEARS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE; YOU CAN FIND MORE OF HIS EDUCATIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY FOLLOWING @PEGEEKSCORNER

Got a great learning idea? Email [editor@teachsecondary.com](mailto:editor@teachsecondary.com) or tweet us at [@teachsecondary](https://twitter.com/teachsecondary)

ENGLISH

# Develop Brilliant Speaking

We examine a resource that sets out to help children find their true voice and grow in confidence...



## AT A GLANCE

- A new customisable teacher resource for boosting KS3 oracy skills in English
- Tried and tested lesson plans, PowerPoints, videos and worksheets
- Challenges all learners with inspiring activities on relatable topics
- Supports the transition from primary to secondary school
- High-quality, evidence-informed oracy teaching

REVIEW BY JOHN DABELL

Oracy skills need to be taught, just as we routinely teach the skills of literacy, mathematics, science and so on. It could even be argued that oracy is the beating heart of a school, being both a curricular and pedagogical concern that improves cognitive development and academic achievement.

The issue, however, is that while many teachers possess knowledge of what oracy skills are, some will lack confidence in challenging and stretching pupils' speaking and listening abilities. Teaching oracy *well* is something that can require considerable amounts of CPD.

Enter *Develop Brilliant Speaking* – an exciting teacher pack developed by assistant headteacher Djamila Boothman, which focuses on teaching and improving speaking and listening skills in the classroom, alongside strategies for promoting and embedding oracy across the curriculum.

Written by a leading secondary school teacher, the contents are packed with practical advice, guidance and tips for improving oracy at Y7. At its heart, this resource is all about empowerment via helping students to find their voices, and confidently articulate and air their thoughts and feelings. This they do through activities that variously touch on debating, interthinking, speech-writing, listening, responding and working collaboratively.

*Develop Brilliant Speaking* contains 10 punchy lesson plans with accompanying

PowerPoints – the latter of which include an introduction to oracy, as well as presentations on non-verbal aspects of oracy, working with others, active listening and ways of boosting confidence.

The customisable lesson plans come complete with worksheets, homework activities, engaging tasks and even some thought-provoking videos, which, as you'd expect, present many prompts for class discussions. There are also additional notes to support oracy across the curriculum, along with guidance on how to continue developing these skills post-Y7.

What's interesting is how the pack doesn't just focus on one category of oracy *per se*, but also encompasses physical, linguistic, cognitive and cultural, social and emotional oracy. There's a clear recognition that oracy skills are perhaps best embedded across the teaching and learning of *all* subjects – thus making this resource a sound springboard for fostering a whole school approach to oracy, since it contains subject-specific suggestions for practice across the school.

Oracy remains a hot topic. Research has shown that the most effective classroom talk occurs when teachers have a clear sense of how to provide supportive and productive contexts for said talk, where participation and productive dialogue is actively encouraged. This resource can serve as a transformative teacher training tool and professional development toolkit, in the service of helping students develop into more articulate and active citizens.

# Collins

teach  
SECONDARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ Slots easily into any KS3 scheme of work
- ✓ Builds social skills and empathy, while facilitating meaningful interactions
- ✓ Supports efforts at improving social mobility and equity
- ✓ Prepares students for participation in the wider world
- ✓ Can improve academic outcomes

## PICK UP IF...

...you are looking to unlock the power of effective communication, and help your Y7 students become more confident and articulate individuals.  
...you want to ensure that student voice is an essential aspect of the secondary school experience.

Priced at £75; find out more at [collins.co.uk/DevelopBrilliantSpeaking](http://collins.co.uk/DevelopBrilliantSpeaking)



CPD



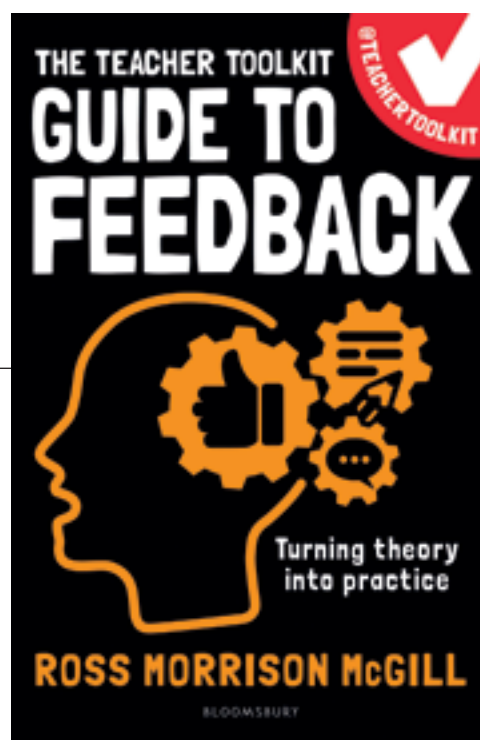
# The Teacher Toolkit Guide to Feedback

Keen to improve your use of feedback but unsure where to start? The answers you seek may well be here...

## AT A GLANCE

- Focuses on techniques to transform feedback practice
- Details nine real-life case study examples
- Presents scaffolded ideas, worked examples, infographics, charts, diagrams and templates
- Contains a range of recommendations, tips and suggestions for applying feedback ideas
- Features a foreword penned by Professor John Hattie

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



The term 'feedback' can cover a whole spectrum of assessment practices, ideas and approaches. Unfortunately, however, it's tended to be the case that one or two types of feedback dominate at the expense of others, to the point of shaping wider narratives around inspection and education.

In *The Teacher Toolkit Guide to Feedback*, Ross Morrison McGill seeks to engage with all the varieties of formative assessment that teachers might turn to, and covers a range of strategies for use both inside and outside the classroom. The book presents an admirably nuanced picture of the feedback methods teachers can draw on, showcasing what effective verbal, non-verbal and written feedback looks like.

A series of chapter-length case studies delve into particular assessment challenges, documenting how the relevant school sought to address it, and the results their actions had. Each study then concludes by highlighting the crucial role that feedback techniques played in each respective scenario, and how well they support students in answering three crucial questions of themselves - 'Where am I going?', 'How am I doing?' and 'Where to next?'

Outside of the case study chapters, readers can expect a rich mix of writing around the latest research and evidence concerning feedback, plus lots of practical advice. These different sides to the book are presented in a clear, user-friendly way that

could well inspire you to give ideas such as the 'Orange Box approach', 'the KFC method' and the 'Praise, probe, identify, plan and lock' a try within your own setting.

QR codes peppered throughout the book contain helpful links to further reading and research - including an additional welcome message from McGill, as well as notes on the different factors that can influence feedback, aspects of social research, further case study nuggets and accompanying downloads.

A defining feature of the book is how it eschews any surplus - stripping away the dense edu-jargon in favour of breaking down the theory involved in feedback down to its essentials, thus enabling teachers to grasp the essence of the ideas the book discusses without being bamboozled.

The valuable insights, useful advice and real-world examples found within *The Teacher Toolkit Guide to Feedback* should go some way towards helping you realise those benefits within your own setting, while also giving you a deeper understanding of the different forms that formative assessment can take. It also provides an important reminder that perhaps the most powerful diagnostic tool teachers have within their armoury is the teacher-pupil conversation.

What you get in this book is a toolkit of evidence-based practical ideas, masses to reflect on and a springboard for making formative assessment relevant, efficacious and impactful. It's relevant for pedagogical

leaders, classroom practitioners and TAs, and will be extremely useful during any reorganisation of the culture surrounding feedback within your school.

teach  
SECONDARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ Shows how educational theory can be turned into useful practice
- ✓ Sets out ways of developing self-regulated learning and performance
- ✓ Signposts the way towards effecting positive change in your school's teaching and learning
- ✓ Clear, jargon-free explanations
- ✓ Ideal for teacher training and staff development sessions

## PICK UP IF...

...you're looking for tried and tested strategies that intelligently link teaching, learning and assessment in ways that can transform your school's approach to feedback for the better.

Priced at £12.99; find out more at [bloomsbury.com/education](https://www.bloomsbury.com/education)



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Lawson is a former secondary teacher, now serving as a foundation governor while running a tutoring service, and author of the book **The Successful (Less Stressful) Student** (Outskirts Press, £11.95); find out more at [prep4successnow.wordpress.com](http://prep4successnow.wordpress.com) or follow @johninpompano

## THE LAST WORD

# A first-class first class

When it comes to teaching those bright-eyed, bushy-tailed Y7s their first lesson at their new school, initial impressions count for a lot, counsels **John Lawson**...

Sir Winston Churchill once advised that an important speech should take an hour to write for every minute it takes to deliver, while at the same time leaving your audience convinced it's being delivered entirely off the cuff.

The best op-eds, speeches, sermons and lessons all possess this quality – the careful concealment of toil.

### Great expectations

I've never forgotten the thrill of giving my first A Level class, which happily elicited applause and a standing ovation from my audience of 12 convent schoolgirls. 30 years on, I don't think I ever bettered it.

Every line, joke, quip and poignant point fell perfectly into place. I remember floating home that Friday afternoon, feeling like God's own gift to the teaching profession – but it was a lesson that had taken many hours to prepare.

I had been determined to show how an NQT could teach at the very highest level – but now, having done so, what on earth was I going to do for the next 39 weeks of teaching, with expectations pitched so impossibly high?

As it turned out, that class would eventually be taken on by a more experienced teacher for the summer term. With 23 other lessons to prep each week, numerous books to mark and reports to write, I'd started flagging – badly. My students had exams to pass and simply needed someone smarter than me.

I missed the last two weeks of term after my candle finally burned out. I could no longer survive on just four hours sleep a night with no days off.

### Seizing the day

My first year thus ended badly, but I was determined to carry on – and what kept me going was the vivid memory of the adrenaline rush during that first A Level lesson.

One thing I never backtracked on in my career was making my first classes *first-class*. Initial impressions are hugely important, which is why my first lessons with a new class will always be geared towards sharing precisely why my subject is so important and fascinating.

After a long summer holiday, the last thing students want is to be addressed by five or six teachers droning on about the boring rules. Engaging teachers will generate respect, and hence tend to find themselves rarely having to enforce and re-enforce their classroom rules.

This is captured well by the film *Dead Poets Society*, in how it shows the all-male students of the prestigious Welton Academy enduring their first few lessons. After all, why would Shakespeare and poetry ever interest teenagers preparing to be captains of industry?

The sole master to capture the boys' imaginations is English teacher John Keating, played by Robin Williams. We're shown how, in just a few weeks, Keating's Romantic convictions have captivated most of his students – particularly the idea that *'nobody is liked by everyone'*.

Keating's overall message is that by seizing the day, these boys can make their lives extraordinary, well before becoming little more than nourishment for the worms and daisies.

### Crafting the 'biggies'

That first lesson of mine initially took about 10 hours to compose, and included a 20-minute monologue on the importance of thinking for ourselves and living authentic lives – what Keating might call the 'biggies'.

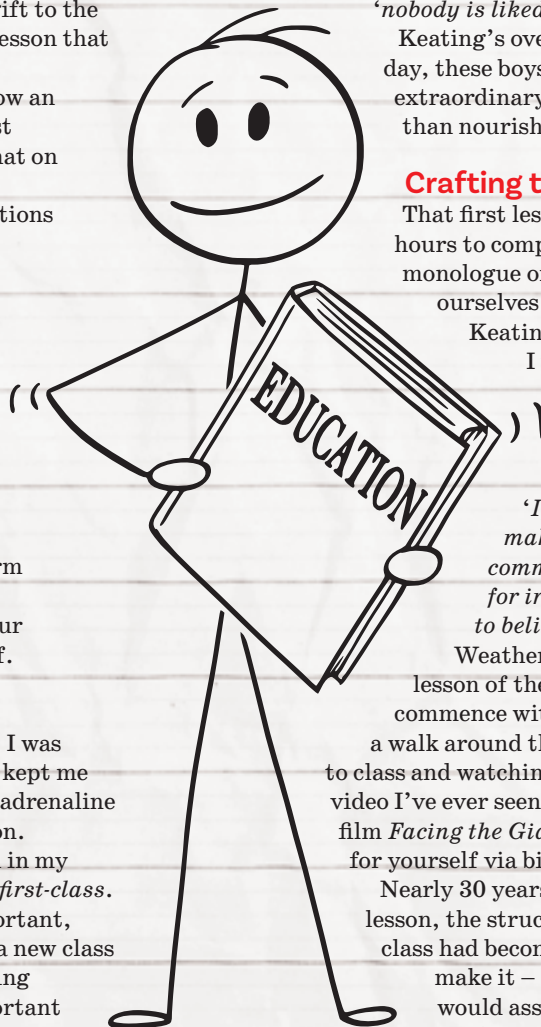
I taught theology, in

which there are few questions as foundational as that of whether God exists. It's the biggest 'biggie' of them all:

*'If we're not created, then what makes us more significant than the common beetle? Is faith merely a mask for irrationalism, or do we have reason to believe that we matter?'*

Weather permitting, my first lesson of the year would thereafter commence with taking the students on a walk around the sports field, before returning to class and watching the best motivational video I've ever seen – a clip from the 2006 sports film *Facing the Giants*, which you can view for yourself via [bit.ly/ts136-JL1](http://bit.ly/ts136-JL1).

Nearly 30 years after teaching that first lesson, the structure of that Y7 introductory class had become as near perfect as I could make it – and the feedback I received would assure me that my teenage students were excited to learn more.



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