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How is everyone getting on with the ‘new normal’?

It’s time to throw open the school gates and welcome back all pupils with open arms. Ok, not so open, maybe a safe, social distant, thumbs up might be more appropriate. Welcoming all children back to school after the Covid-19 lockdown is sure to have its challenges. I seem to have the tune for ‘I’m forever blowing bubbles’ constantly rotating through my thoughts and I’m not a West Ham fan! Keeping both pupils and staff safe is paramount. There are fears of a second wave and local spikes in infection as more and more people get out and about. Cleanliness and hygiene in schools has always been a priority but even more so now. Hand washing routines, making sure that coughs and sniffles are properly dealt with and dealing with possible Coronavirus symptoms are things that are going to become commonplace.

For some pupils this will be the first time they have been back to a school setting since March. The lockdown may have created wellbeing problems, especially among SEND pupils. In this issue we take a look at how we can identify any problems and ways to ease children back into learning. And it isn’t just pupil’s wellbeing that needs to be addressed. We also examine why it is necessary to keep an eye on teacher mental health and wellbeing as well.

We also ask what lessons have been learned from the lockdown? And look at how some schools dealt with the problem and how future closures can be handled. So I wish everyone good luck as we take the first steps back into a new school year. Enjoy the issue.

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Software Group



From the makers  
of Teach Primary

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# Keep the noise down!

Jamie Thom, self-confessed introvert, English teacher, TES columnist and host of the TES English teaching podcast, explains why quiet should play an important role in education

## What led you to write your book *A Quiet Education*?

Basically, I'm a fully fledged introvert myself. I was very quiet at school and I'm quite a quiet adult. Obviously, as a teacher, you're conscious that schools can be hugely extrovert-designed places, full of group work, collaboration and communal space. Also the way quiet is referred to in schools isn't often the best: "They are a brilliant student but too quiet." I wanted to challenge that narrative and offer something a little bit more celebratory about the values of quiet that can exist in schools.

## How can we build more effective relationships with quieter pupils?

You will have kids who just sit down, who don't want to engage or happily get on with the work. Should teachers be looking at that and try to bring them out? Or should they just encourage them to learn?

I think we've got to respect the fact that some people have innate temperaments. We shouldn't try to impose an extrovert ideal on particularly younger children. There are insecurities that come with that: am I too

quiet? Am I not like my friends who are much more, on the surface, gregarious and chatty.

I think one of the things we have to do as teachers is celebrate the quieter quality, the deep concentration that our introverted students will be capable of and the questioning they will be doing internally of what's being shared in the lessons.

## Teachers can be quiet as well. What can we learn from them?

One of the lovely things about writing the book was finding out how many teachers consider themselves to be more introverted. It's a profession that, on the surface, demands a degree of being an extrovert. You have to perform in front of groups of young people and bring a certain degree of enthusiasm and vibrancy.

Not that introverts aren't capable of that but I think that's the stereotype, that introverts are hidden in the cupboard with a book, whereas the reality is that lots of teachers are channelling more extroverted performances in the classroom.

For myself, that's actually one of the joys of

teaching, that sense of ease that you might get in a classroom where you're free to just perform and be a slightly more extreme version of yourself.

I'm conscious of giving space for silence in my lessons. Partly for my own selfish, restorative need. But partly because I recognise that any real deep thinking needs silence to facilitate that. If you are that quiet a teacher, how can you allow yourself to restore, to have a long career in education, particularly primary teaching. My mom was a wonderful primary school teacher for years and years but the most introverted human being you can ever meet. And I think she helped me out a lot in terms of what can more introverted people do to restore themselves?

## But it's not just the classroom that quiet teachers have to deal with, is it?

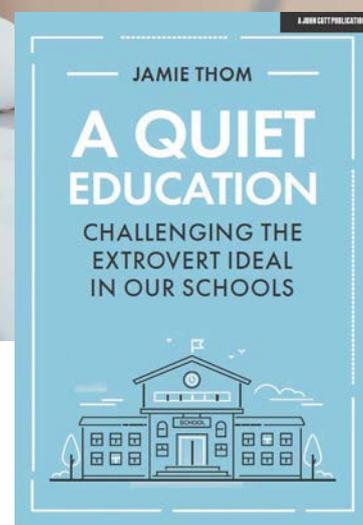
The other real challenge of being a teacher is the huge interpersonal and communication demands. That's where you've got to have a degree of selfishness. If you know that you are an individual who needs quiet to restore yourself then you have to find out what works for you to switch off.

I spoke to so many teachers who had amazing things they did, from marathon running to bird watching. Anything that will help you to find the quiet and find the recharge you need to do the job well.

There's lots of research correlating introversion with more burnout. That's why you just have to be able to let work go, as easy as that sounds, and at the end of the school day you have that cut off point. You have to bring some of that introverted discipline to a work/life

“Working in silence it's about us showing what we're capable of doing individually”





balance because otherwise it's a career that can swallow you up.

People can get lost in the system or feel overwhelmed and, especially if you're introverted, it may be difficult to reach out for help.

#### What skills can introverts bring to the classroom?

There are certain skills that are introspective, that all our young people would benefit in more attention being paid to, such as developing listening skills. In our extroverted and loud society, particularly in primary schools, the capacity to teach young people to listen to each other with intent and consideration is a valuable life skill.

#### How is the concept of quiet beneficial to teaching?

In teaching I think silence becomes something that's quite draconian in the classroom and quite didactic: "Your behaviour has been outrageous so you're going to work in silence for the next ten minutes." I'm trying to reframe that narrative and teach silence as something that's really positive. Working in silence it's about us showing what we're capable of doing individually. I call it sacred silence in my lessons and try and get as much focus on that being something that can't be broken because then we're letting each other down. One teacher I spoke to uses silence as kindness in his classroom. So silence represents something kind, something nurturing that we're doing for each other, rather than something punitive.

#### What would you want people to take away with them after reading the book?

I think schools are incredibly complex and diverse places but they really should represent celebrating human nature in its glorious diversity. My takeaway is that we should be recognising and celebrating that quiet can be something remarkably powerful in our skills. And remarkably important for young people to develop as they get older and mature.

#### CAREER TIMELINE

September  
**2009**  
First teaching  
position in  
central London

September  
**2012**  
First position in  
senior  
management:  
assistant  
headteacher

September  
**2016**  
Set up teaching  
and learning  
website:  
[slowteaching.co.uk](http://slowteaching.co.uk)

March  
**2018**  
Released first book:  
'Slow Teaching:  
Finding calm, clarity  
and impact in the  
classroom'

February  
**2020**  
Released second  
book: 'A Quiet  
Education'

March  
**2020**  
Set up  
'The Well Teacher'  
podcast

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Doug Pitts, ASSISTANT HEAD TEACHER,  
ORRELL NEWFOLD C.P SCHOOL



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# School Improvement

## IT'S A LOVE MATCH FOR THE LTA

Nanaki Bajwa describes how building children's character skills through tennis has paid dividends and benefited the whole school community



One of my goals is to increase physical activity amongst our children, aged between three and 11. This is partly why I agreed to sign up the school to a pilot project testing the new LTA Youth Schools teacher training; I also like the fact their scheme is genuinely inclusive to all pupils, regardless of age, ethnicity or background.

This chimes with our school mission of inclusivity as several of our pupils have learning disabilities, or special needs, health conditions and other impairments (one of our children has cerebral palsy, for example). Additionally, English is not the first language for many children, so we need a programme that's easy to understand and follow.

### MINIMAL OUTLAY

The cross-curricular training and resources are free, meaning this programme helps us meet our targets for minimal outlay. When the pilot scheme ended, I found the process quick and easy when I booked the school to sign up to the programme again this year.

I like the fact the lessons are designed by teachers, for teachers to adapt to whatever space they have, including

our smallest hall. The children get to use lots of inexpensive equipment (some items are already located in our school sports cupboard) such as gloves, different-sized balls, hand mitts – the programme is very adaptable for all ages and sizes.

### SKILLS

The children enjoy the variety of games on offer and the programme is designed to ensure they are constantly progressing in their physical activity. "There's no stop and start... it just flows," says Madison Chipman, one of our Year 5 teachers.

The lessons also build the children's character skills so they can decide for themselves if they want to make it harder or easier.



A sign of the children becoming more independent and confident in the classroom is the fact they ask lots of questions and seem much more engaged in the lessons. This links to our school values: curiosity and the children wanting to know more delineates their passion for what they are learning.

## SMILES

Even the pupils we didn't think would like it are getting involved – they have huge smiles on their faces and are eager to continue talking about it afterwards. They'll even mention it to their parents, so it's not unusual to get parents coming up to me in the playground wanting to find out more. A number of parents have asked about when this project will happen again as their children have enjoyed it so much!

## IMPACT

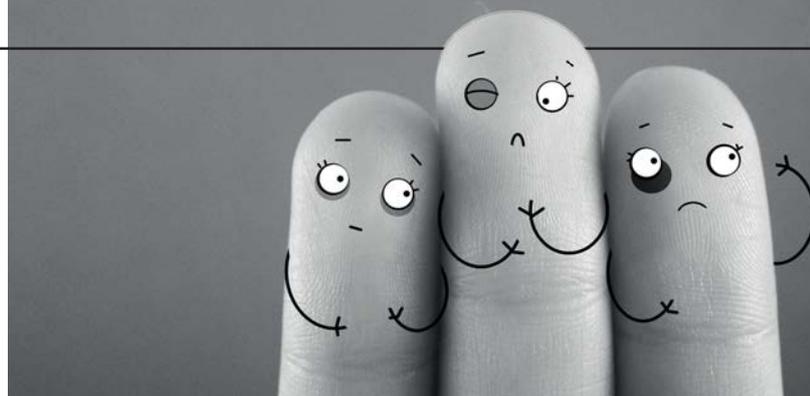
We all agree the LTA Youth programme has had a far reaching and positive impact on the school and its community. The children are better equipped with the knowledge of the rules of tennis and can now apply this to their PE lessons.

Children have shown an interest in a sport other than football and have asked for a tennis net to be put across the playground when they have extra playtimes. Parents have also been more interested in the sport as the project has allowed their children to work with such skilled teachers from the LTA. Moving forward they would love their children to participate in an after-school tennis club and this is something we are looking into.

*Nanaki Bajwa is the headteacher of Nansen Primary School, Birmingham*

*The LTA Youth Schools programme welcomes children of all abilities to build their personal and character skills through tennis. All participating schools will be provided with a free £250 voucher on completion of the free training, to use on additional tennis coaching or equipment. Teachers can sign up to the free training here:*

 [lta-tennis.force.com/schools/s](http://lta-tennis.force.com/schools/s)



## ARE YOU DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

Ross McWilliam asks are you helping or hindering the mental health and wellbeing of your pupils?

It seems like mental health issues have exploded overnight.

We have cohorts of children who are suffering from mild and serious mental health issues, with one in ten primary pupils experiencing mental health issues (Mental Health Foundation). This has seen an influx of 'professionals' who are addressing these issues. But are the proposed solutions appropriate, or, worse still, could they be potentially damaging?

No amount of short-term training is going to make anyone a child psychologist. Surely, mental health practitioners should see their role as complementary to any established mental health expertise. With this in mind, I do think that, with training, this new wave of mental health practitioners can be a very effective support to pupils and the school community.

## HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONER

Firstly, I do believe you must have worked in education, with a variety of pupils, schools, and challenges, to get a real understanding of need.

Secondly, to keep the delivery of support contemporary, an updated specific mental health and wellbeing qualification is also a must.

All school staff can have a positive impact on the mental health of pupils. Often the first point of contact at school may be the site manager, cooking or cleaning staff, or general administrative personnel.

Also, the identification of need or difference is really important. Rather than asking pupils, "what's the problem?" We should be starting conversations with lines such as "are you ok...you look a little different today...you don't seem your usual self this morning?" Then leave time for the pupil to fill in the gaps.

## MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES

Classic warning signs might be obvious, such as a bad temper and clear anger. However, a child who is disengaged, and almost reticent to speak, may actually be in need of support.

There is then a temptation to pick a strategy that suits that pupil, or worse still, a generic strategy of one size fits all. Before strategies are used, an understanding of a child's background is essential. This is the basis upon which to build a trusting relationship, and it shows your interest in the child.

## HOW I APPROACH STRATEGIES

Strategies can be really useful, especially if there is a menu of appropriate strategy choices. I usually ask the pupils about how they are feeling, and often use paper and pens to facilitate responses.

I can then introduce a few breathing techniques which can be seen as quick wins to initially calm the situation. I like to write down, or draw issues and solutions while doing the breathing as it can often bring a sense of calmness to proceedings. I do like to break problems, or challenges, down to bite size bits that can be seen as more achievable.

I also like to use visualisation techniques and aspects of Solution Focused Therapy to envision solutions. This creates a situation where it can appear that we are talking about a third person and the attention can be switched off the pupil.

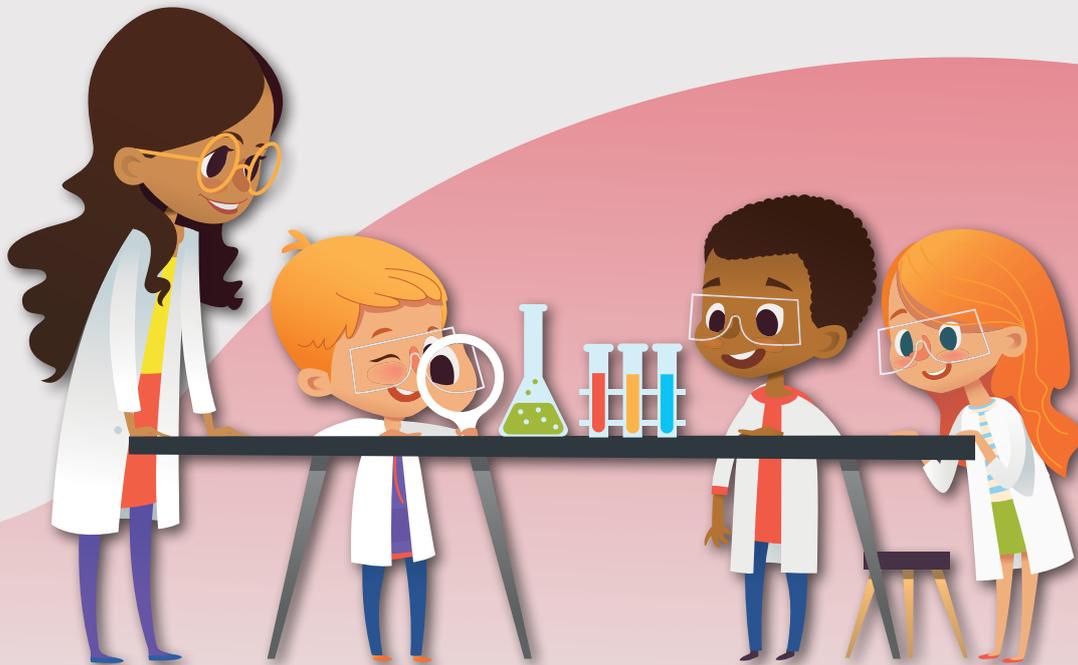
At each session, whether it is formal or spontaneous, there should always be some kind of summary and mini action plan.

I have a whole range of strategies that can be found on my YouTube Channel Ross McWilliam under Katy Cupsworth book images.

**Ross McWilliam, BA Hons, MSc, PGCE, Dip Man Level 7, MHFA National Trainer and author of *The Amazing Journey of CUPPA* and *The Amazing Journey of Katy Cupsworth***

# SCIENCE IS EVERYWHERE - REACH OUT AND TOUCH IT

Jane Dowden discusses ways to engage young people with STEM and inspire the next generation to get involved with science



**S**cience touches so much of our lives, even if we don't realise that it's 'science' - including making choices around healthy living, energy use and the products we buy and those we choose not to.

Everyone can benefit from an understanding of the skills involved. For example, problem solving is at the heart of science and is a very transferable skill for many careers.

I have many fond memories of learning STEM topics at school - as a ten year old I remember experimenting with yeast before making bread. On another occasion, we made a pH indicator from red cabbage juice to use in a project. I probably remember the smell of it more than anything!

It was these every day, practical, but most importantly, investigative experiences which led to my curiosity for STEM and more widely my curiosity for the world around us. Science isn't about knowing all the answers, it is about asking questions and being able to investigate them and solve problems.

## GETTING OUT THERE

Engaging children with STEM outside of the classroom environment is an important way to help them to understand the real-world impact

their STEM studies can have. School visits to museums, farms, parks or even a supermarket can be a source of inspiration for STEM-related discussions, activities and projects.

Trips, just like any STEM activity, should always have a core purpose to them - a big question that they are investigating. Introduce the big question before the visit and make sure any activities are helping to gather information or evidence to answer it. You could give children a short list of discussion questions to use on the visit, or give them specific things to look out for which they can collect, draw or take a photo of to use back at school. Follow up the visit by using the information and photos they have collected on their visit to answer the big question.

With the impact of COVID-19, outside trips aren't as possible - or even recommended in the current climate. One way to get involved with science from the comfort of your sofa is taking part in this year's British Science Week citizen science project: 'Spotting Spider Monkeys'. The project involves tagging infrared drone footage of spider monkeys swinging through the trees in Central America. The tags train an AI algorithm to find and track spider monkeys on its own, saving researchers hundreds of hours of time. With the black spider monkey population

estimated to have fallen by 30 per cent in the last 45 years, primarily due to habitat loss, this is vital work. You can get involved at [www.spottingspidermonkeys.com](http://www.spottingspidermonkeys.com).

## EXTERNAL LEARNING RESOURCES

For more examples of open ended investigations linked to everyday life, try our CREST Star and SuperStar resources: <https://primarylibrary.crestawards.org/>

Apart from CREST resources, a great source of inspiration is the Explorify website. This is full of curriculum-linked activities using short video clips and images to generate discussions and investigations around science topics. These can also be used as CREST challenges towards a STAR or SUPERSTAR award.

The internet is full of ideas for practical investigations be that on Pinterest or other sharing sites. The important thing is to follow the guidelines above.



**Jane Dowden is education and innovations manager at BSA**

# EMBRACING & ENHANCING OUR MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

Colin Baxter explains the purpose and process of setting up bilingual clubs

**L**anguage can be a barrier to learning but by embracing diversity you can not only engage more with pupils but the wider community itself.

Schools are increasingly becoming multilingual places by nature of our society. By supporting and empowering pupils with different languages, cultures and heritages this can unlock benefits for the educational institution.

The Thomas Deacon Education Trust (TDET), based in Cambridgeshire, has implemented an innovative bilingual club model at Gladstone Primary Academy, in Peterborough, to support pupils aged four to seven with learning both English and their home language. The academy is seeing improvements in pupils' language skills and an increase in their engagement both in and outside of the classroom.

The aim of our bilingual clubs is multifaceted. We want to support and celebrate the different heritages that are represented in our community and enhance provisions for pupils with EAL, as over 95 per cent of pupils at the academy are in this position. We also hope to improve pupils' bilingual and literacy skills, expand their vocabulary, boost their confidence and form stronger relations with their parents.

## OUR JOURNEY

We initially set up a working group made up of the academy's headteacher, Simon Martin, and staff who work in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. We discussed what the provision would look like and if it was feasible for us to pursue. I also travelled up to Sheffield to visit The Northern Association of Support Services for Equality and Achievement to see the work they do with EAL children.

We then applied for funding, which was a challenging process as there are lots of grants and schemes to choose from. We were successful with an application to Peterborough City Council's Communities Fund where we had created a proposal setting out the aims of the bilingual club and what resources and materials we would need to set up a Czech/Slovak, Romanian, Urdu and Lithuanian club. The council held drop-in sessions which were useful as we could ask questions and get



feedback on our application before we submitted it. Within weeks, we were awarded £13,000 for the 2019-2020 academic year.

## RECRUITING STAFF AND PUPILS

After receiving funding, we began recruiting for our club leaders. This was our biggest challenge as we needed

people that had experience educating young children, could speak fluently in English and either Czech, Slovak, Romanian, Urdu or Lithuanian, were available to work after school and were the right fit for our academy. We knew that employing the right people was essential, so we asked applicants to run a mini-club session as part of their interview process. Overall, we have been slower to appoint people than we expected but we didn't want to compromise on the quality of the clubs.

Alongside recruiting, we needed to get our parents on board. We held several coffee mornings for parents to come along and find out about the initiative and express their interest. We then consulted with our KS1 teachers to identify the pupils who would benefit the most from being part of the bilingual clubs.

## HOW WE RUN OUR BILINGUAL CLUBS

We run the clubs four days a week after school. We use storytelling as the main vehicle to develop pupils' listening skills, social interaction, vocabulary, use of longer



## TDET'S GUIDE TO SETTING UP YOUR BILINGUAL CLUB

- **Spend time planning:** researching and planning is important to ensure you know if the clubs will work in your school setting and how you would like them to run.
- **Secure buy-in:** your headteacher and key members of staff need to be on board with the concept and understand the impact it can have.
- **Engage your parents:** EAL parents can be challenging to communicate with so make sure they understand the benefits of the club.
- **Find the right space:** running the clubs in a space removed from the traditional “classroom” and “teacher” environment is essential to break down barriers, not only with pupils but with parents too.
- **Employ the right staff:** having the right staff to lead these groups is crucial. They need to not only have the language skills but also be able to communicate with and motivate pupils.
- **Enjoy and continue learning.**

“We knew that employing the right people was essential, so we asked applicants to run a mini-club session as part of their interview process”

sentences and confidence to contribute in a group setting. Our club leaders run activities including storytelling, acting, games and crafts all based on the story of the week. They model the use of languages throughout the sessions and encourage pupils to continually switch between English and their home language. This shows the children that both languages are equally important and reinforces their ability to translate.

On Thursdays, we invite parents in to attend the clubs. We have a café area where they can have a refreshment and talk with staff. They also take part in the activities alongside pupils and find out how to continue the children’s learning at home.

### THE IMPACT SO FAR

Our Czech/Slovak club and Romanian club are up and running. We have appointed our Urdu leader and are now recruiting for our Lithuanian leader. We tested our pupils before they started the clubs to provide a baseline to judge progress against and will retest them again later.

However, already we are seeing that pupils are talking and engaging more in activities and have a rapidly expanding vocabulary in both languages. They are more confident which is benefiting their learning in the wider curriculum with teachers commenting that pupils are more willing to speak and offer answers in class, helping to increase attainment.

The clubs have also had a huge impact on our parents as they now have stronger relations and better communication with the school and our teachers. They feel more included and valued and appreciate the effort made to preserve and continue their heritage and culture. This is shown with strong attendance, despite the clubs running four nights a week. It has also given our academy and Trust a better understanding of their communities and how we can better support them.

### OUR VISION

Our short-term vision for the bilingual clubs is to establish the Urdu and Lithuanian groups and continue to

embed the great practice going on at Gladstone Primary Academy. In time, we hope to roll this model out to other schools in TDET and share our learning with others in the education community.

The bilingual clubs are an exciting and innovative way to engage your pupils. Enjoy the process and continue to learn and develop your provision. If you are looking to find out more about Thomas Deacon Education Trust’s bilingual clubs, please contact Colin Baxter at Colin.Baxter@tdet.education.



**Colin Baxter,**  
Literacy and English  
as an Additional  
Language (EAL)  
Strategy Leader at TDET

# PUT PLANNING IN PLACE TO MOVE FORWARD

Jo Gray gives her tips on how to conduct staff progress meeting

**W**hen do your staff progress meetings occur? Why is it structured in this way? What research has gone into your policy? And, how does it relate to the School Development Plan?

These are the sorts of questions that you should be asking when strategically planning for your staff progress meetings. It is something that occurs in all schools but how often do we systematically review the process that is in place?

## THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Currently, the DfE have set some basic requirements that all schools should meet for their staff progress meetings:

Schools must have an annual appraisal process in place for teachers and headteachers.

- There must be a written appraisal policy for teachers, including the headteacher. (It is also good practice to include teaching assistants and support staff).
- The appraisal policy is not applicable to those on contracts of less than one term or those undergoing induction (i.e. NQTs).
- Teachers' performance objectives must be linked to improving the education of pupils, linking to the Teachers' Standards.
- Teachers must receive a written appraisal report that assesses their performance, training and development needs and makes, where relevant, a recommendation on pay progression.
- Governing bodies must appoint an external adviser to advise them with appraising the headteacher. Their objectives should link to the Head Teacher Domains.
- Schools have also been required to provide anonymised appraisal information as part of Ofsted inspections.
- The three-hour classroom observations

across the year (for performance management purposes) no longer exists. Though it is good practice for learning walks/drop-ins to form part of the appraisal process.

These are the basic requirements for any appraisal structure. There needs to be a concerted effort not to have a 'compliance mind-set' for structures around staff progress meetings. 'Just being compliant' with the compulsory elements of appraisal can mean that there are lost opportunities – it takes the focus away from an invaluable process for improving teaching and learning.

## WHAT ELSE SHOULD I CONSIDER?

### Concerns

If there is a concern regarding a member of staff there should have already been conversations about the concerns and support should have been in place before the appraisal meeting takes place. If a member of staff has not responded to support provided then the member of staff will be notified in writing that the appraisal system will no longer apply and that their performance will be managed under the capability procedure. If you do have concerns about performance, seeking HR support quickly can ensure

that low-level issues can be 'nipped in the bud', and more serious concerns can be managed safely and effectively.

### Check in points

An appraisal is just one of the meetings that would be considered as part of a larger



structure of staff progress meetings. The DfE's model appraisal policy suggests that the annual assessment is the end point to the annual process, as 'performance and development priorities [should] be reviewed and addressed on a regular basis throughout the year in interim meetings'. In some instances, schools have put in place extremely effective structures that allow for regular one-to-one meetings to review steps needed to work towards targets set. There should be

nothing said in an appraisal that comes as a shock to the staff member regarding their own performance.

### Evidence

Personal reflection is important, but it should not require mountains of paperwork or 'proof' that each criterion within the Teachers' standards has been met. Collecting evidence is not a requirement and it can add to an already busy workload. The documentation collated throughout the year when reviewing teaching and learning - during learning walks, book looks and planning checks and Pupil Progress meetings could form part of the staff progress meeting structure.

### Targets

Of course the appraisal structure will require the setting and reviewing of targets, linking to the Teachers' (or headteachers) standards. However, these targets should not be plucked from the air or decided before the meeting occurs. Targets need to be owned by the member of staff who has to achieve them and they should inspire the individual to work at achieving them. Setting SMART targets allows the individual to break down and understand their targets much more easily.

Wherever possible, targets should feed into the School Development Plan for all members of staff. By doing this staff are collectively working on variations of the same goal (often linked to the school's values and vision). A sense of community can be built by just sharing the SDP with all staff and explaining their role within the bigger picture of school improvement.

## THE ULTIMATE STAFF PROGRESS MEETING STRUCTURE

An appraisal shouldn't be seen as a 'tick-box' exercise. It should be a process of ongoing reflection and evaluation that each teacher leads themselves. Teachers shouldn't be waiting for someone to assess how good they are, but rather they should be constantly reflecting, inquiring and improving their practice.

Target setting within a staff progress meeting structure would not see targets that are based on ensuring 98 per cent of children pass the phonics screening check, for example, but would be open ended and enquiry based: "Why are 15 per cent of children not yet passing the phonics screening check in Year One?" The shift becomes research based and moves away from a target that has an underlying tone of blame.

A collaborative structure which values conversations and takes the time to invest in training for mentoring and coaching will mean that 'appraising' your own practice and

the practice of each other becomes part of the school culture. In order for the above to work, time would need to be given for observations, feedback, research and enquiry across the school. Dialogue about theory and pedagogy would become the norm: colleagues would support one another to improve their teaching and, ultimately the children's learning.

Within the ultimate staff progress structure, everyone is aware that they can learn from each other. The hierarchical approach of SLT observing the rest of the staff could be replaced with peer to peer support. Indeed, SLT should be part of that process too and it may be that this structure works across schools, rather than it just being a process that your school goes through.

The staff progress structure should also allow for time to celebrate successes, consider wellbeing of the staff and allow an opportunity for each member of staff to feel appreciated. Our job as educators is to make a difference to the pupils in our care and throughout the process of staff progress meetings, the question that we need to ask is: "What positive impact have I had on our pupils?" It should be this question that ultimately leads the staff progress meeting structure and, indeed, every decision that is made within the school.

## HOW TO STRUCTURE AN APPRAISAL

- Be prepared
- Discuss previous targets and reflect
- Celebrate successes
- Think about the impact had on the pupils
- Set exciting, inspiring and achievable targets
- Remember the school development plan
- Discuss staff wellbeing
- Appreciate the staff member
- Meeting should be part of a much bigger structure

"An appraisal shouldn't be seen as a 'tick-box' exercise"



**Jo Gray, Head of School Development and Literacy, One Education Ltd**

# STAFF MUST BE SUPPORTED ON RETURN TO THE CLASSROOM

We must examine ways of looking after the wellbeing of teachers post coronavirus, says Donna Tandy

**W**ithin education, few of us were fully prepared for the reality of the last academic year.

In many cases, in the light of the coronavirus pandemic, panic and confusion arose, be that from concerned parents, staff members, teachers or pupils, as we all tried to keep on top of the daily Government announcements and the changes in which we all needed to live our lives.

Following the partial closure of schools, parents were trialled with the task of home schooling and teachers continued to work and provide vital care for children of 'key workers', vulnerable children and later, children in other year groups

Alongside this, wider staff members rose to the challenges faced with making school facilities fit for purpose in response to social distancing measures.

As the newly appointed deputy chief executive of a multi-academy trust, last term I saw first-hand the incredible dedication and commitment shown by those individuals in question who rallied to adopt new and innovative online teaching tools for those who were homeschooled, while also looking after and educating those children – including many of the most vulnerable – who were still coming into class. They did this without quibble, and it has been truly inspirational to watch.

## NEW NORMALITY

So now, as they return to work following a much-needed Summer break, we need to be able to support them in the difficult task of reconnecting their primary school aged children, some of whom have been away from the classroom since March 20th.

As part of this, we've recognised the importance of ensuring that staff themselves can continue to engage and connect with each other as they return to a sense of new normality – which might be quite different from before.

The strain on them – and as is no doubt the case for all of the teachers and support staff across the country, and indeed the world – while trying to juggle it all is intense. From making sure our children understand the situation while keeping them on track with the curriculum, to caring for colleagues and protecting their own families.

Protecting the mental health and wellbeing of our staff has never been more vital. Luckily, as a Trust we had already placed considerable emphasis on this as a key



concern long before the world had heard of Covid-19, and we are therefore very fortunate to have some tools and tactics in place to keep our staff connected and supported; although needless to say our efforts have ramped up somewhat.

## MINDFUL

During the latter part of the summer term and the summer holidays, we encouraged everyone in the Trust to be mindful of their mental and physical health. We had three virtual

“Protecting the mental health and wellbeing of our staff has never been more vital”

‘Therapeutic Tuesdays’ with a yoga teacher, looking at the benefits of yoga, alongside nutrition and wellbeing advice.

On July 1st we launched #OneTrustOneChallenge for July and August where all staff, governors and families were encouraged to run, walk or cycle. By the end of the campaign we travelled at least twice around the world. Not only are we encouraging improved physical health through the initiative, we have also raised money for the NSPCC and kept our communities connected over the Summer.

It is our belief that in doing so, this will equip our teams for the challenges they may face in this new academic year – from alleviating children’s concerns of returning to schools and to, where necessary, taking the time to bring pupils back up to speed if gaps in learning appear.

That is why we have scheduled across each term a number of meeting opportunities for our staff members across our 15 primary academies to meet up remotely, to share their ideas, learn from one another and implement different ways of thinking. As we think it is incredibly important to stay connected with one another.

We are also embarking on a Trust wide oracy project with Voice21 that will enable us to reconnect with our pupils and bring our staff together as they work collectively on becoming great teachers of oracy.

## POSITIVE

This gives our staff the opportunity to share their experiences, how different ways of working are affecting them both positively and negatively, and how they are communicating with the families of the children now that they have returned to school.

It builds on the work we did at the end of last year, where staff were still given these opportunities over Zoom. We received a lot of positive feedback from the sessions which produced a breeding ground for common action, best practice and best advice. It also builds on the significant work taking place across the Trust in using digital technologies e.g. Microsoft Teams and the wider Microsoft 365 package to enable collaborative working and help us move towards a new, more blended approach in developing and supporting staff.

This is all feeding into our ‘Learning Together’ online portal that teachers have access to. Not only this but it is helping us continue to produce regular newsletters to parents with information on the support that is out there as well as the learning facilities we think are best for their children.

This Summer, we encouraged principals and headteachers to take time to recharge their batteries and ensure that the whole staff had time away from the building. There have been no expectations from the Central Team or Trustees for leaders to carry out tasks or planning during this time to enable them to return refreshed and ready for the challenges of the Autumn Term.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

What was made clear last term was the benefits of social media in ensuring key positive messages stayed at the forefront of our staff’s minds. Therefore, we are spending time each week researching what support is out there in respect of finance as well as mental wellbeing and continue to send this information out on Twitter and our website. We encourage our staff to engage professionally with Twitter, tagging in @FocusTrust1 and using our hashtag #caredarefairshare to promote the work of the Trust.

Our continued efforts to support one another over the last six months, will hopefully mean we will return stronger than ever this year, ensuring our children are given the best education possible.

I know that many of our pupils, families, teachers and staff are excited to rejoice with one another in person, to reconnect and feel grateful for the new relationships and working ways given to us by this pandemic.



**Donna Tandy is deputy CEO/academy improvement partner at Focus Trust**

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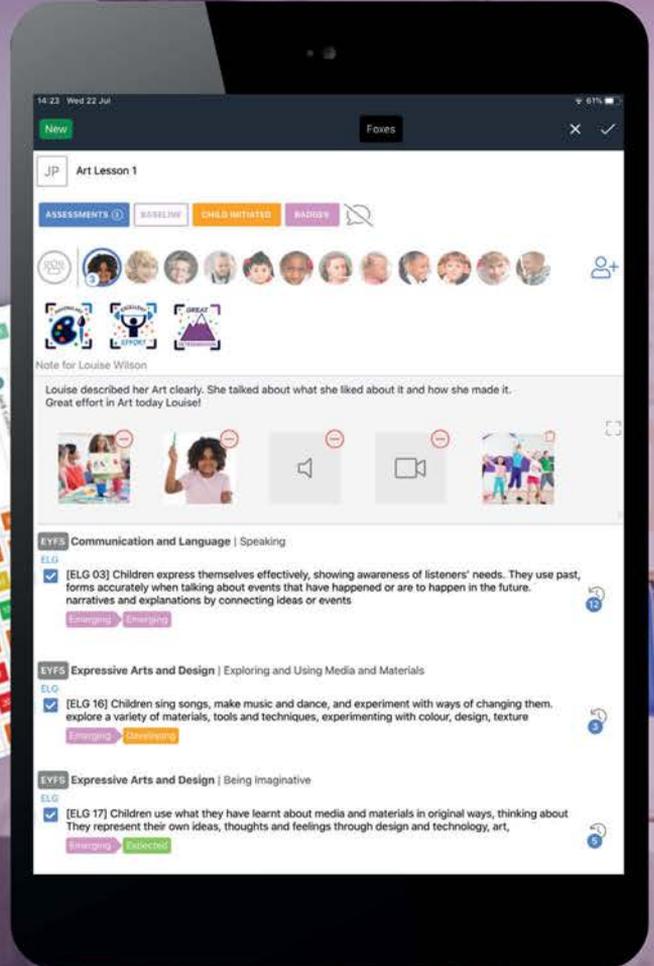


**Aston Infants School Learning Journal**  
**Alexandra Emil**  
 Generated on Wed Sep 11 2019 at 14:07

**My writing**  
 Mrs Carpenter, Mon Feb 25 2019 at 13:03  
 CHILD INITIATED  
 Student note: Alexandra went to the writing table and wrote sentences about her family. She showed excellent effort in her writing.

**Guided Reading - Blue group**  
 Mrs Carpenter, Mon Feb 25 2019 at 14:15  
 GUIDED READING  
 Group note: The group read together in our guided reading session. They talked about what happened in the book and their favourite parts of the story. They listened to each other carefully.  
 Student note: Alexandra really enjoyed discussing her favourite part of the story.

Learning Area	Assessment	Percentage
English	100%	100%
	100%	100%
Mathematics	100%	100%
	100%	100%
Science	100%	100%
	100%	100%
AD	100%	100%
	100%	100%
Computing	100%	100%
	100%	100%
DT	100%	100%
	100%	100%
Geography	100%	100%
	100%	100%
History	100%	100%
	100%	100%



**Art Lesson 1**

**ASSESSMENTS** | **REBEL** | **CHILD INITIATED** | **BADGES**

Note for Louise Wilson  
 Louise described her Art clearly. She talked about what she liked about it and how she made it. Great effort in Art today Louise!

**EYFSP Communication and Language | Speaking**  
 [ELG 03] Children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners' needs. They use past, forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future. narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events  
 Emerging - Emerging

**EYFSP Expressive Arts and Design | Exploring and Using Media and Materials**  
 [ELG 16] Children sing songs, make music and dance, and experiment with ways of changing them. explore a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture  
 Emerging - Emerging

**EYFSP Expressive Arts and Design | Being Imaginative**  
 [ELG 17] Children use what they have learnt about media and materials in original ways, thinking about They represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through design and technology, art.  
 Emerging - Excellent

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- ✔ Monitor assessment and progress reports
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## Need to know

Alongside teaching and learning, the requirement to observe and assess skills acquisition for every child in the primary school class means teachers are constantly busy. For schools looking for technology to streamline this, there are some vital considerations to ensure your money is spent wisely.

To support time-poor teachers and those with low technology confidence, an intuitive solution they can use without extensive training is a great start!

Ensure you have flexibility. For example, if you're doing a group observation and another student joins in, can you record that easily? Are the items of evidence (photo, video, audio, written notes) all good quality and easily added to observations?

Besides the mechanics of observations and assessments, if your chosen solution delivers extra reports (e.g. class progress, student progress, SOAP, baseline assessments, end of KS1 and KS2 assessment, whole school attainment), these can provide valuable whole-school insights.

Parental engagement is important. Technology to nurture this, provide opportunities for them to contribute to their child's learning journey through home learning and celebrate their in-school achievements is a real bonus.

ReallySchool helps with all these things and more. It's an easy-to-use tablet app for teachers, with an online portal, where more in-depth reports and overviews are created.

Teachers can effortlessly apply assessments from the in-built list (includes all UK criteria and frameworks) and instantly check where learning gaps are - even seeing where they can be attributed to the developmental differences between Summer and Autumn-born pupils. And being able to see assessment history, mid-observation, prevents duplication of data that has already been gathered.

As for future-proofing, take this year as an example. Back in January, no-one ever envisaged children having months away from education. ReallySchool's ability for teachers to send out learning activities and communicate with parents during lockdown has proved invaluable, not just to support learning, but to maintain contact, which has meant so much these past months.

## Next Generation

Developed with teachers, for teachers, ReallySchool's latest update streamlines the end-of-year transition of children's records to the next class, allows teachers to send out home learning activities, encourages parents to contribute to their child's learning - and helps teachers to record refinements in pupils' understanding to show smaller steps of progress.



### Contact:

[contact@reallyschool.com](mailto:contact@reallyschool.com)

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## TECH TALK

### Easy to use

Simple for teachers to use, ReallySchool's intuitive user interface is presented in a social media app style, so finding and accessing its tools is easy - and they tell us it can save up to two hours per day!

### Assessments on tap

Staff can choose between multiple frameworks for assessment (the new EYFS 2020 curriculum has just been added), so there's no need to look up assessment points; they're built in and in front of you for each assessment.

### Monitor progress on the go

Use the quick access Class Report grid with multiple views to see the number of observations captured per assessment point for each child, to check attainment on the go.

### Celebrate success

Another great addition for pupils is that there are now even more achievement badges in the library, giving teachers and parents additional opportunities to celebrate their success!

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## DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

During the lockdown you had to think outside the box to create more space.  
Gary Spracklen discusses his experiences



**W**alt Disney famously said, “It’s kind of fun to do the impossible” and during the lockdown of Spring/Summer 2020, I found myself living out this principle.

When most schools were open to a limited number of children, here at The Prince of Wales School in Dorchester, Dorset, we opened up for every pupil wishing to attend. It never crossed our minds not to do this and we had to fight to make it happen. The health, safety and wellbeing of our pupils and staff was always paramount but our view was that if it was safe for one group of 15 children to be together why not another group of 15 with the same strict measures in place?

Our situation was complicated by the Government’s bizarre decision not to take account of the three-tier education system in place in Dorchester. This meant that initially our Year 4 leavers were not allowed to return back to school when Year 6 children in a middle school up the road were able to despite not having any transition to prepare for. The measures described below were put in place following a change in Government policy that came at the start of June 2020 when the then Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson stated, ‘Schools that have the capacity and the desire to bring back more pupils, can do so...’. We always had the desire, the capacity took a lot of creative

thinking, many phone calls and a tenacity to go against the grain.

Throughout this period, we adopted a ‘YOUR CHILD, YOUR CHOICE’ ethos. This meant that we continued to fully support children and families who chose to stay at home. We did this with a full Virtual School Programme and associated support activities including weekly phone calls, food parcels, physical resource deliveries, loan of school equipment (including desks, chairs and Chromebooks) and virtual ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support) sessions (as required).

### CHALLENGING

Now, I fully appreciate every school’s circumstances are different and that each and every school leader would have done their best through the most challenging of circumstances. In sharing our approach though, I hope to inspire others and maybe provide some further food for thought should another lockdown scenario occur either at a local or national level.

To welcome all pupils back, we had to think outside the box to build capacity. We quickly converted our school hall, library and staff room to make additional classroom spaces. We borrowed exam tables from our local secondary school and used household TVs as additional teacher displays. This was all well and good but it wasn’t enough room to accommodate everyone. We looked outside and considered

various options, mobile classrooms were too costly and in high demand at the time. Other options available to purchase were either too expensive or did not offer the protection from the elements required. We contacted a number of local marquee companies, all of which had furloughed their staff and therefore did not have the capacity to support us. After much determination and many many phone calls we eventually found a marquee company in Oxfordshire that would not only work for us, but with us to deliver the best possible solution to our challenge. We made plans over the phone and via video conferencing and thought carefully about all the details involved.

We wanted all temporary spaces to adopt our school's ethos of being a place where 'we are all inspired to learn', and therefore named our marquee learning space accordingly the #InspiredToLearnNightingale Kingdom.

Adhering to social distancing guidelines, the marquee was kitted out with individual desks and chairs. Following the Gratenells Learning Rooms '1-2-3 Recipe for Return', the children each had two Gratenells trays to hold their learning resources and personal belongings, keeping them separated from others and avoiding the need for communal cloakrooms. Setting out the marquee in this way encouraged social distancing within the students, but allowed them to come back together in a social environment.

Cleaning and reducing the risk of spreading of germs within the classroom was a big consideration for schools and parents/carers as they prepared to send their children back to school. With this in mind, we kitted out the classroom using a range of Gratenells products from the new 'Classroom Health and Hygiene' collection. The antimicrobial coating added to the trays and trolleys combats surface contamination from a wide range of bacteria and viruses and offers an additional layer of protection between cleans.

The marquee was loved by pupils and staff alike. It helped us ensure a 90 per cent attendance rate across the school in the final four weeks of term. It taught us that anything is possible and that sometimes... it's kind of fun to do the impossible!

*Gary Spracklen is Headteacher at The Prince of Wales School: Dorchester, Former Digital Educator of the Year and a member of UK Government's - Department for Education 'ETAG' (Educational Technology Action Group).*



## A FLOOD BUT DEFINITELY NO FAMINE

Riverside Junior School triumphed over adversity to achieve national catering accreditation for their healthy food achievements

**F**looding far from dampened spirits at Riverside as determination and resilience won them national recognition. Riverside Junior School catering achieved the Silver Food for Life Served Here accreditation, making them the first school caterer in Calderdale to be awarded at this level - and this is despite flooding that closed the kitchen for nearly six months.

Calderdale has a history of severe flooding and the school's catering team proved their ingenuity to continue serving excellent quality, hot meals for the children despite difficult circumstances.

In 2016 Riverside Junior School was flooded, preventing the kitchen from functioning. Undeterred, catering manager Cheryl Jefferys and the team quickly forged a working relationship with a nearby pub and worked hard from a small unit there to keep things going - this lasted for nearly six months.

### RECOGNISED

David Howes, acting headteacher at Riverside Junior School, said: "Cheryl and her team have gone from strength to strength over the years at Riverside and it's a fitting reward that their hard work, team spirit and endeavour has been recognised with the Silver accreditation. I can't thank them enough."

The Food for Life Served Here (FFLSH) accreditation is a clear signal that caterers are serving food made from fresh, local and honest ingredients, free from undesirable additives and trans fats, that meets UK welfare standards, and complies with national nutrition standards.

The fact that the school's catering team forged on despite a closed kitchen extended beyond Riverside Junior's school gates. Riverside's catering team also prepares and sends lunches out to five other local schools: Colden, Heptonstall, Stubbins, Central Street and Hebden Royd, serving 360 meals a day.

The 2016 flooding came as a complete shock to Cheryl, she said: "It was just

devastating for us all. The kitchen and the whole ground floor of the school was totally lost. It was an awful situation to be in. The only local pub that escaped the floods put out a message that they had a kitchen that could possibly be of use to a business, we went to discuss this with them and took them up on their very kind offer.

"The pub caterers were very helpful and hospitable to our needs but we only had a certain amount of time to use the kitchen as they needed to start to prep for their own service.

"We tried to keep meal times the same as far as we could. As most of our meals are transported out to other schools. The timings remained the same as we had a fantastic delivery driver who was very flexible."

### DELIGHT

But there is no place like home and Cheryl and her team were delighted to get back to cook at the school. She added: "Getting back to our own kitchen was just amazing and a massive relief as we had a brand new kitchen to come back to. Having our team back together was great as it had been four months since we had all worked together. Some of our team had been helping out in classrooms as the pub kitchen had limited space.

"The Silver Food for Life Served Here award is quite an achievement for both our kitchen and our school, we are all proud to represent Riverside Junior School and to be recognised for the work we do. It is great job satisfaction for us all."

The school is also leading the way with the launch of a daily vegan meal choice. Thanks to the catering team, Riverside Junior School is the first school in the area to have a daily vegan option offered alongside UK-sourced and sustainable meat and vegetarian options, at no additional cost to the schools they provide lunches for, or to the parents.

**Mark Hayhurst is editor of Primary School Management**

# SHOULD SCHOOLS BE ALCOHOL-FREE ZONES?

Adam Taylor gives his view on why water-based sanitisers are more suitable for primary schools than alcohol-based ones

**L**iving in such unprecedented times, and as Coronavirus continues to spread around the world, frequently washing children's hands has never been so important. A simple act of handwashing not only prevents the spread of Coronavirus but also the spread of a myriad of harmful diseases. Germs can survive for up to three hours on our hands and there are between two to ten million bacteria on our fingertips and elbows.

The best way to keep children's hands free of germs is to wash them with soap and water by following Government recommended guidelines, yet soap and water isn't always readily available. Hand sanitisers are a great alternative and can be extremely effective when it comes to removing bacteria and viruses.

As schools get ready to fully re-open in September, safety is going to be your top priority and good hand hygiene will be an important part of your strategy. Have you considered how children and parents will be able to sanitise their hands upon entry? Having a member of staff present at the door with a hand-held bottle of sanitiser could prove to be a long, arduous process. An automated hand sanitising system that is free-standing or wall-mounted could save time and be more effective. Hand sanitisers are not all created equal and it's important to choose the right one to keep children safe. High quality effective sanitisers should kill 99.9999% of all bacteria including MRSA, E Coli and Norovirus. There are several different hand sanitisers out there but in broad terms they divide into two groups: water-based and alcohol-based. We've put together five reasons why water-based sanitisers are more suitable for use in primary schools than alcohol-based ones.

### 1. Last longer on children's hands

Water-based hand sanitisers contain a 'killer' agent whose chemicals are dissolved in water. Once the water has evaporated, the 'killer' agent is left on your hands, and continues to be active for up to six hours, giving up to six hours protection. If you go on to touch a dirty surface, you do not become contaminated, and do not pass it on. In contrast alcohol-based sanitisers act

quickly to reduce the bacterial counts on your hands yet it is the alcohol that is the 'killer' agent. Once evaporated the 'killer' agent has literally disappeared into thin air. If you touch another dirty surface you can become re-contaminated and could pass it on.

### 2. Less irritating and kinder to skin

Alcohol-based hand sanitisers can be drying and irritating to skin if used regularly as the alcohol strips away the skin's natural oils. Water-based hand sanitisers tend to be kinder to the skin and more suitable for those with skin conditions because they contain emollients designed to moisturise.

### 3. More acceptable for those who forbid alcohol for religious or cultural reasons

For some families alcohol is forbidden for religious or cultural reasons, therefore alcohol-based hand sanitisers would not be able to be used. Specific religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism and Islamism all prohibit alcohol, however water-based hand sanitisers are considered halal (permissible to use in those faiths).

### 4. Pose less danger if used inappropriately

Alcohol-based sanitisers can pose a poison risk to children. Swallowing even a tiny amount of alcohol-based hand sanitiser can be dangerous for children, particularly those under six. Many are made with alcohol or rubbing alcohol (ethanol, ethyl alcohol, or isopropanol, isopropyl alcohol). Alcohol poisoning symptoms can include sleepiness, low blood sugar, seizures and even coma, therefore water-based sanitisers are a much safer option.

### 5. Often scent free

Many children have sensitive noses and the strong smell associated with alcohol-based sanitisers can be harsh for them. The ethanol used in many of the alcohol-based sanitisers available at the current time is to blame for this. In contrast, water-based sanitisers don't contain the same strong ingredients and often are scent free.



Adam Taylor is messenger project director at IDS Media UK - provider of digital hand sanitising kiosks



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# NATURAL LIGHT, OUTDOOR SPACE & SOME ANCIENT BONES

Joanne Wilkinson-Tabi explains the joys and benefits of influencing the build of a brand new school

“One of the things that I really wanted was an open foyer which included the school’s library”



**A** brand new school that you can put your own stamp on is a delight. To be able to influence the design of the building and the way the facilities can be used is a joy.

Ebbsfleet Green Primary is a new Garden City school and is part of the Maritime Academy Trust; an educational charity catering for over 2,600 pupils aged three-11 across eight primary schools with nurseries based in London and Kent.

Ebbsfleet Green Primary will serve the rapidly growing community in the new Ebbsfleet Garden City and help meet increasing demand for school places in Dartford and Gravesham, whose population is predicted to rise to 252,000 by 2031.

Beginning as a one-form entry school, we will become two-form to match Ebbsfleet’s rising population. This year the school will have Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes.

However, our main school buildings will not be ready until August next year and we were due to have temporary buildings for our new pupils to move into. Our merger with the Maritime Academy Trust has proved very fortunate for us as we are so lucky, in these unprecedented times, to have secured Bligh Primary School, Strood, as our new temporary location for Ebbsfleet Green Primary from September.

Bligh has a lovely set of bright, airy

classrooms with their own reception area available. The head of Bligh School has kindly agreed that we could use this. This allows us to have our planned nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes for our Ebbsfleet Green children. This space would be solely used by us, allowing us to create Ebbsfleet Green Primary School within Bligh. A school within a school! It also meant that we could get into the classrooms early and prepare them for the new school year. By bypassing all temporary accommodation completely we’re also going to have better spending power to put into the main school. So that’s another benefit.

TURN TO PAGE 27



- BOUNDARY TREATMENTS**
- 1 3000mm high waist-high ball stop fencing with gates
  - 2 2000mm high waist-high perimeter fencing with access controlled gates
  - 3 1200mm high timber palisade fencing with gate
  - 4 1200mm high anti-rag low-top railing
  - 5 400mm timber knee-raft fencing
  - 6 Proprietary stair handrail and balustrade
  - 7 Existing timber post and rail fencing to be retained and extended
  - 8 Waist-high ball stop fencing by Redwood Homes

**general notes:**  
 All work shall be done in accordance with the drawings and dimensions shall be checked on site prior to commencing work.  
 All work shall conform to the current edition of the Building Regulations and other relevant standards for requirements on building and construction of all projects. All relevant safety standards shall be followed.  
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NO.	DATE	REVISION	BY	CHKD
01	11.03.20			
02	14.03.20			

project: **Ebbsfleet Green Primary** client: **Kent County Council**  
 title: **Proposed Site Plan**  
 date: **March 2020** drawn by: **bj**  
 scale: **1:500 @ A1** checked: **gp**  
**gdm architects** **PLANNING**  
 project number: **4078** drawing number: **P104** revision: **P2**

# SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE DESIGN

Glen Ernest, managing director of gdmarchitects, explains the process of bringing all the elements together for the design of Ebbsfleet Green Primary

## HOW EASY WAS IT TO ENVISAGE JOANNE'S VISION FOR THE SCHOOL?

The design for the school was initially based on the Education Funding Authority (EFA) reference scheme in line with BB103 and adapted to suit the site. We all then went through a design development process with; the school, KCC, EDC and an independent design panel review. This process informed the design and resulted in several layout changes.

gdm then worked with the Maritime Academy Trust and their headteacher to focus on how the internal environment will work and how it will be used to compliment the teaching ethos

## THE NEED FOR NATURAL LIGHT WAS A BIG ELEMENT THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL

## BUILDING - HOW DID YOU BRING THAT INTO PLAY?

Natural light is an important design factor in any new building but fundamental inside a school, although often difficult to achieve to corridor and circulation spaces which are usually located central of the internal space, allowing the classrooms to grab the external walls. For this scheme we have managed to allow natural daylight to filter into the corridors by the use of three main approaches:

1. A large central feature roof light located at the turn of the internal corridor brings light down at an important location. This roof opening is then reflected in the first floor with a glazed floor panel of the same size, allowing the natural light to filter from the roof to the first floor and then down to the ground floor.
2. Doors to classrooms are glazed and we

have added a further glass panel to the sides of doorways. This allows natural light to filter through from external windows and into corridors along the full length of the circulation route.

3. Internal breakout/personal study areas on the first floor benefit from 'sun tubes' which bring natural light from the roof level down to specific internal areas.

## HOW DID YOU PUT INTO PLACE GREEN AND ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SOLUTIONS FOR THE SCHOOL?

Sustainability and environmentally responsible design is at the forefront of our approach. This starts with what is called a 'fabric first' approach where the envelope of the building is designed to be responsible in two ways:

We are all really excited about the new build though, especially as we can put our own stamp on it. It's going to be a state of the art school that we hope will be at the heart of the community.

## PASSIONATE

One of the things that I really wanted was an open foyer which included the school's library. Initially the library was on the top floor but I'm very passionate about reading, about sharing, reading with parents and carers, about getting people in and really seeing the fact that we value reading so highly, so it's going to be the first thing that anyone sees as they walk into the school. It's open plan and we'll have soft seating, so it's going to be a very welcoming environment that parents and carers will immediately see. Also it will give us the opportunity to showcase children's learnings and outcomes and it gives us the possibility of being an exhibition space. For example, if we have events at the weekend, people using our hall or other facilities, will be able to come in and see what we're about right from the outset.

One of the other major influences that we secured was our resource provision. In the original plans, it was on the ground floor. And I've asked for it to be split into two. Because we're going to have Key Stage 2 children with ASD, as well as Key Stage One. Because we are so committed to inclusion we want children, if they can be, to be included within their mainstream classes. It was really important to me that

there was a split provision, which again, is quite unusual.

Also we have ASD resource provision in our canteen, which is linked to the main school. We've actually got a little separate meal area for children that can't necessarily cope with sitting in a noisy environment. And again, that was a suggestion made by my team and I and the architects listened and responded quickly to that.

One of the things that was also really important was the availability of natural light throughout the building and I've got to say that the architects look to have done a brilliant job. The inclusion of such things as sun tubes, a glazed floor panel which you can look down onto the library, glazed doors and roof panels allows natural light throughout the building.

Because we are serving a new Garden City, our outdoor space is also very important to us.

## COURTYARD

The original designs didn't have a courtyard and that's something that we wanted to put in. Children will be able to eat their lunches outside, we're planning on getting benches with umbrellas and making it a lovely place to spend lunchtime and breketime. The classroom doors within that courtyard will open out straight on to it and there's scope for outdoor learning as well.

We are also going to have a wildlife area, a pond, a Multi Use Games Area and a playing field. And because we're

in a Garden City, we're going to be committed to children walking, cycling or scooting into school.

## NEOLITHIC

One of the interesting things about the build, which will have educational benefits for the children, was finding the remains of a Neolithic man on the site - not a whole skeleton though. We were going to exhibit them in the foyer but the archeologists said they were too valuable for us to do that and they would have to be preserved in special conditions. However, they're making a replica for us which can put on display. It will bring the past, the present and the future together. The children can see what their community has stood on for thousands and thousands of years. The first theme that we're going to be studying is 'We are Ebbsfleet Green'. We will think about our identity and that will be part of it. And really thinking about our community, where we are, what its history is and what we want for now and then looking at the future, what a garden city is, what's different about living here, why are they important?

It's going to be very exciting when we finally get to move into our new school environment.

**Joanne Wilkinson-Tabi is the executive headteacher of Ebbsfleet Green Primary**

1. Designed to a high insulating standard to reduce the need for energy demand of heating in the winter or cooling in the summer.

2. Specifications of responsible materials that are from renewable sources and manufactured responsibly.

In addition to the above factors, we have also introduced educational areas of landscape in the scheme which include:

3. Wildflower/wildlife area.

4. Vegetable growing patch to complement the 'Eat Ebbsfleet' promotion by EDC.

5. Wildlife dipping pond.

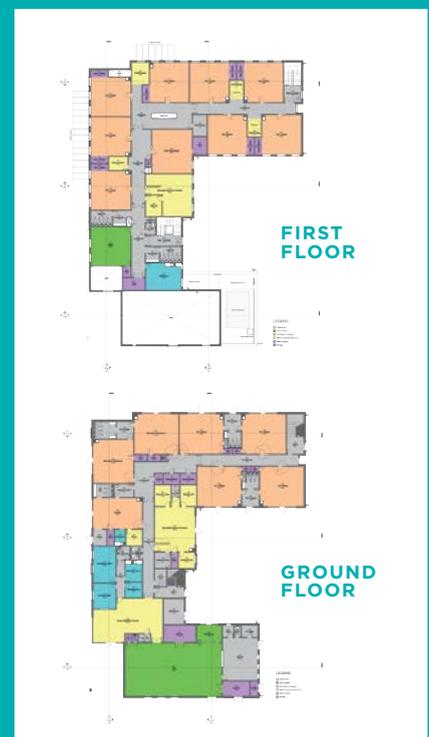
## OUTSIDE LEARNING AREAS AND FACILITIES WERE IMPORTANT TO THE SCHOOL - HOW DID YOU BRING THOSE INTO BEING?

The outside environment has the added value of nature and complements the

internal teaching spaces. In this scheme we have integrated the two elements by allowing classrooms to overlook or open out onto external areas and created learning and teaching hubs within the grounds. Unlike many school schemes, this design has many external elements that offer different teaching opportunities.

## WHAT PROBLEMS DID YOU HAVE TO OVERCOME?

We do not see the process as having problems but it is one of identifying the needs for the school's vision and designing the solutions into the whole scheme. The internal and external environments complement each other and allow the school to deliver a holistic teaching campus. The design process also identified the potential future needs of the school and its reaction within a growing new community and incorporated expansion and development within. Of course, as with any project, this has to be delivered within a budget to the best of everyone involved ability.



# TURN YOUR PUPILS INTO AN ECO CREW

Edd Moore describes how to get your school engaged with the environment

**W**hen I first joined Damers School eight years ago, there wasn't a huge level of environmental awareness across the school.

The children didn't know about recycling or how to look after their environment, they also didn't know where their food came from - they just thought it came from the supermarket! I saw great potential to embed the Eco Schools programme across the school.

Eco-Schools is a global programme engaging 19.5 million children across 67 countries, making it the largest educational programme on the planet. There are now 20,000 schools in England signed up to Eco Schools.

Every class at Damers First School has an Eco ambassador who forms the Eco Crew. Each class makes a termly pledge to help animals, people or the environment giving every child the opportunity to have a voice and speak passionately about environmental issues they believe in. Pledges have included encouraging the community to feed the birds, making Dorchester litter free and encouraging other schools to be involved, encouraging businesses to reduce their single use plastic and devising a Litter Policy for other schools to use in Dorset with Litter Free Dorset. Children at the school have given up their weekends to lobby local businesses on environmental issues. Some of the children even asked for litter pickers for Christmas!

## LEADING FORCE

The school has become a leading force on environmental issues with many other schools across Dorset and the rest of the UK wanting to come and see the school and speak to children about what they have learned and see their environmental work.

The Eco Schools programme has had a huge impact on the children's learning across the school. They have gained confidence and they believe that what they are doing will make a real difference to the society they live in. They have the passion and confidence to stand up in front of a room full of people and talk about the changes they would like to see.

They are very determined, and they do



“Every class at Damers First School has an Eco ambassador who forms the Eco Crew”

not take no for an answer. The skills they are developing are ones they will need as adults. I would like sustainability to be compulsory in schools. For me, children learning about the environment is just as important as literacy and numeracy.

## CAMPAIGNS

Many organisations want to work with us on our environmental campaigns linked to work the children have already done. City to Sea's Refill HQ visited after they had heard about the work the children had done in signing up businesses to Refill Dorset. They interviewed the children and put a view together to inspire other towns across the UK to get on board with Refill.

The school has become an ambassador for Delphis Eco, an ecological cleaning company whose products the school has been using for four years. The children speak to other schools about the product getting them to use it. They also sell the product to parents, staff and businesses.

They have been filmed speaking about it and the CEO of the company, Mark Jankovich, has visited the school to speak with the children about how he can improve his product. Two of the quotations on the new bottle were written by the children and one of the school cleaners.

## RECYCLING

The children have been active in getting the local community to recycle - printing cartridges, pens, biscuit wrappers, crisp packets, soap dispensers, baby pouches, helping the environment and raising £1,500 towards a bird hide and wildlife area. The school's recycling centre has been so successful that WI volunteers come and help with sorting and boxing up the items to be sent off to be recycled.

The school became an SAS Plastic Free School in May 2018. Children launched Refill Poundbury signing up 25 businesses and appeared on Newsround. They contacted businesses supplying school fruit and milk



asking if fruit could come in card boxes and milk in glass bottles. They wrote to all local headteachers asking them to become plastic-free schools. They put pressure on Brace of Butchers about the plastic used and they implemented their ideas, establishing a zero-waste free shop.

They created posters giving the local community ideas on how they could reduce plastic. In July 2019, Dorchester became the third location in Dorset to achieve this status. The children have set up a steering group with influential members of the town to help them carry on their Plastic Free work making Dorchester as green as possible. They are part of Dorset Council's climate change panel.

### AWARDS

The children won four awards at the Young Enterprise Fiver Challenge 2018 with their product Waxtastic No Plastic, an alternative to cling film. They sold the product at local events raising £4,500, which financed a school nature area. The school has been included in 'Plastic Game Changer' by Amanda Keetley which showcases the work they have done to reduce single-use plastic. The children hope that it will inspire other schools and community groups to use their ideas to start their own plastic-free campaigns.

A Year 3 class, as a pledge, took part in a CPRE Green Clean with students from Thomas Hardye School. They collected 156 plastic bottles and cans using the reverse vending machine. Damers' children inspired Hardyes to recycle and set up a green committee. In February 2019, the children went to Westminster to speak with Mr Gove about the importance of an "all in" Deposit Return Scheme.

### CLIMATE CHANGE

The children are part of Dorset Council's climate change panel. They presented ideas

of how the county could reduce climate change. Ideas included more electric buses, easier access to hire electric bikes and scooters, more electric car charging points and the broken ones fixed, closing roads to town centre once a month, every school to have their own Ridan Food Waste Composter with an idea that the compost could fuel cars. The Council realises the power of their message and the influence they have had.

The children have been to Clarence House, have spoken with HRH Prince Charles, and Jane Goodall about their environmental work.

Through hard work and determination, Damers First School has achieved Plastic Free School status from Surfers Against Sewage, as well as inspiring their community to secure Plastic Free Community status. They have taken their work to Westminster - where they met Michael Gove, they have appeared on Newsround, and they have won several awards, including Jane Goodall's Roots and Shoots Educational Environmental Institution of the Year 2019, Surfers Against Sewage Plastic Free Schools Champion 2019 and Eco Schools Primary School of the Year 2019.

### HARMONY

I found out about the fantastic work of Richard Dunne and the Harmony Curriculum in 2017. I visited Richard's school to learn more about the seven Principles of Harmony and how it could be used at Damers First School. I went on a four-day Harmony Development Course at the Princes Studio of Traditional Art in London. The Seven Principles of Harmony were already embedded into our curriculum through the work I have mentioned but wasn't under the Harmony name officially. In the past year the children have been producing some phenomenal geometry work and have a greater depth in their knowledge of nature and the world around them. They know that there are different coloured carrots not just orange ones which links to one of the seven principles, diversity. The children have

## HOW TO ENGAGE PUPILS WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

- Find a staff leader with the enthusiasm, drive and initiative to take the group forward.
- Create a passionate group of eco warriors.
- Make an audit of environmental work in the school, celebrate what you do and improve other areas.
- Make an action plan of things you are going to work towards.
- Sign up for Eco Schools and follow their seven steps.
- Inspire staff, parents and the local community to get involved.
- Embed environmental work into the school curriculum.
- Take part in national campaigns such as Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean.

learned about the many life cycles around them by using the garden and wildlife areas. The Ridan Food Waste Composter has taught them about food decomposing to make compost which can then help the plants grow.

Garden volunteers from the local community with many years' experience come and work with children each afternoon.

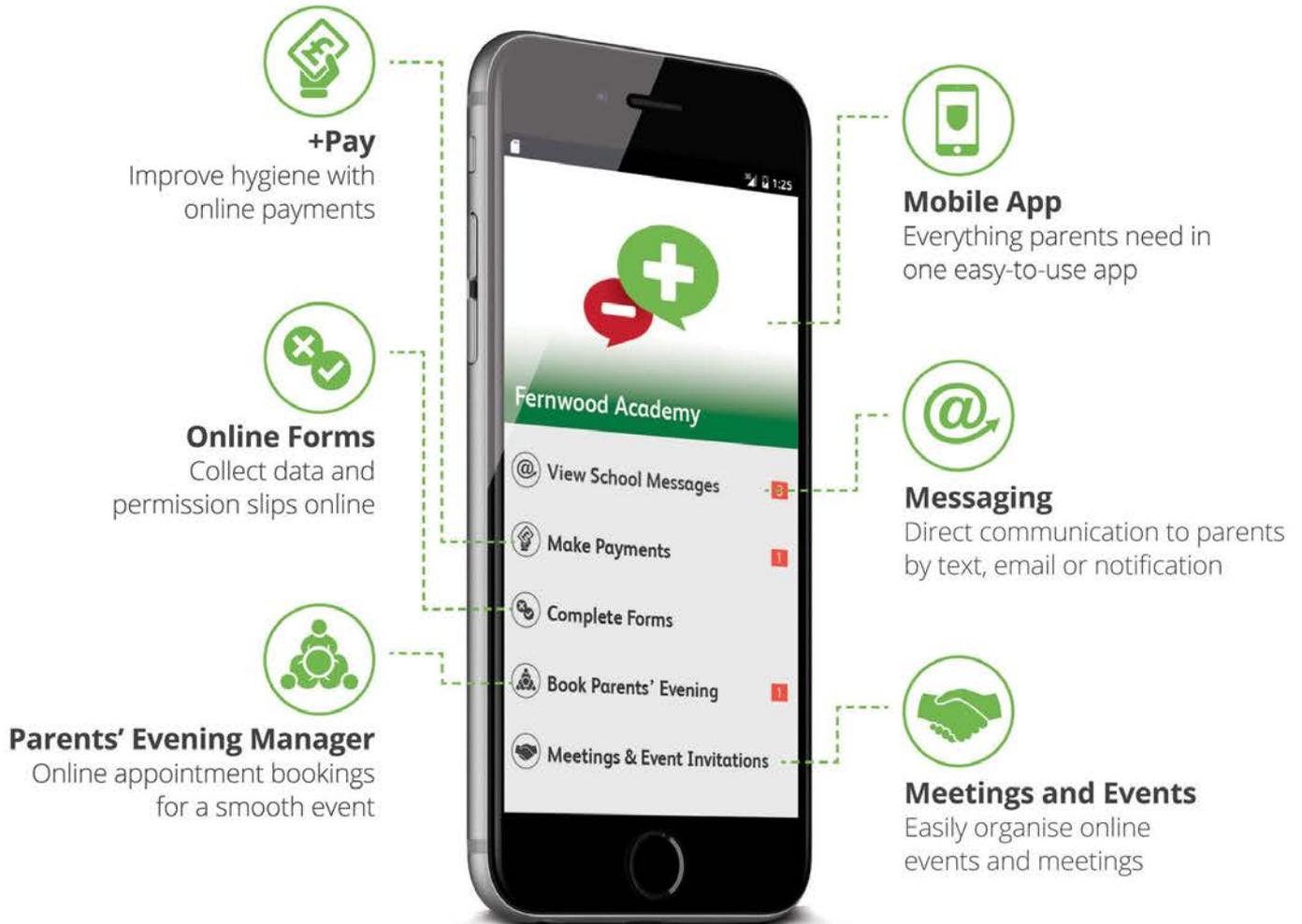
The children have learned where their food comes from by growing vegetables and fruit by seasons and learning what is produced in each season, as well as rotating the beds. They have then taken this knowledge home and had a go with their parents or even taken on an allotment themselves. They have also learned how to use these vegetables to cook a dish in the school kitchen.

The children of Damers First School are fantastic ambassadors for how we would all like the world to be.



**Edd Moore is a Year 3 teacher and Eco Coordinator at Damers First School, Dorchester, Dorset**

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# Digital parent engagement in the next normal

Driving connections and connectivity across school communities

IRIS Education recently surveyed over 400 UK schools and MATs to investigate the impact of lockdown on integral communications and operations.

It appears primary schools across the country have seized the opportunity to progress their digital strategies – and to great success!

Every school leader understands the importance of parent engagement. Before email, mobile apps and social media, paper newsletters served to bridge the home/school gap. However, most schools acknowledge the difficulties in engaging with every family, every day.

With over eight million students impacted by COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown, school life changed overnight – and so did the role of parent engagement. Allowing any family to slip through the net simply wasn't an option.

**Leading to the question: does the pandemic see a change for the better when it comes to home/school partnerships?**

In our free insight guide, we explore the future of parent engagement, the impact on school communities and the role of digital in ensuring efficiency and transparency in a post-lockdown world.

## How are primary school leaders preparing for post-lockdown school life? Our findings:

- > Nearly 90% believe the ability to access student, finance and asset data remotely will be vital from September
- > Almost 40% are planning additional teacher training to aid remote working and learning
- > Nearly 80% believe the ability for children to learn remotely will be key for student progression
- > 60% believe paper free classrooms and offices will be vital in ensuring the health and safety of students and staff

*IRIS Education software is the cornerstone of efficient operations in over 11,000 UK schools. Every step of the way, every day, we're behind the scenes of effective school management.*

**Read our free insight guide to investigate how schools across the country are thriving in the next normal.**

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## KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON

Rich Harley outlines what to consider when putting together your school's organisational continuity plan



**T**he recent need to manage schools remotely has shown how vital it is for schools and trusts to consider and plan for a variety of disruptive scenarios.

### WHAT IS ORGANISATIONAL CONTINUITY?

Organisational continuity can be seen as a form of risk management. It typically involves three steps - preventative controls, risk mitigation and contingency planning - and focuses strongly on the notion that 'prevention is better than a cure'.

### WHAT SHOULD A PLAN INCLUDE?

While plans will need to be tailored to an individual setting(s), there are several key areas that you should try to cover in your plan. Indeed, some of these areas may also have their own associated plans. Here's a snapshot

of what to consider:

- **Plan governance:** this will include the existence and relevance of the plan(s), when it was last reviewed, where the plan itself is stored and who has access.
- **Responsibilities:** for example, who has the authority to declare an incident and who's in charge of leading each phase of activity? A flow chart would be useful to help quickly navigate the above decisions.
- **Incidents covered:** for example, a health pandemic or a biological or environmental threat, mass staff unavailability, gas/water/electric failure etc.
- **Scope:** including how likely it is for the issue to happen, the impact it could have on students, staff, safeguarding, operations, reputation, finances, and actions required if an incident occurs. Actions are then typically split into three stages; response, continuity and recovery.

- **Templates:** these might be incident assessment forms, event and decision logs, or pro forma letters to parents - having some documents ready to use will save time in the moment.

Within the wide range of contingency planning that your school or trust will undertake, you should make sure to factor in technology at every stage, as it forms a vital part of school operations.

### HOW CAN TECH HELP TO INCREASE RESILIENCE?

Many schools and trusts are realising that using IT applications and storage that are physically located on servers and devices on the school site are not a viable option anymore. Moving to IT systems that are located remotely, or cloud-based, mitigates the impact of a physical site becoming inaccessible, perhaps due to health reasons or natural disaster. For example, using



## SUPPORTING SEND PUPILS AND PARENTS AT HOME THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Neill Oldham describes how they have dealt with lockdown and the way forward

online collaboration and communication tools, such as those available in G-Suite or Office 365, are available over the internet as soon you log in, meaning staff can continue working from anywhere. It's an effective way of preventing on-site incidents from disrupting operations.

This is similarly the case with the school's Management Information System (MIS). During recent closures, those using a locally-hosted MIS may have found that they needed to have a machine on the school site switched on and logged in to remotely access the school's system. However, as well as creating a number of possible security risks, this approach also requires a member of staff to physically travel into the school to access data and resolve issues.

Schools using a cloud-based MIS won't have experienced these complications, as users can log on from home safely and securely, using any device. When leaders needed instant access to vital information (such as student, parent and staff details) they could access and input data, no matter where they were. Also, with schools needing to adhere to changing government guidance, they needed an MIS that could adapt equally quickly. Cloud MIS providers were able to roll-out new features, or reporting functionality, at a click of a button as policy changed, saving already stretched schools a big headache.

Technology is just one part of the continuity puzzle, but it can have a big impact on your resilience. If your school or trust hasn't already got an organisational continuity plan in place, or your current plan needs reviewing, now is the time. As this year has shown, you can never predict the future, but advanced preparation can help to mitigate the disruption caused by unforeseen events.



*Richard Harley is the CEO of ScholarPack. The advice in this article is based on information in ScholarPack's guide 'Ensuring the resilience*

*of your trust: A guide to organisational continuity', developed in partnership with Chirs Kirk, Education Consultant and MAT Expert at CJK Associates.*

All primary school parents across the country have faced challenges over the last few months, but for our parents there has been significant pressure compounded by the additional worries of the risks of Covid-19 to children with complex needs.

For many of our families, the closure of schools coincided with the closure of respite services and care support agencies. This has meant that parents have had to take on 24-hour care for their children during lockdown and try their best to continue to support the education of their child at home.

As a school community we have endeavoured to meet the complex needs of all of our pupils, from nursery and primary right the way through to secondary and sixth form while they're not in school. Many of our pupils use large, specialist equipment to stand, walk and stretch. They also use state of the art technology to assist with communication and as much of this isn't available at home we have all had to unite to support everyone remotely and in person where safe and possible.

### UTILISING TECH TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

In order to support parents we have also set up a specialist equipment loan scheme to provide access to expensive equipment, and introduced weekly community visits where staff support pupils to access fresh air and provide some respite for families. In addition to this we have been supporting pupils and training parents through remote Speech and Language therapy to help them understand the equipment we would normally use to assist their children and help them to communicate fully with them.

We were using digital education platforms, like SeeSaw, before lockdown but they have been so

useful over the last few months. We have been able to share resources, lessons, read stories, share activity videos and much more through the platform. We also share videos and pictures of class groups to help pupils to keep in touch with their friends, which really boosts everyone's mood. Staff have also posted videos of them reading and telling stories through the platforms so pupils at home can watch them at their own convenience. We have now built up a library of books with accompanying videos for all our pupils to also view at home.

With a digital platform, you can still be very much there for pupils and families - not just to support learning, but to support them emotionally as well. Starting out on a digital platform can feel daunting, but the systems are safe to use and once embedded into the school culture, have numerous benefits to pupils and their parents.

### MOVING FORWARDS

Many people think that learners with additional needs won't be able to access remote learning or use technology. But we have found that if you find the right platform for your school and the technology supports the functional, social and learning needs of each child, then mastering the edtech is well worth the effort.

We would encourage all schools with children with special education needs to take advantage of the free technology support the DfE is providing and help your pupils now and in the future, visit: [covid19.thekeysupport.com](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid19-thekeysupport) to find out more.

**Neill Oldham is the head teacher at Highfurlong School in Blackpool. Highfurlong delivers outstanding education and care to children with a wide range of physical, medical and neurological conditions and associated learning difficulties aged between two and 19 years.**

# Online learning and questions of resilience

Schools are showing inventiveness and determination with remote learning as they ready themselves for an unpredictable new school year, but they also want support to help them through, says Lord Jim Knight.

**M**emories of a gruelling and emotional 2020 summer term may be receding into memory for many primary school leaders and their teams, but the legacy of that remarkable time will be with them for years to come.

How schools approach the autumn term will set the shape and tone of teaching and learning in our schools for the rest of the academic year and beyond.

There's much to be optimistic about. The flexibility, inventiveness and determination of schools in the spring saw teaching and learning move online en masse.

We have seen some amazing examples of this throughout the country; of schools that have fully embraced remote learning in all its richness, with primary school children engaging in exciting online lessons and virtual school events and using stimulating learning resources.

It's been an exciting mixture of local innovation and national effort: we at Tes Global have played our part in supporting schools directly through our teaching resources, as well as working with national online learning initiatives with the BBC and Oak National Academy.

But big contrasts remain in online learning practice which are highlighted when you look

across the nations of the UK. There has been more consistency of practice in Wales and Scotland, which have more centralised systems and a more centralised approach to the technology platforms that schools use. The result is that there is also less inconsistency in the leadership of technology to support teaching and learning.

## Catch-up learning

The main challenge for primary leaders will be catch-up learning. Many schools have successfully used platforms such as Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams and maintained regular contact with their children so they know quite clearly what the learning gaps are. For other schools that have been late to online learning September is likely to be more of a challenge and they will have to backfill learning before they can move on, particularly in numeracy and SPaG.

As well as being across issues like wellbeing, attainment and catch up, leaders will need to ensure their schools are resilient. As we move into the colder months there will be the threat of covid spikes and local lockdowns and the possibility that staff may need time off due to illness or self-isolation. Schools will need to be fully prepared for these scenarios.

## Consistency of confidence

A big question for school leaders is where online learning fits into this resilient school picture. We know that technology can be a real enabler of learning if it is well led, so we need a focus on a consistency of confidence and competence in the leadership of online learning.

A recent Tes Global survey revealed a clear need for professional support to help schools prepare for a future in which, whatever happens, online learning will have a more significant role to play in our education system, supplementing or, at times, temporarily replacing classroom learning.

Of the 2,400 school staff who took part in this summer survey, three quarters said they needed training in remote learning. More than two-thirds (69 per cent) had not received any training in remote learning during lockdown and that the most popular means for delivering remote lessons was to simply email work to pupils.

While the survey highlighted some challenges that policy makers should note, it also revealed the flexible and 'can-do' character of our school workforce. Participants said the lockdown had increased school staff confidence in using technology, with 79 per cent reporting that they were more likely to use technology in their teaching practice once the situation normalised.

## Strategy

The survey shows that online learning will be a major plank in any school resilience strategy for the new academic year and I believe that it makes a strong case for the Department for Education to impose an additional training day so that training can happen.

This need for online learning training also highlights a broader concern: that government should be more co-ordinated and strategic in its support of schools on this and other questions of resilience. It's an approach primary school leaders are likely to need as they face a year likely to be every bit as unpredictable as the last one.



**Lord Jim Knight is Chief Education and External Officer at Tes Global. He is a Member of the House of Lords and a former schools minister**



# HOW TO STRETCH YOUR SCHOOL'S TECH BUDGET

Winston Poyton shares his top tips on how to get a good deal when investing in new tech

**T**he benefits technology can bring to schools from improved parental engagement to better management of school meals is clear, but how do you make your tech budget go further?

Before investing in anything, it's essential to review your overall strategy. You may have a member of staff who has discovered a great tool that they are keen to use, but is it useful to several of your team? What are the challenges that are holding your school back, is technology the answer and what would make the biggest impact to your colleagues? Do they need better pupil tracking, a reliable payment system or an easier way to communicate with parents? Knowing what your biggest challenges are, makes it much easier to prioritise where to invest your money.

Once you know this, there are a few ways you can make savings before you part with your cash.

## UNDERSTAND THE FULL PROJECT COST

Buying the technology is only the first phase, it's important to ensure your supplier is being completely transparent about user licences or about how easy it will be to get your staff up and running with the new technology. If it's going to require your staff to spend time getting up to speed with new attendance software or processes, this is also a cost to you. The best suppliers will offer you ways to train as many staff as possible and will give you a clear view of the long-term costs.

## IT'S GOOD TO TALK

Having a limited budget to spend on technology can make cutting corners to save money attractive. However, the adage of 'if it's too good to be true then it probably is' certainly applies when buying software or hardware. Sometimes what seems like a good deal can cause a host of issues when trying to integrate new technology with a school's existing systems. Make sure your supplier has a clear plan for integration with legacy systems and what will happen should any problems arise.

There's also no reason why the supplier relationship should cease after purchase. To get the best value out of your investment, find out what other services and support is on offer. For example, we provide a health check service for schools. This means we can help our customers spot or iron out any initial problems or we can predict complications that might arise in the future.

Perhaps a parental engagement app was working fine but a few parents start to report problems with accessing it. Highlighting these niggles as soon as possible can save money and frustration.

“Another smart way to get a discount is to partner with another school”

## SAVING TOGETHER

Another smart way to get a discount is to partner with another school, and you don't need to be part of a multi-academy trust (MAT) to do this. While your local authority can secure volume discounts, there's nothing to stop you asking a supplier directly for a deal for a larger order.

You could also investigate whether the supplier would be open to a referral scheme. Technology providers are always more open to discussing a price reduction, if you can recommend other schools who would be interested in purchasing their products.

If you are part of a trust, you may be able to secure an early discount on a growth basis. For example, they might offer reduced rates on technology for five schools, assuming this will grow in a few years.



## FREEBIES FOR FEEDBACK

Your knowledge and time is valuable for a supplier. When new technology is being developed, providers are keen to hear the views and experience of the people who will be using it in the future. By offering to be a beta tester, a school that trials the product before it is released, can secure you some very attractive discount. However, this works better for software rather than hardware. But it can be a good way for your school to access the latest software tools in exchange for letting the supplier know of any bugs or improvements that can be made. Yet, this requires a willingness to try out a system in the development stage and time available to communicate with the supplier.

## INVESTIGATE PRICING STRATEGIES

Generally, there are two different types of payment: subscription or perpetual licensing. If your school is more cash rich, you may prefer perpetual licensing, which includes an upfront software cost, followed by an annual maintenance fee.

However, subscriptions are becoming more popular as government funding is often distributed throughout the year. This allows schools to spread the cost, making it easier for them to budget.

At a time when demand for technology in education has never been greater, it's important to have an open relationship with suppliers to see if they can help you make a tight budget go a bit further.

## FIVE TIPS FOR INVESTING IN TECH ON A BUDGET

- **Define what your school needs from new technology – this will guide your strategy and will ensure you get the maximum benefit for more of your staff.**
- **Partner with your supplier – find out what additional or ongoing service or support they can offer.**
- **Share the benefits – get better deals by collaborating with other schools to secure volume discounts or negotiate referral deals with your supplier.**
- **Put a value on your time and expertise – cost savings can be had if you test new technology.**
- **Secure the best pricing strategy for you – do you want to pay for the tech up front and be able to use it indefinitely or would a subscription-based license suit you better?**



**Winston Poyton is senior product director at IRIS Software Group. Find innovative software designed for the education sector at [iris.co.uk/sector/education-software](http://iris.co.uk/sector/education-software)**



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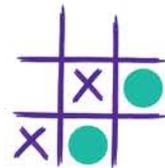
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# FROM G SUITE TO ZOOM ASSEMBLIES – HOW YOU CAN UTILISE TECHNOLOGY

David Maguire looks at the digital education platform options available to primary schools

**T**he last few months have presented many challenges to the education sector. It has been particularly difficult for primary schools, like Coupals, where we've had to quickly adapt to both maintain the delivery of education to our pupils as well as support their development at such a young stage in their academic years.

Our teachers and parents have worked tirelessly to achieve this, but it wouldn't have been possible without a digital education platform that allows our pupils to continue their learning while at home.

The pandemic has forced all of us to upskill in digital technology and weave it into our teaching practices and we have learnt a lot about the different options available to primary schools. Coupals Primary is a Demonstrator school, which means we support other schools and colleges to make the most out of the technology already available to them. We have been working with other schools to advance teaching methods through technology during lockdown. And already, many teachers have created efficiencies, using online platforms that have reduced their workloads.

## CHOOSING A PLATFORM

It can be tricky deciding which platform is best for your primary school, and they all have pros and cons. Most schools tend to stick with Office 365 Education as many of them are used to using Microsoft as their primary IT software. Having said that, G Suite for Education contains a free set of productivity tools for classroom collaboration which is really useful. It's accessible from any device and already used by over 120m plus people worldwide. Many teachers we work with have used this system to continue delivering lessons remotely.

Google Classroom is also another great option as it helps teachers to organise learning activity, hand out and mark assessments and provide structure for students learning at home. It has been great for many teachers we work with to be able to give students immediate feedback through these platforms – helping to motivate and keep our pupils engaged despite the fact they couldn't come into school. We'd recommend using Teach from Home as it



provides teachers with easy-to-use resources to get started with G Suite and how the tools can be used. We have found at Coupals that bringing together the apps you know and love, such as PowerPoint, Excel and Outlook, with powerful cloud services like OneDrive, Microsoft Teams and SharePoint, Office 365 enables our teachers and students to effectively and securely create, collaborate and share from all their devices regardless of location. We know this way of working has also been really useful for our parents at the school who are often juggling full-time jobs with attempts to home school. These digital tools mean school work can be accessed at home and at any time of the day, working around different families' schedules.

## TECHNOLOGY THAT GOES FURTHER

You don't have to limit yourselves to using purely education technology software for teaching. One of our biggest concerns as a school is the social and cognitive development of our youngest pupils. Starting school is also about developing those social ties and becoming a part of a school community.

We really missed this during lockdown, so to stay connected we started running 'Zoom assemblies'. We shared Zoom dial-in details with all students and parents and held

assemblies like we would usually during term time. It was nice to remind pupils and teachers that we are still a community.

## THE FUTURE OF REMOTE EDUCATION

Lockdown has given us the opportunity to rethink how we teach. We had always wanted to implement flipped learning and now we are able to try it out and, we hope, continue it into the future as all pupils return. There is no denying that digital education platforms have long-term benefits. They improve learning outcomes, reduce teacher workload and streamline processes to save time and money. We want to see schools continue to use technology to complement traditional teaching after children return to the classroom.

*To take advantage of the free support, and help your pupils now and in the future, visit: [covid19.thekeysupport.com](https://covid19.thekeysupport.com)*



**David Maguire is headteacher at Coupals Primary Academy**

# IS THERE A PLACE FOR **TECHNOLOGY CO-PRODUCTION** IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

Al Kingsley asks is helping to develop edtech a rewarding boon or burdensome bother?

**W**ith the UK's education technology sector set to be worth a whopping £3.4bn in 2021, there are now hundreds of technologies being targeted at primary schools hungry to take advantage of innovative teaching aids and admin-cutting tools. But are all these technologies made equal? Of course not.

My advice to primary leaders considering any new technology is to ask what role schools themselves have played in its development. Co-production - suppliers and schools working together to develop technologies - demonstrates, at a basic level the technology answers a real need and takes into account direct teacher feedback. For ambitious primary schools, keen to innovate, engaging in co-production projects can return preferential and cost-effective access to state-of-the-art technologies. However, such projects done wrong can be a resource-draining exercise. In my position as a vendor, Multi Academy Trust board member and primary school governor, I understand both sides.

Co-production can be a rewarding exercise for both school and supplier if both parties are clear on the terms. For schools considering such a partnership there are questions they need to consider:

## **1 WHAT ARE THE VENDOR'S REAL INTENTIONS?**

In education, co-production is fundamental to make sure suppliers deliver what teachers actually need, rather than what they think teachers need. Therefore, whether the vendor in question is truly entrenched in the education community really matters. This means looking past the marketing and questioning who the people behind the product are and where their interests really lie.

Do they have experience within education - putting effort into understanding educational needs - or are they on the periphery, selling in? That means asking probing questions; their

background, external roles, what impact, evidence and research do they have to support their approach? You need to be confident that they are as grounded in education as they are in technology.

If you're considering a longer-term co-production relationship with a supplier it's essential they don't isolate technology from teaching. That means they are as focused on working with teachers on pedagogical development as they are

“There's little point agreeing to test an application which doesn't result in impact where you need it”

on technological innovation. Again, this is why it is so important to know the people behind the product and know whether their interest extends to pedagogy beyond technical processes.

## **2 DOES THE PROJECT ALIGN WITH OUR SCHOOL'S DIGITAL STRATEGY?**

Before engaging in any edtech project, schools need to ask; does this align with our digital strategy? If your school hasn't defined its digital strategy, then be very wary of committing to any edtech project!

In my experience, primary schools tend to lag slightly behind their secondary colleagues in setting a digital strategy, mainly due to the perception that it requires a large IT team to do so. In fact, a digital strategy is a joint effort that at its simplest, is a plan of what you want to achieve and why.



With this in hand you can then assess whether co-production will pay off. There's little point agreeing to test an application which doesn't result in impact where you need it. You may be offered any number of incentives to test a product but remember, just because something's free doesn't mean it's not expensive. The main cost of co-production is usually time; implementation, training, feedback all adds up. If that cost cannot be attributed to an identified, long-term key objective, it's a waste.

While devising a digital strategy can seem like a daunting task there are guides and expertise available to help.

### 3 WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT AND HOW CLOSELY TO ENGAGE?

Every co-production project will be different. It could involve working with an existing supplier on current solutions, testing new or refined features. Teachers will already be using the product, know its strengths and weaknesses and may already have clear ideas for improvement and evolution.

Alternatively, it could be beta testing a product, putting a solution through its paces prior to release, providing early access to discounted or free versions of new technology, which can be exciting. It might be starting at the drawing board and helping shape a new solution to meet a current need. However, testing or collaborating on specification can create extra work for

teachers who need to be trained, and commitment to reporting and providing feedback.

That's why it's so important to reflect on your digital strategy. Will the time and effort required get us closer to our goal? If it aligns then make sure you understand and agree with the level of support and training teachers will be given, the mechanisms to enable fast, streamlined feedback and the added extras you'll access as part of the scheme. Don't be afraid to ask the question to yourselves - "do we get as much or more out of this relationship than we put in?"

### DON'T BE GUINEA PIGS, BE PARTNERS

Let's be clear. Co-production is about shaping and polishing solutions so they are the best they can be. That means suppliers must be transparent about why the technology exists and any issues they are seeking to solve. With that in mind co-production is not about putting ill-designed, half-finished products in the classroom, using students as human guinea pigs! No supplier should expect a school to risk student attainment or teacher wellbeing in this way - if they are, walk away. Seek a co-production partner that is open and honest, understands and appreciates your digital strategy, is embedded in education and can clearly demonstrate they're in it for the right reasons.



## COPRODUCTION IN ACTION

**Dogsthorpe Infant School, in Peterborough, reaped the benefits of coproduction, being instrumental in the development of NetSupport's primary classroom observation technology ReallySchool.**

*"Observing and assessing each pupil every day to gauge their progress is a huge task. We tried several different solutions to try to make the process easier, but most of them only partially suited our needs, which caused more problems than they solved. When NetSupport approached us to test and feedback on ReallySchool we were keen but also a little wary of the time it may take. However, we made sure to understand how the process would work and our experience of coproduction has been overwhelmingly positive."*

**Becky Waters, headteacher**

*"We knew that, in theory, ReallySchool would save us a lot of time - but it was great to test that out and prove it to ourselves. Knowing we've played a role in making the technology as useful as can be is really satisfying - and of course, we're glad to have had the benefit of early access. We can now tailor our teaching and learning so much more and be more active with planning, instead of simply rushing to complete our observations each day."*

**Rachel Jordan, EYFS learning and teaching manager**



**Al Kingsley is the Group MD at NetSupport**

# BOOKING AND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM

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## HOW TO CUT THE ADMIN for your After School or Breakfast Club

Running an after school or breakfast club is a great source of income for the school and provides an essential service for working parents. But it's easy to underestimate the amount of admin that's required to keep things running smoothly and to comply with Ofsted requirements.



There's a lot of information to be collected and stored about the children and when they will be attending. Double or triple keying information from paper forms or emails to produce registers then creating and sending invoices to parents is incredibly time consuming. That's before you start to deal with the inevitable last-minute changes.

Things could be much easier for everyone. Collecting the required information using online forms and a central database means parents don't need to submit repeated information and you have easy access to what you need all in one place.

When using Kids Club HQ, registers are automatically up to date

(including last-minute changes!) and can be viewed online in an instant or exported to Excel for offline use.

Instead of manually creating invoices for parents, these can be generated and sent by email automatically. Automated reminders for outstanding payments help to keep accounts up to date and reduce time spent chasing parents.

Kids Club HQ is an easy to use cloud-based platform built from the ground up for breakfast, after school and holiday clubs with an online booking system for parents and an administration system for you and the club staff.

Schools like yours rely on Kids Club HQ to keep on top of the admin for their clubs.



To find out how we can help with your bookings and administration please get in touch at [hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk](mailto:hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk) or visit our website [www.kidsclubhq.com/psm](http://www.kidsclubhq.com/psm)

Phone: 0118 3216671

# Community Engagement

## BE SMART AND SET OUT YOUR GUIDELINES

Kaley Foran provides an overview of what to consider when creating your school's mobile phone policy.

**W**hatever you decide your school's stance on mobile phones is, having a mobile phone policy in place helps you set clear expectations for everyone in your school community.

### EXPLAIN WHY YOU HAVE THIS POLICY

To manage expectations and make sure everyone adheres to your policy, it can be helpful to start by explaining to pupils, staff and parents why you have a policy on mobile phones. You should think about:

- Parents' expectations around their children having access to mobiles.
- How you want staff, and others, to model appropriate phone use.
- Behaviour incidents related to mobile phone use.
- How you use technology in the classroom
- Safeguarding.
- Data protection.

### ASSIGN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

You'll need to decide who's responsible for implementing and monitoring your policy and state this in the policy. Similarly, if governors are involved, you'll need to explain how and what you expect them to do.

### CONSIDER MOBILE PHONE USE BY PUPILS

It's up to you to decide on the approach that works best for

your school. When deciding if, and how, pupils are allowed to use mobile phones at school consider:

- The age and maturity level of your pupils.
- Parents' expectations (e.g. do they want their children to have one as they travel to and from school?).
- Are there certain groups of pupils (like young carers) that may need access to a mobile?
- Any trends in behaviour incidents or

safeguarding information that may increase the risk of allowing phones in school.

- If you allow pupils to bring phones to school, are they allowed to use them during the school day? Where do you expect pupils to store them?
- If you allow pupils to use their phones during the school day, when is this allowed (e.g. only during break times). And how are they allowed to use them (e.g. no phone calls or messaging, only for games).
- How will you enforce your policy? Don't introduce conditions that you can't enforce, for example allowing pupils to use their phones, but then saying they can't use social media sites.

Make a clear link between your mobile phone policy and your behaviour policies, and set clear sanctions for not adhering to the policy

### DEVELOP A CODE OF CONDUCT/ACCEPTABLE USE AGREEMENT FOR PUPILS

If you allow pupils to bring mobile phones to school, or to use them, include a detailed code of conduct or acceptable use agreement. Your code of conduct must reflect what your policy states about pupils' use of mobile phones.



## CONSIDER MOBILE PHONE USE BY STAFF

There are no set rules. It's up to you to decide on the approach that works best for your school. In your policy, set out how you expect staff to use, or not use, personal mobile phones around pupils. Explain that staff shouldn't use their phones to take photos or recordings of pupils, their work, or anything else which could identify them.

When developing your policy for staff, consider:

- The age and ability of your pupils.
- How you want staff to model appropriate phone use.
- Safeguarding and data protection considerations. For instance that staff mustn't share their personal details with parents/pupils.
- Situations in which staff having access to a mobile phone may be necessary or appropriate. For instance, if they care for vulnerable dependents (such as very young babies or elderly/infirm relatives) or if their job requires extensive lone working (such as a site manager).
- Sanctions for misuse of mobile phones (linked to the staff code of conduct and your staff disciplinary policy).

If a member of staff's role requires use of a phone, try to provide one (rather than have staff use their personal mobiles) and set out the expectations for how it will be used. If this isn't possible, set clear guidelines in your policy for how personal phones can be used in these situations.

## LOSS, THEFT OR DAMAGE

Make it clear in your policy that the school does not take responsibility for phones that are lost, stolen or damaged. Explain how you make the disclaimer clear to everyone (for instance, by posting it in the school office or including it in your code of conduct). Include advice on keeping phones secure and explain how people can turn in lost phones.

## LOSS, THEFT OR DAMAGE

Explain how often your policy will be reviewed, and how its impact will be monitored. For instance, through regular parent and pupil feedback, feedback from teachers and reviewing records of behaviour incidents.

*Kaley Foran is a lead content editor at The Key, a provider of up-to-the-minute sector intelligence and resources that empower education leaders with the knowledge to act*



## GET YOUR MESSAGE OUT THERE

### Lauren Mulcahy gives her top tips for keeping on top of school social media accounts

In recent years, social media accounts have become more and more important to schools, and have effectively become your mouthpiece for talking to the school community. While they can't replace a good parental engagement system and strategy, they are still an important part of school communications.

#### BE PURPOSEFUL

Every social media account should serve a purpose. If you have more than one account, think about goals and aims for each of them. If, for example, you use both Twitter and Facebook, think about what each platform does for your school. Facebook helps you to engage more deeply with parents, whereas Twitter may be better for announcements because of its format (short messages). YouTube is also great for coverage of school events and for showing off your premises and facilities.

#### BE CONSISTENT

However you use your social media accounts, everything needs to be aligned and in sync. Push your branding across all platforms by adding school logos and colours and be proud of your school values. You should aim for consistency in branding and messaging across all social platforms. Don't just focus on a single channel, post on them all equally.

#### BE PREPARED

Plan ahead and think about what you're going to be posting for the next few weeks. You don't need to be rigid – who knows what may come up in the meantime? However, a rough plan of important events that are coming up will help you to stay on top of your social accounts.

If you have social media-friendly engagement software, you can even plot posts across all your channels ahead of time, making it easy to stay on top of.

#### BE A TEAM

If you're in a trust, why not spread good news from your sister schools? A simple retweet or share can go a long way to showing your

solidarity and can help parents to see the positive impact that your trust has on children's education.

#### BE PROACTIVE

Get your social media handles out there and get parents to follow your channels. You should treat social media as just another way to contact parents and tell them important school news, so the more parents you can get to follow you, the better. Pin social media handles up around school, add them to letterheads, and even send letters and messages home to get parents involved.

#### BE VISUAL

Whenever we use photos and video content, we have great engagement levels (people liking, sharing and commenting on our posts). Parents want to see visual content and messages about their children's school, so give the people what they want. Make sure any images aren't blurry and have a main focus, without a cluttered background. Try not to fall into the mistake of uploading the same photo multiple times, as people will quickly tire with it. Most importantly, always make sure you have consent before posting any photos of children and ensure there's no confidential information in the shot.

#### BE SMART

If you upload your posts manually on each individual social platform, you could be wasting hours of time every week. This also leaves you with no way to plan ahead. We use specialist marketing software in-house at IRIS to manage our social media, but there's also a social media management tool available to schools. With PS Connect's parental engagement tools, there's a host of ways to contact parents, including text messaging, push messaging, and social media account management. If you're interested in taking your parental engagement to the next level, visit the PS Connect website for more information.

**Lauren Mulcahy is a social media executive at IRIS Software Group**

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# GET SOCIAL MEDIA SAVVY

Kate Hindmarch explains how to protect your school and its teachers from the threat of keyboard warrior parents

## **H**as your school felt the sting of the double-edged sword of social media? **DON'T PANIC, ASSESS THE THREAT**

Social media is a powerful tool that helps you communicate useful information to parents and pupils, but what happens when a disgruntled parent takes to the keyboard to share their anger at your school? Whether this is because of a recent lesson or lunchtime incident, it can be easy to panic when you see the post. It is always best to get a clear understanding of what the post is saying and how much engagement it has. Commenting publicly on posts with low engagement could end up fanning the flames and cause others to get involved. If the post has received no likes, comments or shares, then you may just want to let it slide since it will probably soon drop off people's timelines.

## **HAVE A COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE IN PLACE**

When a parent complains on social media, it is likely the result of a snap decision fuelled by anger. If you have judged the post to be damaging to the school, then it is important to address the issue as soon as possible. Speak to the individual in question, point them to your school's correct formal complaints procedure and your social media policy which should be easily accessible to all parents online.

Sometimes it is a misunderstanding that you can easily iron out over a phone call or face-to-face meeting. However, if their behaviour continues, or if you've received abuse from the parent in question through social media on two or more occasions, then you may wish to contact the police.

## **BE PREPARED**

Like most issues, prevention is often better than cure and that's as true here as ever. While most schools will - and should - have a social media policy in place, this policy will often usually only cover staff and pupils and won't stretch to parents. And, although most schools will stipulate that all parents sign up to the school's Code of Conduct, this will often not include conduct on social media. That being said, ensuring all teachers are conducting best social media practice and adhere to the guidelines

detailed in your school's social media policy, will mean they're best equipped to deal with any issues should they arise. The policy should clearly outline the consequences for breaching it and what steps the school can take in the event of a social media issue.

## **CONTACT YOUR SOLICITOR**

If an individual is harassing a school or teacher on social media, you may have no other choice than to contact your solicitor and ask for their advice on the matter. In such cases they can help draft letters to the individual that advises them on what laws they have potentially breached. This could be anything from defamation to breaches of confidentiality. If the post is more serious, your solicitor might advise you to take legal action and apply for an injunction.

## **APPLYING FOR AN INJUNCTION**

Applying for an injunction will often be your school's last resort. While they are a very effective way to put the brakes on any social media harassment from a parent, they can be quite tricky for schools - not to mention costly. You can't simply grant an injunction to a parent prohibiting them from entering or contacting a school as they will still need to attend Parents' Evenings and get in touch to find out important information about their child, for example. However, if the judge sees the parent's behaviour as damaging to the school's reputation, it's likely they will still grant the injunction to put a stop to

their negative social media behaviour. Should you wish to go down this route, it's worth ensuring you act quickly, as any delay in proceedings could stop the courts from granting an injunction at all.

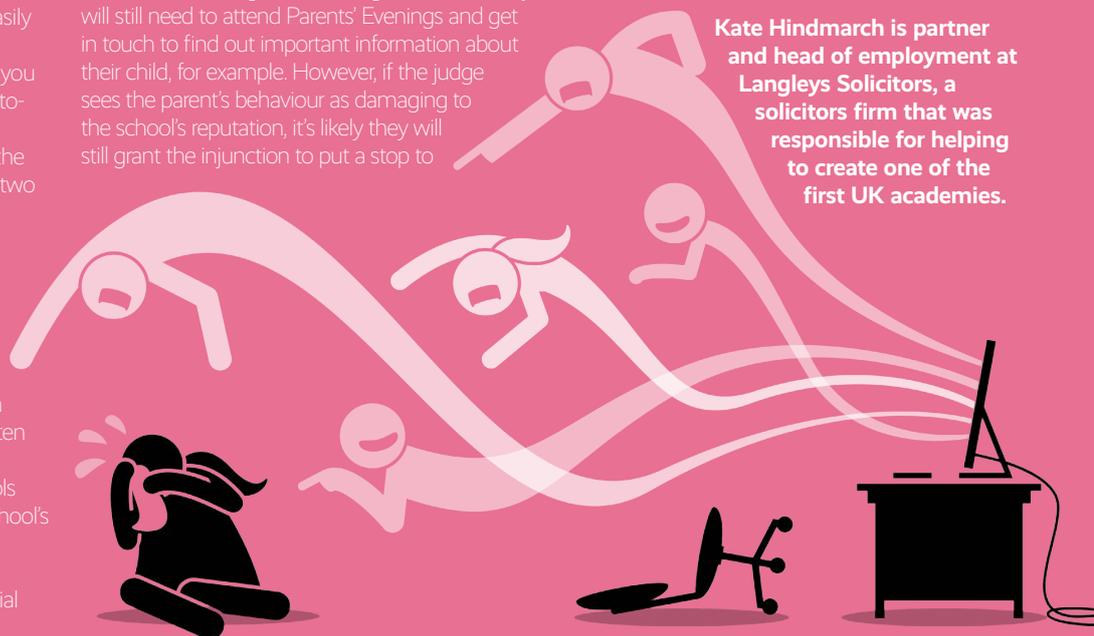
## **ADVISE YOUR STAFF**

Advising all staff members on how to protect themselves online is another great preventative method. Such advice as ensuring they make all social media profiles private, don't befriend parents or pupils through social media channels and advice on what to do if they receive unsolicited messages through social media, are all great places to start. It is also good to outline the differences between professional and personal use of social media. Schools may also wish to suggest clever ways to make it harder for parents and pupils to find them such as asking teachers to flip the first and last letter of their name around or use nicknames.

## **... AND ONE FOR GOOD LUCK**

One clear rule that everyone should remember on social media is to make sure you don't say anything on a public forum that you wouldn't say to someone's face. After all, whether you're a teacher or parent, it's easy to get carried away when there's a keyboard at your fingertips.

**Kate Hindmarch is partner and head of employment at Langleys Solicitors, a solicitors firm that was responsible for helping to create one of the first UK academies.**



# ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

Emily Drabble offers tips and advice for organising a visit to your school from an author or illustrator

**A**s the school gates open again properly for the first time, for many, life in the classroom will be very different. The global pandemic has made industries and organisations completely shift their ways of working and be more agile and adaptable than ever. The impact of that has been enormous, but especially so for schools and teaching staff with tremendous challenges to overcome; whether it is teaching remotely, navigating school hours for vulnerable children or children of key workers or managing the personal impact and risks of Covid-19, none of us could have predicted how dramatically our day-to-day life would have shifted.

To make things that little bit easier for families at home, BookTrust joined forces with a host of the nation's favourite children's authors and illustrators to launch our BookTrust HomeTime hub to help keep children engaged and having fun with stories at home. We also launched Cressida Creativity Summer Camp, with the current Waterstones Children's Laureate. After a term of unparalleled disruption to children's education, Cressida's Creativity Summer Camp inspired families to embrace books, reading and creativity over the summer holidays to inspire magic ideas and for entertainment, learning, as well as to support mental well-being.

For more information and to see all the creative activities that so many authors and illustrators have on offer for families go to <https://bit.ly/39Ak3OU>.

We understand that it won't be the first priority when teachers and pupils are back in the classroom, but having a school visit from an author, poet, illustrator or storyteller is an incredible way to inspire children and help to bring reading and stories to life and re-engage those readers who may not have picked up a book over the past few months.

An author visit really can make all the difference, especially for a reluctant reader, so you'll want it to be the best it can be, having an engaging author speak to children about their job - who are always surprised to learn it's a real job! They will discover all about the ideas behind a story, how the characters came to be and see the

fun side of reading. It truly can have a big impact on children, getting them excited about books may well improve their love of reading for life. But as with everything, the key is in the planning.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

What is it you want to achieve with the author visit? Do you want to increase reading enthusiasm for instance or concentrate on a particular genre or encourage a celebration of reading? Giving the day some direction and focus will be a great help to the author/illustrator.

## FORMAT

Consider how you would like the visit to be delivered. With restrictions in place, these are likely to be hosted virtually, at least for the foreseeable future. Virtual events are hugely impactful though and you could choose to pre-empt these with video content and resources from the author to help build excitement for the virtual event. For when in person events do resume, consider whether you want to hold an assembly for the entire school, should the author/illustrator give a speech or perhaps run smaller group workshops or live readings. Do you want them to sign books, run activities or create resources?

## FIND YOUR AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

Authors and illustrators are in demand and do get booked up quickly. There are a few different ways to find and get in touch with an author or illustrator. If you've never had an author or illustrator visit before, I'd recommend getting in touch with Authors Aloud ([authorsalouduk.co.uk](http://authorsalouduk.co.uk)), they can help to find the right author for your school if you don't have a clear idea. Another tip is to get in touch with authors on Twitter, a website, where most authors and illustrators have a contact me area, or you could try going through the publisher or agent. Also check out The Society of Authors' advice on paying authors when

they visit your school. School visits are an important part of author and illustrator's salary so they should be paid for their work, unless it is part of their promotional tour organised by their publishers.

## INCLUSIVITY

Inclusivity is important, so think carefully about who you approach. BookTrust believes that what children read can transform their lives and change our society. It is vital that children see themselves within the pages of a book or represented by the authors and illustrators who create them. Our BookTrust Represents programme works to ensure that all children get to see themselves within the pages of a book



or represented by the authors and illustrators who create them. BookTrust partnered with Speaking Volumes and Pop Up Projects to publish our *Breaking New Ground* brochure celebrating 100 British writers and illustrators of colour producing quality work for children and young people in the UK. This guide provides lots of ideas of authors and illustrators who you could invite to your school. Also see our website [www.booktrust.org.uk/represents](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/represents).

## BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS

Ensure there is a good supply of books, so that children are able to read the story either individually or in groups. At BookTrust, when we visit schools with authors and illustrators, we work closely with publishers to ensure every child in the class gets to take their own copy home, for free!

## MONEY TALKS

We understand that schools are on tight budgets, but we'd suggest that where possible, funds are allocated to bringing in authors and illustrators to visit children because a memorable learning experience can have a long-lasting impact on student's engagement and overall attitude to learning and reading, which helps with so many life outcomes, not just educationally but socially and emotionally too.

Where an in-person visit isn't an option, think outside the box. Could you have a virtual visit, using online videos or commission an author at a smaller cost to send a video that's tailored to your students?

## ON THE DAY

You want to make the actual day as smooth as possible for everyone involved, including the author,

especially if they're newer and haven't had years of experience visiting schools. They can be quite intimidating – think back to when you were a Teaching Assistant and how daunting walking into a classroom full of bright bubbly children was.



## INSIDER TIPS

- **Authors Aloud – an organisation run by ex-librarians who can help with school visits. They'll do all the hard work, from arranging the logistics, to discussing fees etc. Sso well worth the investment if budget allows <https://authorsalouduk.co.uk>.**
- **Direct contact – some authors are happy for you to get in touch with them, so try the contact section on their website.**
- **Social media – also a great place to connect with authors and illustrators, find out about the work they are doing and what activities, events and tours they have coming up.**
- **Bookshops are always a great to work with, your local bookshop can help to organise an event where books are sold, so it's beneficial for all involved.**

A picture is worth a thousand words, so if you can take photos then do. Just double check the author is happy to do so, which more often than not, they are. With all the GDPR rules and regulations, you want to make sure you don't fall foul of any guidance, so make sure you have permission forms all agreed for any children in the photos, especially if you want to shout about it with the local press, who are always looking for good news stories.

It's important to make your visiting author or illustrator feel welcome and comfortable. If they are at ease from the start, the day will run a lot sooner. Building relationships with them and ensuring they form bonds with the children and the school can pay dividends in the longer term, especially if you're planning on inviting them or their counterparts back. It is a small world and people talk, so treat them as you would any other important visitor.



**Emily Drabble is the head of children's books at BookTrust**

[booktrust.org.uk](http://booktrust.org.uk)

# WELCOME BACK

How can we reconnect with children after the enforced break?  
Ben Ballin sets out some ideas

**A** friend of mine returned to work recently for the first time since the lockdown. She works with autistic children at an inner-city Birmingham primary school, in a majority BAME area that has experienced a great many Covid-19 deaths. She expressed her anxieties about the return as a practical question: will the crayons be sanitised?

Another friend has been rota-working throughout the lockdown at a primary school near one of the city's hospitals. Some of the children were already designated 'vulnerable', while others are children of NHS workers. She regards them all as vulnerable, because key workers' children have particular worries about their parents. She related the following incident from playtime:

"It started with someone throwing themselves off a climbing frame, lying there. Someone else said, 'Let's have a funeral.' They pounced on the idea and all the children from Reception to Y6 got involved. The game was about taking it in turns to die. The others would hold their funeral, including a eulogy for them. Children were clamouring for it to be their turn. They played for at least 30 minutes."

She reflected afterwards: "I see a lot of play about fighting, about power and strength, but I have never seen children, especially younger ones, deal so explicitly with death. As an Early Years teacher, I am used to knowing what to do with play, but this time I felt out of my depth. This was not something any of us had ever experienced before." She concluded: "They were playful about it. What they needed was for me to take a step back."

## WHAT ARE THE EXPERTS SAYING?

The lockdown has caused individuals and organisations to produce innumerable materials supporting children and their families, including home learning resources and some good guidance on children's needs. Much of this focuses on children's need for a safe, loving and caring environment. Some experts, such as Professor Paul Ramchandani – LEGO professor of play in education at Cambridge University – have urged adults to balance formal learning with opportunities for unstructured play (see 'Further reading' panel).

Looking ahead, neuroscientist Professor Irene Tracey has warned that "increased levels of anxiety, OCD and other conditions" are a real risk that could affect pupils over the coming years. Helen Westerman, safeguarding expert at the NSPCC, has reported seeing increased levels of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts during the lockdown, especially among the 400,000 children designated 'vulnerable' by the DfE, saying that "there is a potential generation of children that are very vulnerable following this epidemic." Nigel Attwood, headteacher of Bellfield Junior in Birmingham, agrees, saying: "Our vulnerable children ... will be even more vulnerable."

"I have never seen children, especially younger ones, deal so explicitly with death"

## SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

**REASSURING ROUTINES**  
Routine can be reassuring for both children and teachers: not everything needs to be different or strange. There will be many things that are new for children in terms of social distancing: keeping clean; people potentially wearing masks and gloves. Everyday school rituals such as doing the register, playtime and putting things away at the end of the day will help provide children with a sense of continuity and stability.

**SOCIAL CONTACT**  
Replace pats on the back and high fives with other forms of human contact: spatial distance need not necessarily mean a 'stand-off' environment. Be conscious of what your body language is telling children and remember that no disease was ever passed on through a friendly smile or a comforting word.

**TIME TO TALK**  
Tune into children's needs and listen to what they say. Use circle time to encourage children to ask questions. As one headteacher reported to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, "We need less focus on core subjects and more on the social and emotional at this hard time."

**PLAY TIME**  
As Professor Ramchandani reminds us, children need opportunities for both structured and unstructured play, especially now. This is not only true of the youngest children. As the teacher in the example above found out, this may sometimes mean standing back, watching, listening and letting children work things through for themselves.

**CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS**  
Fake news and conspiracy theories have flourished during the lockdown. Helping children distinguish fact from opinion will help them get their heads around what has been happening while developing their critical faculties. For younger children, this may mean being clear that washing hands regularly is a good idea. For older pupils, it may mean looking at news items or social media stories and comparing them with what the scientists actually say.

**TRANSITION ATTENTION**  
Any rush to 'curriculum catch-up' may be particularly counter-productive for children transitioning from Reception to Y1, as pupils move to more formalised learning, having missed out on the full EYFS experience.

**VULNERABLE PUPILS**  
Those who were already vulnerable may be more so. Some children not previously designated as vulnerable may have fresh worries, traumas or difficulties to deal with. Some pupils will have experienced bereavement, all will have experienced separation and a sense of loss. Safeguarding and emotional support will need to be prioritised, possibly for a long time to come.

**STORY AND DRAMA**  
As the Staffordshire headteacher said: "Drama allows children to play out what's been going on, while story helps

## FURTHER READING

### RESOURCES

**Child Bereavement UK** – Books and resources for adults supporting bereaved children.

[childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

**Cruse Bereavement Care** – Recommended books for children about bereavement and grief. [tinyurl.com/tpcruse](http://tinyurl.com/tpcruse)

**The Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association** – Supporting Children at Home ebook. [sebda.org/news/supporting-children-at-home](http://sebda.org/news/supporting-children-at-home)

### ARTICLES

**The Syllabus** – Important contributions on the political, economic and social effects of Covid-19. [covid19syllabus.substack.com](http://covid19syllabus.substack.com)

**The Guardian** – ‘Don’t turn your home into school,’ says Professor Paul Ramchandani. [tinyurl.com/tpguardian](http://tinyurl.com/tpguardian)

**Paul Hamlyn Foundation** – What challenges are primary schools facing and how can the arts help? [tinyurl.com/tpphf](http://tinyurl.com/tpphf)

### RADIO

**Bellfield’s Year** – One year with a primary school in a poor part of Birmingham as it battles to stay solvent. Listen on BBC Sounds at [tinyurl.com/tpbbc1](http://tinyurl.com/tpbbc1)

**The Briefing Room** – The psychological impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Listen on BBC Sounds at [tinyurl.com/tpbbc2](http://tinyurl.com/tpbbc2)

children use and develop their emotional literacy at a time that they will need it.” Both allow them to do so within the safety of fiction. For my own part, I have been working with Big Brum TIE to develop drama strategies which support children’s and teachers’ wellbeing, including a coronavirus monodrama project.

### LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Teachers are anxious too, and will sometimes be traumatised. This is a good time to be sensitive to your own needs and to those you work with, even if it is just a kind word or sharing your hand sanitiser.

Much has been written about the wider ramifications of this crisis and how the world might change in its aftermath. Existing fault lines and inequalities have become increasingly visible. One headteacher has been quoted as saying, “The legacy of accountability and austerity has hit some schools hard. This crisis has made that all too clear. Now it’s the time to change, slowly but surely.”

For me, the crucial thing right now is to keep prioritising children’s very real personal, social and emotional needs over any perceived need to rush into regaining lost time with formal curriculum progress. Indeed, the latter is unlikely to happen if due attention is not paid to the former.



**Ben Ballin is an educationalist at Big Brum TIE where he is working on a drama project focusing on the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and vulnerable children. He has also co-authored research on global learning and the mental health and wellbeing of ASD pupils.**

 [@benmballin](https://twitter.com/benmballin)

# How best can you protect pupils and staff from Covid-19?

With the Coronavirus still a threat to the health of the nation, what practical steps can be taken to help aid the fight against the disease in our schools?



## JOE PLOSKY

Director at Everblocks UK

Children need to be in schools to get the best from their learning environment. So the space and how it is divided up can play a huge part in providing safe protection for pupils.

An avenue of opportunity for most schools is the repurposing of existing spaces. This can be achieved with fun, modular, reconfigurable, building blocks and panels.

Gyms, halls, foyers and unused areas are great places to define smaller spaces and safe working areas for pupils and staff alike. Classrooms can also be redefined to allow for safe space areas. Everblocks' modular building blocks provide a self-build product to create semi-permanent walls, rooms, areas, desks, workstations and divide spaces. The blocks and panels can be reconfigured to another use or style entirely and can be classed as multifunctional modular building products, as they can be used inside or outside too. The products are also "sustainable through re-use", and we offer a "buy-back scheme" to make sure the products can be reissued into the system for others to use again and again.

All blocks and panels are hygienic and easy to wipe clean.

Full design and build support is also available along with "Classroom" and "Playground" kits for STEM and team learning.

 @EverblocksUK

 [Everblockssystem.co.uk](http://Everblockssystem.co.uk)



## DR EMMA SAUNDERS

General Manager for Genesis Biosciences

With all schools in the UK set to fully reopen in September, establishing a thorough cleaning regime now is crucial for the safe return of pupils.

We are supporting education facilities in their quest to secure safe and effective anti-viral products and incorporate them into their new cleansing schedule. Genesis Biosciences has developed its own unique anti-microbial, general-purpose sanitiser that is proven to be effective against Covid-19 and is free from any harmful chemicals, and has begun supplying primary schools across the UK.

Educational institutes are under huge pressure to ensure their facilities are protected against COVID-19 while also maintaining day-to-day cleanliness. While it is inevitable that schools need chemicals to perform certain cleaning tasks, not all cleaning jobs call for chemical solutions and there can be wider environmental and health implications for both children and workers if institutes are unaware of the alternative cleaning solutions available.

Genesis has seen a huge increase in demand for its new Evogen Professional natural anti-microbial sanitiser and has supplied more than 60 tonnes of product across the entirety of Europe since the beginning of March.

 @Genesis\_Bio

 [evogenprofessional.com](http://evogenprofessional.com)



## JEAN-HENRI BEUKES

Managing Director at Ecocleen

As a commercial contract cleaning provider, we have been servicing 10 million sq ft of schools daily to aid the reopening of education facilities. With specialist cleaning expertise and local account management, the company adapted its offering to meet individual school needs and expectations, during this unprecedented period, to ensure education facilities remain a safe and hygienic environment.

Since schools started reopening in June, we have adjusted our cleaning specifications, in line with government guidelines, and introduced daily cleaning throughout school hours, focussing on main contact points to help limit the risk of cross contamination. We're proud to have helped students, teachers and parents return to some sense of normalcy by providing them with what they need to safeguard their school. Schools are not experts in cleaning: they are there to educate, as well as look after their teachers and students. We're on hand to understand the unique needs of cleaning schools, colleges and nurseries, and help them feel safe as education facilities continue reopening. As a national service provider with regional franchise ownership, Ecocleen has provided schools with a local cleaning solution backed by nationwide standards, systems and support.

 @Ecocleen

 [Ecocleen.co.uk](http://Ecocleen.co.uk)

## MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 IN THE CLASSROOM

**Andy Jakes, product development director at Ultima Displays, explains how sanitising units can be used in schools**

Making hand sanitising part of children's everyday life while in school is the challenge faced by teachers.

This follows Government guidance to schools released in July stipulating that for the Autumn term, schools must 'introduce preventative measures to help students and staff clean hands thoroughly, more often than usual and introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often'.

To meet these challenges, visual communications company Ultima Displays has shared insight into their latest Kids Multi-height Sanitising Unit specifically designed for Early Years, KS1 and KS2.

They already offer a popular range of adult premium sanitising stations and realised there was nothing in the marketplace to engage children, so that they see hand sanitising as an activity that is friendly, fun and appealing. This inspired Ultima to design a brightly-coloured portable unit that can be used indoors and outdoors.

The innovative aspect of the design is the ability to easily adjust the dispenser height; by using the sliding mechanism, the sanitiser bottle height can quickly be altered to between 500 - 900mm from the floor. This ensures its suitability for a broad age range from three to 11 years. The ability to change the height and move the unit where it is needed makes the sanitiser an attractive option for schools and nurseries.

Key to its impact are the brightly coloured graphics, designed to engage children in a clear, friendly way. This makes the sanitising unit easier for teachers to visually explain the importance of hygiene.

Designed with longevity in mind the sturdy metal unit has a low centre of gravity, a wipe clean glossy powder-coated finish and has no sharp edges. The circular half-moon base enables easy access for wheelchair users making it safe and accessible.

### PRESSURE

Covid-19 has had an immense impact on children and their education and has added extra pressure on teachers to keep children engaged and alleviate their fears. Ultima believe the combination of height adjustability, colour and bright graphics will encourage engagement and make it easier for teachers to promote regular and unsupervised hand sanitising by students.

Feedback so far is that children really love the unit and want to use it. This in turn will help to make it a much less frightening experience especially for younger children and ease parents' concerns that their children are safe while in school.



# 20%

OF RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS CAN BE PREVENTED BY HANDWASHING

Source: DfE

Handwashing stations should be located so they are convenient to use at the critical times, such as before handling food or after using the toilet. If soap and water for handwashing are unavailable, or far from the toilet, food preparation area, or food consumption area, this can reduce the likelihood of handwashing. The location of a handwashing station should serve as a reminder or 'cue to action' when people leave the latrine or are about to cook or eat.

Source: [globalhandwashing.org](http://globalhandwashing.org)

Ensure that sufficient handwashing facilities are available. Where a sink is not nearby, provide hand sanitiser in classrooms and other learning environments. Clean surfaces that children and young people are touching, such as toys, books, desks, chairs, doors, sinks, toilets, light switches, bannisters, more regularly than normal.

Follow the Covid-19 cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance

<https://bit.ly/3fw4xoG>

High-touch surfaces should be identified for priority disinfection. These include door and window handles, kitchen and food preparation areas, counter tops, bathroom surfaces, toilets and taps, touchscreen personal devices, personal computer keyboards and work surfaces. The disinfectant and its concentration should be carefully selected to avoid damaging surfaces and to avoid or minimize toxic effects on household members or users of public spaces. The environmental cleaning techniques and cleaning principles should be followed as far as possible. Surfaces should always be cleaned with soap and water or a detergent to remove organic matter first, followed by disinfection.

Source: World Health Organisation

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and safe learning space.

# EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION?

Laura McPhee examines the demands of the new EIF

**T**he new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) has been described by inspectors as an evolution, rather than a revolution of the existing framework. However, with an increased focus on the curriculum – you could be forgiven for thinking otherwise.

The framework now demands teaching facilitates pupils' ability to build up knowledge in the long term memory - so that pupils know more, remember more and can do more.

The curriculum must be well thought out so that the right components are embedded in long term memory in order to enable pupils to perform more complex tasks.

Crucially lesson activities should fit in within the school's goal of education. Steps should be taken to avoid overloading the working memory, as fluency and automaticity become key components in learning.

Educators are deepening their understanding of the framework and wrestling with the practical implications. In what can feel like uncertain times, can we look to certainties within the framework to develop the quality of education within our schools?

We know that our curriculum will be scrutinized. Under the new framework we should be ready to answer detailed questions about our wider provision:

- Can you explain the content of your curriculum?
- Is there clear lesson sequencing over time?
- Is there clear progression and coherence?
- Are the acquisition of basic skills from EYFS strong enough so that children are 'ready to learn' as they enter Year 1?

- What are the subject leaders understanding of the school's ethos and curriculum goals?
- What steps are taken to ensure the lowest 20 per cent (attainment and progress) are accessing the curriculum?

## CASE STUDY

Gainsborough Primary is an average sized school in Hackney, East London, with a children's centre, provision for two year olds and, from September, provision for pupils with SEMH. The school is part of the Primary Advantage federation. Executive Headteacher Jenna Clark shares Gainsborough Primary's six steps to success:

### 1. Audit existing curriculum models

The leadership team undertook the task of evaluating existing curriculum models to understand what was already working well and what needed to change in order for pupils to make accelerated and age appropriate progress.

### 2. Collaborate

In addition to sourcing information nationally and locally, leaders collaborated across settings and key stages to develop a shared understanding of the framework and curriculum content.

### 3. Refer back to your intent

As a revised and updated curriculum began to

be drafted, leaders continued to revisit their curriculum intent asking themselves – does our new curriculum still reflect our ethos and shared purpose?

### 4. Use your subject leaders

In the spirit of distributed leadership, leaders at all levels were involved as early as possible in the process.

### 5. Disseminate

It is important that middle leaders are 'on message' but teachers also need to understand the process. Do they understand why lessons are sequenced? Do they have the autonomy to revisit themes or ensure 'deep learning' is taking place? Class teachers were supported by senior leaders with planning and coaching to assist with the transition.

### 6. Review

The progression document is a work in progress. It is important the curriculum continues to meet the needs of the wider school community, therefore the curriculum will be subject to regular review.



**Laura McPhee is an experienced headteacher, education consultant and carries out policy consultancy for national**

**social justice charity Nacro. Visit <https://www.nacro.org.uk/>**



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## HOW DO YOU MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE?

Laura Williams takes you through the many factors to consider when it comes to recruiting the right SBM for your school

**W**hen it comes to recruiting a School Business Manager, it's important to remember that there are many different types and flavours. Though they may all have the same or a similar job title, they will have varied experience, qualifications and specialist areas of expertise. To ensure that you appoint the right SBM for your school, I've put together some tips to help you navigate the process.

### GET THE FIT RIGHT

When it comes to recruiting a School Business Manager, the wider context of your school is hugely important. Consider the role in the context of your Senior Leadership Team and what your SBM will be expected to contribute to the school at that level. They will of course have a different remit to the rest of your SLT but helping you to develop strategic plans, managing resources, providing reports and contributing to the efficient and effective running of the school are just some

of the ways that your SBM can add value and have an impact on your school. If this isn't how you envision your SBM operating, then maybe it isn't an SBM you're looking for. If you're working within a MAT, think about how the MAT operational systems and infrastructure influences the role of the school SBM and what this means in terms of recruitment. Also consider the people management element of the role and the people/teams your SBM will be line managing. What 'soft' skills will your SBM need in order to ensure that these teams operate effectively?

### GET THE JOB DESCRIPTION RIGHT

Think carefully about the role your SBM will be undertaking. Is there a bias towards one particular element? Perhaps you have an old building that requires a lot of looking after or you have big plans for expansion. Maybe the finance needs tighter management and monitoring or your staffing processes need updating and coordinating. Consider what third party contracts and SLAs you have in place relating to the role of the SBM. What level of expertise will your SBM need? Are you expecting to bring more of your business services in house or will your SBM be working alongside other specialist providers making sure that things get done and run smoothly? When you have a clear

idea how much autonomy, skill and experience you want your SBM to have in each area, you can shape the job description and person specification in a way that is totally bespoke to your school. There is a huge difference between leading, undertaking, administrating and overseeing so be clear at exactly what level you want your SBM to work.

## GET THE RECRUITMENT RIGHT

Your recruitment panel should include an experienced school business professional. If you're in a MAT, you might ask your CFO or COO to assist. If not, someone from the LA, another school or your local SBM group will be able to support you. Role specific knowledge is essential in terms of recruitment; especially when it comes to assessing the practical exercises your candidates will be undertaking. Make sure that the recruitment tasks are focused on school priorities and the areas you need your SBM to excel and give candidates the opportunity to evidence their knowledge and skills in analysing, interpreting and presenting their conclusions. Remember, if your candidate pool includes people from a non-educational background, be as inclusive as you can with tasks by providing enough contextual information to ensure that they are not disadvantaged.

*Laura Williams is a School Leadership Coach at L J Business Consultancy Ltd*



## CAN THE TEACHER DRAIN BE STOPPED?

Sara Ford explains what you should expect from the early career framework reforms

**A**s part of the Department for Education's recruitment and retention strategy, from September 2021 reforms are being made to the support available to teachers in their first two years of teaching.

The intention of the reforms is to turn around the steep drop off in the number of teachers leaving the profession in their first two to five years. Over 20 per cent of new teachers leave within their first two years of teaching, and 32 per cent leave within their first five years. These figures are contributing significantly to the current teacher recruitment and retention crisis.

The early career framework (ECF) will set out what early career teachers (ECTs) are entitled to learn about and learn how to do, and new teachers will receive professional development support over two years instead of one.

The ECF includes sections on:

- Behaviour management
- Pedagogy
- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Professional behaviours

And this will be delivered through:

- Two years of new, funded, training
- The DfE making freely available development materials based on the ECF
- Schools receiving additional funding to allow ECTs five per cent of time away from the classroom in their second year
- A dedicated mentor and new training for these mentors, and funding to cover time with the mentee in the second year

The DfE is taking a phased approach to introducing these reforms, starting with early roll-out (ERO) from autumn 2020 in:

- The North East
- Greater Manchester
- Bradford
- Doncaster

ASCL is encouraging all schools who opt-in to ERO to give extensive feedback, thereby helping to ensure that the national roll-out meets the needs of teachers and schools

whatever their context.

As part of the support package, mentors will receive:

- 36 hours' funded training over the two-year induction period based on the early career framework
- high-quality resources to support their mentoring
- funding to cover their time with the mentee in the second year of teaching

Participating schools in ERO areas will receive £2,200 for each second-year ECT and mentor pairing. This funding is essential, as ASCL believes that it is high-quality mentors who will be key to these reforms having the desired impact.

It's important to note that during both the early and national roll-out, ECTs will continue to be assessed against the teachers' standards (<https://bit.ly/3f9kSPO>). The ECF is a supportive framework rather than an assessment tool.

The reforms will not impact on when QTS is awarded. This will continue to be awarded:

- at the end of initial teacher training
- before the start of statutory induction (minus exemptions from assessment-only routes)

ASCL believes that the ECF has the potential to significantly impact on not just the retention of ECTs by improving their earliest experience of teaching, but also on the quality of their practice going forward. However, for the intention of the reforms to be fully realised appropriate funding for mentors' training and time will be necessary, so we will be monitoring this closely during the ERO. If the programme is to reach its promising potential then learning lessons from the ERO will be essential.

**Sara Ford is deputy director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders**

# DON'T GET SNAP HAPPY

Andrew Laing says don't get caught out when it comes to pupil photos



**W**e've issued two reprimands, which are legal warnings, recently to schools for wrongly disclosing the personal data of children.

In the first case a class photograph, sent to a local newspaper by a Cheshire primary school, included the images of two pupils whose adoptive parents had refused consent for their children's images to be shared.

The second reprimand, issued to a Humberside primary school, followed a class photograph being taken and sent home to parents. The photo included the image of a child whose adoptive parent had previously signed consent forms clearly stating that no photographs of her daughter were to be used outside of the school.

These sorts of incidents can lead to safeguarding concerns and distressing consequences, not only for the families involved but also the staff responsible.

While data protection law does not prevent the taking and publication of photos, in cases where parents have made a specific request for their children not to be included, data protection law does apply.

We feel other schools can benefit from the lessons to be learned in these cases to avoid falling short of the standards required by the law when handling photographs of pupils:

- Photos taken for official school use, such as in the school prospectus or to be sent to the local paper, will be covered by data protection law and so the legislation should be followed.
- Ensure your school has an appropriate procedure for the handling of pupils' images. Don't just rely on a single member of staff remembering to check a spreadsheet of parental permissions.
- Make sure to report any breach to your data protection officer as soon as it happens and consider if the incident needs to be reported to the ICO.
- Know what personal data the school holds and where. Documentation and accountability is a key part of the GDPR and an information audit or data-mapping exercise will help with this.
- Staff should be educated about the school's data protection policies and procedures. These should be reiterated to

them on a regular basis, such as annually or as soon as changes are made. Keep accurate and up to date records of staff training, policy updates and the internal communications that bring these to the attention of staff. This will create an audit trail to evidence compliance with the GDPR.

It's important to note that data protection law is unlikely to apply in many cases where photographs are taken in schools and other educational institutions. If photos are taken purely for personal use, such as by parents at a sports day for the family photo album, they will not be covered by data protection legislation. Fear of breaching the law should not be a reason to stop people taking photographs or videos which provide many with much pleasure. The issue here is about schools following good data protection practices, so their pupils remain protected.

**Andy Laing is head of data protection complaints at the ICO**



# CHALLENGING TIMES AHEAD

Let's talk mental health with our teacher trainees says **Emma Hollis**

**N**ever have we needed teachers more than now and never has the hard work and dedication of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers been more vital in protecting the flow of entrants to the profession.

None of us can know what the world, and our schools, may look like over the next academic year but what I can confidently say is the ITT sector will continue to rise to the challenge, surpassing all expectation and continuing to ensure our children have the very best teachers in front of them (or the other end of a computer!).

Trainees are putting so much trust in us by applying to us now, in such an uncertain world, and are entering training knowing full well what the world looks like. They are placing faith in us to get them through, when they

do not know whether they are going to be in school in September, or even October or November. They do not know which children they are going to be teaching, and whether they are going to be teaching online or in person, yet they are still trusting us, and we need to continue to be open with them.

As a guiding principle, compassion is something we need to show for our trainees. Trainees going into schools for the first time have feelings of nervousness anyway. They are entering a new profession that they are genuinely very excited about, but now there is a deeper sense of the unknown. Will they get it right? What are they going to be facing? And suddenly they are doing that in a period when the unknown is even greater than we have ever seen before.

Going back 18 months, I highlighted for the first time about how not enough has been done – and is being done – to support trainee teachers with their mental health, and this must begin with ITT. Speaking to NASBTT's members – School-Centred ITT providers and School Direct Lead Schools – I was hearing first-hand about a new generation of troubled teachers who needed help. Through my own personal investigation I then discovered that in some local authority areas, up to 78 per cent of child and adolescent mental health service referrals were turned away during the period in which the previous year's trainees were pupils.

Fast forward to today and we need to be even more mindful of the challenges.

There is absolutely no doubt that ITT providers work hard to support the

“As a guiding principle, compassion is something we need to show for our trainees”

needs of all their trainees, including their mental health needs, and yet difficulties around non-disclosure, variability in occupational health processes and lack of funding and capacity in schools mean that their efforts often do not receive the support needed from other stakeholders within the sector. Tackling this important issue must be a team effort, and yet so many members of that ‘team’ are hampered by matters outside of their control.

Since my initial ‘call to action’, the issue around trainee teachers’ mental health has received much greater attention in the sector and beyond. In November last year, Education Support – a charity committed to improving the mental health and wellbeing of education staff, and of which I am a Trustee – published the latest findings from its Teacher Wellbeing Index.

While the headlines at the time focused on how work-related stress in the profession has increased for a third successive year – what went under the radar is that 43 per cent of NQTs suffered from mental health issues in the last academic year, compared to 34 per cent of all education professionals. In many ways, this statistic encapsulates why mental health support must begin as soon as teachers walk through the school gate.

However, we also need acknowledgement of what happens in the ITT year being so important for later years. To provide truly effective mental health support for trainee teachers, there are three overarching challenges we must tackle:

• **INCREASING LEVELS OF TEACHER AUTONOMY AND TRUST**

It is vital for the profession that potential new entrants see it as an attractive option when considering their careers. High levels of stress, caused by excessive accountability in a fear-driven culture, permeates through the system. Trainee teachers entering classrooms for the first time are often surprised and shocked by the levels of stress they encounter in the colleagues who are trying to support them. As an introduction to the profession, this can be incredibly damaging – triggering

mental health issues and anxiousness which leads to increased drop-out rates and higher levels of support needed, adding additional pressures into an already stretched system. Until teachers are truly treated with the professional respect they deserve, this negative spiral will only continue to worsen.

• **PROMOTING HEALTHY WORKING PRACTICES AND BOUNDARIES**

ITT providers work extremely hard to minimise the workload of their trainee teachers but this has been frustrated by requirements to evidence progress and attainment. Good progress is being made under the new Ofsted inspection plans which will no longer require providers to grade trainees, nor to gather and collate extensive files of evidence against the Teachers’ Standards. What has yet to be addressed is the workload expectations placed on teacher educators themselves, particularly mentors in schools who are often overloaded with multiple roles. Without proper recognition for the mentor role, supported with sufficient time, funding and resource, the well-meaning plans for the Early Career Framework (ECF) and ITT Core Content Framework may place such high demands on mentors that they will create unsustainable workloads, leading to greater levels of stress and deterioration of the mental health of those charged with nurturing new entrants.

• **FRONTLINE EARLY INTERVENTION EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

Every trainee teacher, in fact every member of staff right through to executive heads and CEOs, should have access to professional and confidential emotional support. This can help resolve issues and support education professionals to manage their mental health and wellbeing. Early intervention is vital and we urge government to consider a nationally-funded Employee Assistance Programme for all frontline education staff. Let’s also not forget about the mental health and wellbeing of senior leaders within the ITT sector who are facing momentous change with the introduction of the ECF, ITT Core Content Framework and ITT Inspection Framework, all against the backdrop of ongoing pressure to recruit sufficient numbers of trainees in a competitive graduate marketplace.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

- **Not enough has been done – and is being done – to support trainee teachers with their mental health, beginning in Initial Teacher Training.**
- **The 2019 Teacher Wellbeing Index found 43 per cent of NQTs suffered from mental health issues in the last academic year, compared to 34 per cent of all education professionals.**
- **ITT providers represented by NASBTT report a “worrying number of cases where trainees are going back into schools and presenting quite severe mental health issues”.**
- **There are difficulties arising from non-disclosure, variability in occupational health processes, and lack of funding and capacity in schools.**
- **Trainee teachers are often shocked by the levels of stress they encounter in the colleagues supporting them – levels of teacher autonomy and trust must be increased.**
- **Mentors have unsustainable workloads driven by unrealistic expectations – healthy working practices and boundaries must be promoted.**
- **All trainee teachers should have access to professional and confidential emotional support – frontline early intervention is needed.**



**Emma Hollis is Executive Director of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT)**

# BE PROACTIVE IN YOUR PROCESS

Take a strategic approach to risk management says Laura Williams

**A**s school leaders, risk is something that we are incredibly familiar with. We have processes in place to ensure safety on school trips, that our site is secure and that the staff who work for us are screened in accordance with safeguarding legislation. These systems are woven into the fabric of school life, often without issue or incident.

However, there are other types of risks to our schools – beyond the operational – that require more consideration and focus to allow us to mitigate them appropriately.

By taking a strategic approach to risk management, your school can be proactive and make well-informed and timely decisions.

## WHAT DOES RISK MANAGEMENT INVOLVE?

The process of risk management involves six steps; identification, assessment, measurement, management response, monitoring and reporting.

As an organisation, you should have a process that outlines how you follow these steps to ensure that the management of risk is clearly articulated, understood and implemented by key stakeholders.

At a strategic level, risk management should be linked to your school development plan and its objectives; specifically the risks that will impede you from implementing your plan effectively.

## WHAT TYPES OF RISK ARE THERE?

It's easy to fall into the mindset that everything is a risk i.e. an accident on a school trip or a break-in at school. While these are all risks, as outlined above, they will likely already have comprehensive mitigation measures in place. Unless you have reason to believe that your measures are not working or are out of date, an audit identifies areas of concern or some other variable factor has changed, then these types of risk need not feature on your strategic and 'live' risk register (or similar document).

Risk management does not equate to voiding risk altogether as this is often not possible. It's about forward thinking, taking appropriate action at the right time and ensuring that you've done all that you can to reduce

the impact of any risk. If your management actions are effective and the risk can be deemed 'low' then you are managing risk effectively.

Strategic risks usually fall into five main categories; governance, educational, financial, external and compliance. Operational risks, as outlined above, may be incorporated into your risk management process but only if there is a significant impact upon your progress towards your strategic objectives. Chances are, serious operational risks would be covered under one of the other five types of risk. Here are some examples of risk for each category:

**Governance:** constitution or structure of your LGB (numbers, attendance, committees), capacity of the LGB in terms of skillset and time, conflicts of interest.

**Educational:** outcomes, Ofsted, curriculum, provision, staffing etc.

**Financial:** limited income, insurances, procurement, internal controls, cash flow, inadequate information or reporting, asset management.

**External:** reputational, demographic changes, pupil numbers, community, changes in government policy.



**Compliance:** failure to meet legislative requirements, poor knowledge of responsibilities and regulations, audit issues.

“Risk management does not equate to voiding risk altogether as this is often not possible”

### HOW DO WE MANAGE RISK?

Where a risk has been identified, you need to be able to quantify both its probability of occurrence and the relative impact if it does occur.

When you have identified the measures you are going to put in place to mitigate the risk, you should then assess what effect these measures will have on both the likelihood and impact. You should expect a lower probability of it happening or a lesser impact if it does after you have taken management action.

In the academy sector, this risk assessment process is documented on a risk register. In the maintained sector, you may have an LA risk register template that you use or you may record it in another way.

There are four main approaches to risk; tolerating (accepting and managing), treating (controlling or reducing), transferring (contracting out or insuring) and terminating (avoiding). The approach you choose to manage each risk will depend on your context and your resources.

To be clear on accountability and responsibility, you should determine who ‘owns’ each risk. This will likely be the person who is responsible for implementing the mitigating actions. While we know that the ‘buck’ stops with the headteacher, risk management is everyone’s responsibility. Line management and reporting to your LGB should incorporate the risk management process, ensuring that the accountability chain is robust.

### HOW CAN WE MAKE SURE OUR RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS IS FIT FOR PURPOSE?

When a risk has been successfully mitigated to what you determine to be an ‘acceptable’ level, there should be a point where this risk is removed from the risk register. This means that the focus of risk management is not diluted and that priority is given to current and ‘live’ risks. In the future, it may be that some risks ‘return’ and at that point, they can be revisited.

When it comes to managing strategic risk, it’s important that the process is integrated into existing structures and systems. This ensures that it is a regular topic of discussion. The more people that are involved in the identification, assessment and management of risk, the less likely it is that the process will become subjective or overlooked.

Risk management may appear to be an onerous administrative process but when it’s well implemented, it can help you to protect your school, staff and students as well as save money, provide stability and help you to make smart decisions about the use of time and resources.

## RISK MANAGEMENT: SELF-EVALUATION

- Do we have a formal risk management process?
- Is it explicitly linked to our strategic objectives?
- How do we categorise risk?
- Is our assessment of risk robust?
- What is our approach to risk?
- Are accountability lines clear in terms of risk management?
- How do we communicate management action in terms of addressing risk?
- How does our governance structure support risk management in terms of scrutiny and challenge?
- How do we keep our risk management process objective?
- How do we determine whether a risk should be removed from the risk register?



Laura Williams is an executive coach and trainer working with headteachers, SBLs and CEOs

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Mark Hayhurst, PSM Editor

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# ARE YOU READY FOR A LOCAL SPIKE?

Harris Federation's response to the pandemic lockdown contains important lessons in health and safety preparedness, says Graeme Holland.

**L**eicester's lockdown in late June was a stark reminder to schools across the country that the pandemic is far from being in retreat.

Every school leader and teacher will be aware that other lockdowns are a distinct possibility if there are local spikes in infections in the coming months.

The impact of these are all too clear, so having a solid health and safety set-up is an absolute necessity for schools in these covid-haunted times.

Steering through the pandemic has been a huge challenge for all schools and creates significant risks for multi-academy trusts which are responsible for multiple schools.

This is where a strong central team, supported with external expertise, resources and leadership, can come into its own.

That was certainly the case at Harris Federation, one of the largest MATs in the country. The federation, which has 48 primary and secondary academies across London with 36,000 pupils and over 4,000 staff, is a good example of the role a strong central MAT team can play in easing the workload on headteachers, using its central teams and external support to provide strong leadership and guidance.

## GUIDANCE

As soon as pandemic started to hit the headlines Harris Federation's central HR and health and safety teams swiftly produced model risk assessment templates based on template risk assessments written by our health and safety experts, summarising the barrage of government advice and guidance.

This quick action meant that headteachers could then review and adapt much more quickly than if they had been working in isolation.

## TRAINING

Malcolm Drakes, leadership consultant to Harris Federation, said: "While many individual schools struggled with how to equip their staff, the Harris central teams identified and purchased all the PPE required for all academies, including face masks, antiviral sprays, gloves and infrared thermometers. This was then distributed to schools so that leadership teams could focus on preparing rather than on procurement."

The Harris Federation health and safety and facilities management teams were supported by health and safety consultants who produced more than ten covid-19 school-based updates over this period. These were drawn from the numerous government guidance documents and ensured the Harris team could apply the most current information to the schools.

Staff across the MAT could also access a range of health and safety online training courses, written specially in response to this new way of working.

The wellbeing of staff and pupils has been at the centre of the Harris response to the covid-19 disruption. This included

training to prepare staff to help pupils feel emotionally safe and secure about returning to school, and access to stress management e-learning courses for staff and senior leaders.

The pandemic experience showed that with preparedness, strong leadership and support a large MAT could handle the challenge of the pandemic lockdown confidently.

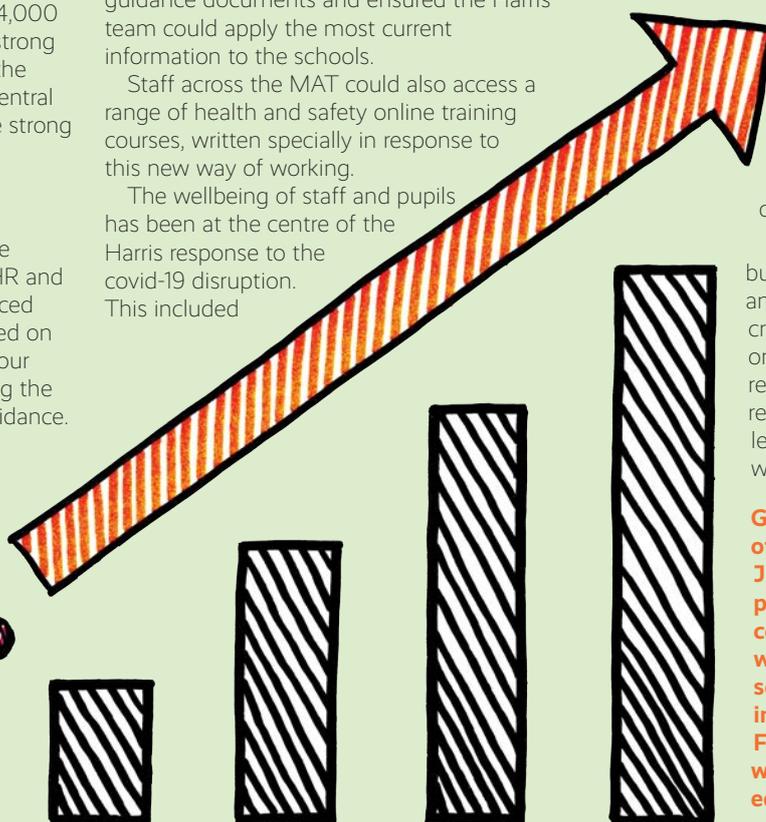
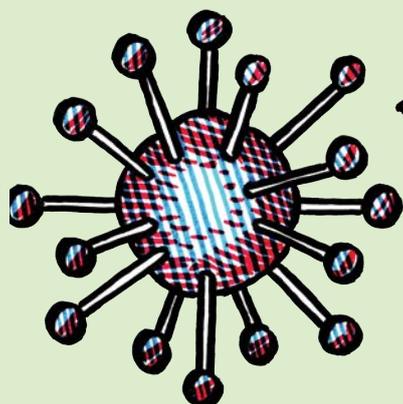
It has also been an opportunity for learning and the experience will help the federation to develop even stronger systems so that they are ready if there is a local spike in the future.

Malcolm Drakes said: "There will be some lessons that we can draw from our health and safety set up. Having robust online systems that provide easy access to bespoke training provides a model approach to the curriculum and online training that we want for all staff and pupils.

"We have risk assessment templates that can be easily contextualised for a school's needs and we want the same for online learning.

"We're reviewing our business continuation plan and we are planning to create a central bank of online teaching and CPD resources so that we are ready to switch into online learning and staff CPD if we need to."

**Graeme Holland is Head of Health and Safety at Judicium Education, a professional services company working with more than 1,200 schools across England, including Harris Federation.**  
[www.judiciumeducation.co.uk](http://www.judiciumeducation.co.uk)





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# Procurement and Budgeting

## HOW TO DEAL WITH A TENDER PROBLEM

Hilary Goldsmith gives her advice on using a procurement framework



**F**rom pens, toilet rolls, stationary, office equipment to catering, you know you'll need them.

For many school business leaders one of the most complex tasks they undertake is the tendering and procurement of new goods and services. Many schools end up allowing contracts to roll over in an almost perpetual state, using the same supplier for years, rather than carry out a new procurement exercise.

Complex OJEU tendering rules, the identification of suitable suppliers and lack of knowledge over how to run a tender process can all be reasons why some SBLs fail to adhere to their own Best Value principles. One alternative to running a full tender can be to use a procurement framework.

### WHAT IS A PROCUREMENT FRAMEWORK?

A procurement framework or Framework Agreement, is an arrangement where a

body (a purchasing consortium, the Government or a Local Authority) carries out a process to pre-select suppliers and sets terms and prices for a period in advance (up to three years).

The frameworks that were used in this process are then available for schools to use as and when required. The tender process takes place in advance, and then suppliers are called on to deliver the pre-agreed specification when required.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING ONE?

Aside from the hassle of having to run your own process, using a procurement framework means:

- The prices quoted are fixed and have already been tested for best value.
- A wide range of suppliers have been invited to tender - a wider range than might be interested in your single job.
- The frameworks will contain detailed information about the products and the services that are available to you.
- Terms and conditions of the tender and purchase agreement are already in place, and will usually have been written by an expert who has your school's best interests at heart.

- Frameworks will have already been checked for legal compliance, so your due diligence is already done.

## SO HOW DOES IT WORK?

First off, you need to find a framework provider. There are a few to choose from, but the DfE's Find a Framework service (<https://bit.ly/2CPU629>) is a great place to start.

It will take you through a question process to lead you to the perfect framework and provide for whatever you're sourcing. Or there is a list of all of the available frameworks at <https://bit.ly/3gayegd>.

Once you have found your framework, you need to complete a specification, outlining your exact requirements, so that suppliers can provide an accurate quote. Remember, the more detail you put in, the more likely you'll find the right supplier.

When your quotes come back, there are two options:

Firstly you can carry out a mini competition to select the provider that most closely meets the needs of your school. Use your normal Best Value practice here - it's not always about the lowest price, you can award on previous relevant experience, appropriateness of the goods offered, or other factors which are specific and important to your school.

The second option is a direct award. This can happen where there is only one supplier in the framework. If the goods or services you need are straightforward and of relatively low unit value, this is a great option, as you can award the contract to a single supplier straight away.

Just remember that before you award any contracts, you do still need to seek all the usual authorisations as set out in your Scheme of Delegation.

**Hillary Goldsmith is a school business leadership consultant**

# BE READY FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Sue Birchall examines how to manage emergencies and plan your budgets to cope with any eventualities

**E**mergency planning has been top of our agenda due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus. The disruption to everyday living has been significant and no less so in schools where it has been very much a case of plans changing as government advice changes.

As a public body, our emergency planning is not primarily about budgets, we are funded on student numbers and operational needs and fortunately our day-to-day income is not directly affected by emergencies. That is not to say that some budget considerations should not be assessed during this disruption, but just how do you plan and budget for such events?

In the education industry we are used to producing emergency plans and all schools and academies will have a version of a Business Continuity

Plan. It is that document that we revisit, usually on an annual basis or when there is a significant change in management. It ensures that all of our action flow charts are fit for purpose and accurate and we have a plan if the worst should happen. This may again be added to in the event of weather disruption or more recently Brexit. It largely focuses on the operational aspect of such events with a focus of least disruption for our students and their learning and rightly so.

Alongside this runs the finance Risk Register, a document that is statutory in academies and good practise in maintained schools often required by the local authority. This is the document that measures the impact of any significant disruptions or alterations that will have a financial effect on the school and its budget forecasting and management. As a dynamic document it enables school leaders to make an informed decision based upon the level of associated risk.

## IMPACT

Part of the process of risk management is to look at the impact of emergencies that may

cause school closure thus impacting on learning and exams. There are several areas which could have a financial risk.

We are all aware that staffing is our largest expenditure and the impact of absence can be extremely detrimental to the budget. At approximately 70 per cent of the budget, it is by far our biggest and most expensive resource. Any loss in this area can have a significant impact, particularly if you are a small school. Considering the impact of any staff absence when writing your school staffing strategy is good practise and where possible providing a financial allowance when budget setting. An emergency plan

should always look at ways you can collapse classes, using technology and achieve collaboration with other schools to share staff in the event of an emergency.

When looking at staffing we tend to think of classroom-based staff as they have a direct impact on teaching and learning. Consideration also needs to be given to the support staff who keep your school running. Imagine the difficulties that would arise if there were no staff to open and keep the school stocked and clean or anyone to work in reception and manage back office functions such as paying bills or first day calling. Using the Coronavirus epidemic and the expectation on provision of free school meals as an example, this consideration also needs to be given to your catering provision.

## SKILL SET

While it would be impossible to have a plan that covers all situations, understanding your staff skill set will enable you to have contingencies in place for all eventualities. Having staff from whatever department taking second subjects or even support staff who are able to manage classes adds an extra element of provision. Processes such as collecting data on availability in bad weather, ability to attend school in adverse conditions

“Access to school or site in the event of an emergency can have a cost”



and out of work commitments will all give you a head start when looking at an appropriate management strategy in an emergency. Your Senior Leadership Team will always be your first point of call but having a second and third string for emergencies is good planning.

### HERE'S WHAT TO LOOK AT

**Emergency Planning in strategic budget setting is best practise and can be a way of accumulating a cushion at year end but not all emergency planning needs to cost – consider:**

- **Collaboration with other schools.**
- **Resource sharing.**
- **Use remote strategies for MIS and Finance processes.**
- **Plan your emergency plan strategy in advance.**
- **Make your staff aware.**
- **Plan, plan, plan.**

### EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Access to school or site in the event of an emergency can have a cost. While we all have insurance, there are excesses to pay and there may be costs that fall outside of your insurance. Things such as fallen trees, building problems, asbestos removal, to name a few, could all become a cost to the school that you hadn't budgeted for. An emergency management plan will always look at physicality, the ability to access your school and provide services, good practise would be to ensure that it is a consideration during budget setting.

The risk from other areas of school operations that can be affected can be mitigated through effective everyday good planning and process. As a school, you will already be aware of the financial risk attached to contracts and terms and conditions of provision of services. Having an up to date contracts register which shows terms and conditions, early withdrawal clauses and emergency procedures can save time and money. Along with this a list of contacts for easy contact if necessary.

### INFORMATION

Making sure that you can access important sources of information such as your information management system and finance systems remotely will pay dividends in an emergency. The data for staff

and students being accessible offsite will ensure instant access for parents, carers or next of kin as well as medical data if needed. The ability to be able to pay salaries, suppliers and for emergency supplies can be invaluable during an emergency.

You may feel that your school is not in a position to be able to allocate a budget to emergency planning, we are all aware of the restrictions of the budgets. However, now is a good time to consider it, we have had an injection of increased funding and before we allocate it to something else it would be prudent to have some set aside 'for a rainy day'. At the end of every year, if you are fortunate, there will have been no need to spend it. Of course, if you are a maintained school this will have to be considered to keep within the balance control mechanism.

It is important to remember, not all emergency planning needs to have a huge cost, including the consideration in good strategic planning would mean that it can be an integral part of the budget setting programme and even a financial cushion at year end.



**Sue Birchall is a consultant, speaker, writer, trainer and business manager at The Malling School, Kent**

# SHOULD YOU CENTRALISE OR NOT ?

Will Jordan examines the thorny issue of how to structure budgets across MATs

**M**ulti-Academy Trusts (MATs) have come a long way in the past few years and there are a growing number of Trusts that have started the financial centralisation journey. The Kreston Academies Benchmark report, published in January, highlighted that larger more centralised MATs are operating more efficiently and with lower average surplus/deficit, which suggests that economics of scale are being realised.

There are several ways that centralisation can happen, and, in many cases, the local context combined with the recent growth of the MAT will impact on both the ambition and resource availability to make such a big and decisive change. For those MATs which have embarked on this journey, the first step is usually to move to a centralised bank account. This can provide some major benefits, many of which can be achieved in a short space of time: reduced access to bank accounts leading to reduced risk of fraud/error; pooling of cash to help manage

growing, it is proving harder to establish and very few Trusts have adopted this approach. GAG pooling is a separate issue entirely to that of centralising bank accounts, as there is no link between cash management strategies and reserve policies, but is one that invariably generates some strong views.

One area of centralisation that has seen much lower levels of adoption is the centralised approach to budget setting/strategic planning. Most MATs will insist on the eventual sign-off of budgets, once they have been prepared and approved locally, but the extent that they are being prepared centrally is still not something that we come across too often. So, to centralise or not to centralise? That is the question.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

With a varied landscape and MATs adopting many different schemes of delegation, we have seen some MATs where the budget process is very much completed within their schools, with a handful of budget assumptions set by the Trust, to try to ensure there is an element of consistency across the schools.

In the cases where we have seen a strong degree of centralisation, the budgeting process has taken a similar path to the one taken on bank

accounts where the budget systems are maintained centrally.

Here the 'big-ticket' items and more complex assumptions – funding, payscale data, pay rises and teacher pay/pension grants – and top slice are all managed by the Trust and the schools will use their local knowledge to maintain staff contract data and discretionary non-staff budget data, such as resources and premises.

## WHY IS IT STILL RELATIVELY UNCOMMON?

There are two main blockages that we see holding back the centralisation of the budget process.

The first reason is cultural and surrounds the perceived reduction of autonomy that was also encountered when centralising finances and bank accounts.

However, where we have seen this implemented – the MAT in question already had ultimate sign-off on budgets in a non-centralised approach – the reality is that schools will still have a big say in where their budgets are allocated, even if the Trust is leading the process.

cashflow peaks and troughs; and efficiency – with fewer bank accounts leading to reduction in management time (bank reconciliations, payment runs, internal transfers and so on).

Of course, centralising bank accounts does not happen without its challenges and can often be interpreted as 'GAG pooling'. This is where the Trust receives its funding centrally and then allocates budgets to the individual schools, rather than schools receiving their income and then just paying a top slice to cover central costs. The same Kreston report highlights that, while the level of interest from MATs in GAG pooling is



The second reason is that the budgeting systems landscape has not kept pace with the emergence of MATs. Given their long history with standalone schools it is difficult to re-design systems from the ground up, and therefore insist on a school-led approach, with the MAT requirements largely being fulfilled with a few aggregated MAT reports. The ability to automatically populate budgets based upon MAT defined assumptions is only available from MAT specific systems, such as our own IMP Planner.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

A top-down approach to budget setting will transform planning processes. With an underlying confidence in the core of the budget, along with MAT defined assumptions being consistent and correct, time can be spent on the more discretionary areas where real value can be added. This can link available budget to school improvement plans or other areas of development.

Improved efficiency is also a major outcome of a centralised model, as MAT budget items can be automatically calculated, reducing the need to check each budget line. While both of these areas bring some hefty benefits, the key reason that we see driving this change is the potential negative impact of getting the budgets wrong and the unsustainable process that is required to check the school's budgets and underlying assumptions in granular detail.

“A top-down approach to budget setting will transform planning processes”

seen six-figure budget swings (within primary schools) when we have started to apply consistent budget treatments to budgets that have never been looked at or prepared on a consistent basis previously.

## WHAT ABOUT 'WHAT IF' SCENARIOS?

In addition to the creation of the core budget plans, once these have been defined, within a centralised budget structure MATs can then 'stress test' these models with a host of 'what if' scenarios, across all their schools and years, instantly.

Uncertainty is one of the few certainties in the current climate, so being able to model various outcomes is crucial. This process needs to be simple to ensure that multiple scenarios and combinations of scenarios can be considered.

Without a unified MAT database – with automated budget building – planning will be a real challenge as these scenarios are driven by changes to individual school data-sets, it takes too long, and is open to inconsistency and error.

Having confidence in the MAT budget has never been more important.

The funding environment is still extremely challenging and despite promises of increases, the details on these are still light and uncertainty remains. In addition to the headline funding there are a host of temporary grants (pay/pensions etc) that all must be factored into each budget, within each school and each year. With so many moving parts the opportunities for inconsistencies, errors and mistreatments to creep in is high.

With the MATs that we are working with, in a number of cases we have



**Will Jordan is co-founder of IMP Software, specialists in MAT budgeting systems**

## HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- The **Kreston Academies Benchmark report** has highlighted that larger more centralised MATs are operating more efficiently.
- MATs' first step on this road is to move to a centralised bank account – however, a centralised approach to budget setting and strategic planning is an ever-growing trend.
- Here the 'big-ticket' items and more complex assumptions are managed by the Trust – and schools use their local knowledge to maintain staff contract data and discretionary non-staff budget data.
- Barriers to overcome in centralising the budget process are cultural (and the perceived lack of autonomy within schools) and that school budgeting systems have not kept pace with the emergence of MATs.
- MATs should consider whether their current budgeting software can automatically populate budgets based upon MAT defined assumptions – this is needed for effective centralised budget setting.
- Primary MATs are reporting improved six-figure budget swings given their enhanced ability for budgets to be automatically calculated.



# Transform Writing In Your School!

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## VISIT DON'T OBSERVE

Paul Garvey gives his views on the way forward for classroom inspections



I've deliberately not titled this piece 'Lesson Observations'—the reasons will become crystal clear!

I love visiting lessons. It's a delight and a privilege and I've been lucky enough to have visited well over 10,000 as an inspector and consultant to schools (OK, that's not terribly accurate, as I lost count a long time ago!). I've learned an awful lot about the process, as a result.

I've both observed and graded lessons in the past. I've done it on my own and fed back the mandatory three stars and a wish to teachers. I've seen joy prompted by a good grade and the devastation I caused by a poor one and I'm sorry! Fifteen years ago, I thought I was doing right, as it was all there was at the time. I did my very best and I was glass half-full, but I knew the process was wrong.

### OFSTED

About ten years ago, Ofsted introduced joint lesson observations. I was leading inspections then and it changed my thinking completely. I had someone else to talk with and observing began to be a visit. I still had to grade the quality of teaching seen. But at least I had someone off whom I could bounce ideas.

However, I realised I could go further. What if several people were in the classroom and they all talked, quietly, but with intent to learn, about the learning and teaching? Talk for Teaching was born.

### INCLUSIVE

At this stage, I and the people who worked with me, still fed back at the end of the day. No grades, but it was obvious what we felt from our feedback. However, it was far less threatening overall and much more

# HOW TO HOLD ONTO YOUR BEST STAFF

Want to improve your teacher retention rate? Simon Hepburn takes a look at the issue

inclusive. I remember clearly a TA, feeding back to a teacher she'd visited as part of a Talk for Teaching group. She told me beforehand that she'd just be quiet, as she could never feed back to a teacher. You should have heard her concise, evidenced feedback. She was just brilliant! Everyone's views on T&L are important. The power imbalance with observation often impedes our learning.

Soon after that, I stopped the feedback. It's not needed. Everyone, from headteacher, to teacher, to LSA, to parent, to governor and even to pupil (yes, pupils have been involved in Talk for Teaching) learns what they learn. It's highly individualised and the teacher joins in discussions in their own class. Highly useful.

I don't feel observations are any use. They are compromised because every single observation, no matter what the skills of the observer, are skewed by:

1. The criteria invented by the observers, often around what they want to see.
2. Every observer carries the baggage of their experience.
3. Teachers are under pressure and don't perform as normal.

In addition, when I ask a HT where the good teachers are and where are those that need support, they always know. So why observe and, especially, why grade? It's often inertia, or a fear that heads won't be able to show the quality of teaching in their school. A vicious circle. Observing to produce data.

Instead, visit classes, always with some other colleagues and everyone in the room, including the kids, will learn. Their learning will be enhanced by seeing you learning, not interrupted. Don't 'observe', visit, with other reflectors (not observers), to learn from what you see the spark (not the teacher) and their pupils doing. You really will all learn!

**Paul Garvey, Education Consultant and owner of QA South-West**

**T**here's no doubt that it's getting harder to recruit teachers. While the problem has existed for longer and is more severe in secondary schools, an increasing number of primary heads are seeing fewer applications for jobs and more teachers pulling out of the recruitment process, even on the day of interview.

And while the COVID pandemic may eventually lead to more people considering teaching, in the short term it is causing significant disruption to teacher training as well as increasing stress levels for many teachers and heads.

With this in mind, it has never been more important for schools to consider how to keep their existing staff. But how can you ensure this?

The key is making your school a 'great place to work' – somewhere that people are happy and productive. And the knock-on effect will be that as word spreads round the teaching community, people will want to come and work for you – reducing future recruitment issues!

In the early 2000s a booming economy led to employers having difficulty recruiting employees across many sectors. At the time I wrote a report called 'Why Don't People Want to Work for Us' following research with eight blue chip companies.

The report concluded that there were four key factors that companies needed to focus on to recruit and retain the best employees.

- Values - are people 'doing socially valuable work or given the opportunity to do this alongside other work'?
- Culture - are employees 'treated with honesty, fairness and trust'?
- Organisational Health - is the school or trust 'successful, growing and offering opportunities for the future'?
- People Policies - are organisations 'listening to employees and giving them the right support' - from financial rewards to development, training and flexible working opportunities?

## WHAT CAN SCHOOLS OFFER IN EACH OF THESE AREAS?

### Values

Schools will score highly in this area by default because of the tremendous social impact every school makes! However, this can be lost in the day-to-day pressures of the job. Make sure you take time out to celebrate your achievements and the impact you are having on your local community – perhaps when you are celebrating the end of each term, take some time to look back at the great things that have happened! It's been

great to see many of these schools coming together to produce positive, celebratory staff videos during lockdown, for example. Involving staff in setting your school's

vision and direction and creating and monitoring your values will also mean that they are likely to feel a greater sense of belonging to the school.

### Culture

Creating a supportive and open culture contributes significantly to staff retention. This starts with listening to your staff – either formally through staff surveys, a staff council or focus groups, or informally by having a real 'open-door' policy where people can share their concerns.

Introducing 'exit interviews', ideally with an independent professional or perhaps a governor can also identify any common issues that can be addressed.

Schools might find teachers concerned about high workload, student behaviour and issues with the working environment – from concerns about health and safety to everyday issues such as lack of time or space to have a proper meal at lunchtime.

Once the school has received this feedback it's so important to act on it to the extent that finance and time allows. To take one example, a school might introduce a

*“It is important to check the impact of your work on retention”*

policy where any additional activity that requires teachers to do more work must be balanced by removing the same amount of work. Or the school might set up a group to investigate the many schools who are reducing or eliminating extensive marking.

Finally, make sure that decisions are fed back and explained to staff. Even in a small school it is important not to assume that people will see changes!

## Organisational Health

It's important to realise that many teachers are looking for career development opportunities and will move school to find them, even if they are happy in their current roles.

What you can offer will depend somewhat on what type of school you are and the links you have within a local authority, multi-academy trust or other type of federation – but ensuring that all staff have access to high quality personal development and publicising internal promotions will help.

One trust that has a good record in this area is the Learning for Life Partnership in Cheshire, where 'Staff Development for All' is one of the stated aims of the trust. CEO Dan Thomas told me, "as we grow, we have already found many opportunities to draw on the strengths of our schools to develop staff in all roles and at all levels, helping us create a strong and stable team for the future."

Examples of innovative development at the trust include holding a job open for a primary school teacher who had the opportunity to teach in Italy for a year, creating cross-MAT roles for teachers in CPD and school improvement roles, and helping admin staff through teacher training.

Another way to help retain staff in this



area is to raise the profile of your school locally or nationally so that staff feel proud of teaching there. This might involve taking part in research projects with local universities, presenting at conferences such as ResearchED or entering competitions such as the EdTech50.

## People policies

Schools are under severe financial pressure, and it might be difficult to see how you can make your school stand out from others in this area. However, there are a number of interesting schemes to investigate that might just make a real difference. These include:

- Flexible working – this is often seen as just meaning job-shares but there are other ways to see this including letting people take time off for family events, and even (if controversially) 'duvet days' where teachers can take time off at short notice!
- Sabbaticals – these are rarely offered in the UK but are common in other countries such as Israel, where teachers can take a year off for paid professional development after six or seven years.
- Salary sacrifice – childcare voucher schemes were closed to new entrants from 2018 but bike-to-work schemes are still popular and from April 2020 there have been major savings available on

electric car schemes.

- Relaxation and wellbeing – can you offer your staff social events (e.g. theatre trips, book groups, walking clubs), access to school sporting facilities or changing facilities for those who cycle or run to work?

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S WORKING?

It is important to check the impact of your work on retention. The most important metric is your overall teacher turnover rate, although it's important to make allowances for individual situations within that – for example a number of staff retiring at the same time. You should also regularly repeat surveys or focus groups in order to see how your staff's perceptions of the school are changing.



**Simon Hepburn combines teaching with training, consulting for schools on marketing issues, including teacher recruitment, and is the author of *Recruiting Teachers*.**

[@mktadvice4schl](https://twitter.com/mktadvice4schl)

[simon@marketingadviceforschools.com](mailto:simon@marketingadviceforschools.com)

## HOW TO IMPROVE RETENTION IN YOUR SCHOOL

- Celebrate your school's work.
- Listen to your staff.
- Show you are dealing with their concerns.
- Offer great CPD.
- Raise your school's profile locally and nationally.
- Promote from within.
- Be innovative with benefits.
- Track turnover rates.

# HOW WILL WE COPE WITH THE NEW NORMAL?

Karen Pilling explains what to consider as children with SEND return to school

**S**o hopefully you have all had a chance to recharge your batteries after the weirdest summer term in our history. Hopefully, we can now start getting back to some sense of normality – or a new normality for a while. The Government has released new guidance for schools on how to be fully reopened but ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’ as they say and there is a lot for us to consider this term.

## SAFETY FIRST

Firstly, and most obviously, is how we should keep children safe. New guidance lists a ‘system of controls’ which must be adhered to in order to reduce risk. It states that children should be encouraged to social distance but acknowledges that this may not be possible with EYFS or children with SEND. It also states that children need to regularly wash their hands. Anyone who has ever worked with SEND children – or indeed children of any age – will know that this is easier said than done.

Children with certain conditions, such as ADHD or ASD, may struggle to social distance or wash hands due to sensory difficulties. The guidance has suggested that social stories will help with this.

Although these are a really useful tool and are used to good effect in many instances, in my experience, social stories need time to be embedded. The idea is that they are done regularly and repeatedly until the child begins to understand but this can take weeks or even months until it begins to work as a strategy. This therefore leaves the question, what happens in the interim? Hopefully your school will have implemented a recovery curriculum which will include the reasons for extra hand washing etc. and this should hopefully help. I have found that most of the SEND children that we have had in school during the partial school closures, quickly got into the routine of extra handwashing. Although staff have said that they underestimated the amount of extra time this can take. We have also found that going through a visual timetable (that includes

handwashing sessions) each morning as our SEND children came into school, really helped.

The guidance makes it very clear that staff do not need to wear PPE unless the child they are supporting has symptoms. However, the guidance clearly identifies the difficulties of reducing cross contamination when supporting children that spit or that use saliva as a sensory stimulant and makes it clear that children that spit should still be in school. The guidance suggests that staff need to wash their hands more regularly but I think some staff may still be anxious when supporting a child with a high level of need. I have found that completing individual risk assessments with staff, that include a clear plan for what to do, have really helped with this.

## 24-7 STRESS

Parents of children with SEND will have had the additional stress of supporting children with a high level of need for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many won’t have been able to leave the house at all. It’s important that we talk to parents, find out how they’re coping and catch up on any important events that may have occurred during lockdown, so that we can point them in the right direction for any support they might need.

The partial closures have meant that many children with SEND will have been at home without their SEND needs being met. That’s not to suggest that this is due to some shortcoming on the part of their parents – but there’s only so much that a child can be taught at home by unqualified families.

We may see some children ‘shell-shocked’ by the process of returning to a school

environment. Many will be overwhelmed. Just having to get up before 11am will be tricky for a lot of them.

Unfortunately, there will also be many children living in toxic, chaotic and/or unhealthy environments which will likely have been made worse by the lockdown restrictions. This is particularly important to consider for children with SEMH needs, since the lockdown may well have increased the difficulties these children have to contend with.

Children with ASD and ADHD will meanwhile find the reversion to ‘normal’ school life



extremely difficult to manage. Staff must be prepared to recognise concerning behaviours when supporting the wellbeing of SEND children. Many will need to be gently eased back into school, while simultaneously trying to preserve familiar routines.

## CREATIVE THINKING

Children with SEND are likely to have found lockdown to be a traumatic experience, and an impending move to a new class or school may be overwhelming for them. This year, children will have started their new classes with very little or no transition into their new classes, year groups and schools. As we know, most children with SEND require additional support with this, and schools would normally have done a lot to help prepare children for their moves.

There will obviously need to be some creative thinking around the best way of supporting these children under the current conditions. It is likely that it will take significantly longer for these children to settle in and offering additional support during this

time will be important. One Page Profiles, transition sheets and CPOMS records will all be really useful to help transition. The more information that is shared, the easier it will be.

## BACK TO 'NORMAL'

The final consideration – and least important, I think, given current circumstances – is to remember that children's progress will have been affected. Although, some children with SEND may have actually made accelerated progress due to having uninterrupted support at home, others will definitely have regressed.

For some children with ASD/ADHD and SEMH, their needs may have made it impossible for them to learn at home, thus requiring an extended period before they're able to settle back into standard school routines.

The Government has talked a lot about the importance of catch up and the need to focus on maths and English. Although I can understand the concern, I'm not sure it should be the main concern for children

with SEND. Children with SEND are often playing 'catch up' and so this experience will not feel too different. If a child is not ready to learn, any attempts at interventions, tutors etc will have very little impact. What we need to do is get these children back on an even keel and then we can see what needs to be done and what gaps need to be filled.

**Karen Pilling is currently deputy headteacher and SENCO at Chapel Street Primary School – a three-form entry primary school with a diverse cohort.**

## TOP TEN THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1** The most important thing is that children are as safe as possible under the current circumstances.
- 2** Children's wellbeing will inevitably have been affected by the lockdown, but not all will necessarily have been affected negatively.
- 3** Children have had little or no transition – this will affect their ability to settle into their new classes.
- 4** There have been a few subtle changes to EHC legislation (<https://bit.ly/3fhfYk8>). Keep an eye on whether these are upheld or if there are any further changes.
- 5** Be vigilant for any safeguarding disclosures following the lockdown – these may increase this term.
- 6** Get children back onto an even keel first – then worry about catch-up.
- 7** Speak to parents and carers as often as possible.
- 8** Make sure that staff know the warning signs to look for among children and parents, and how to recognise when their colleagues may be struggling.
- 9** Remember how important routines are for some children with SEND, try and get these in place as soon as possible.
- 10** Check in with your one-to-one staff to reassure and support, if needed.



# WHY 'CATCH UP' WON'T WORK

Focusing solely on academic learning when pupils return is damaging and will lead to disengagement says Sara Alston

Questions about the return to school are haunted by two 'spectres': the impact of the lockdown on the economy and how we ensure children catch up. Both are rooted in a desire to return to normality and a fear that we, as a nation, and our children in particular, are going to be left behind in some kind of imaginary race. In reality, the clock stopped for everyone at the same time and we will not be returning to normality.

All our children have missed schooling and will have had different experiences of learning during lockdown. It will be easy to look at those children who have spent every day, including holidays, engaged in formal learning activities and completed every piece of work set by the school and believe that they will be in some way ahead. Many people outside of the education system assume those attending school sites are receiving 'normal schooling' and will be ahead in this imaginary race. Those of us rotated to support on-site know that this is not true.

The lockdown has highlighted and exacerbated the inequalities between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. This has led to a moral panic about children who have not been able to access schooling at home and a desire to force feed them all the lessons they have missed as quickly as possible.

## FUNDAMENTAL MISCONCEPTION

The demand for 'catch up' is founded on false premises; children cannot be learning unless they are in school and that they only learn when they are being taught. This has led to a focus on those children who have not accessed teaching during the lockdown.

There is a school of thought, spearheaded by ex-MP Andrew Adonis, that this teaching should be online, regardless of the access, suitability and

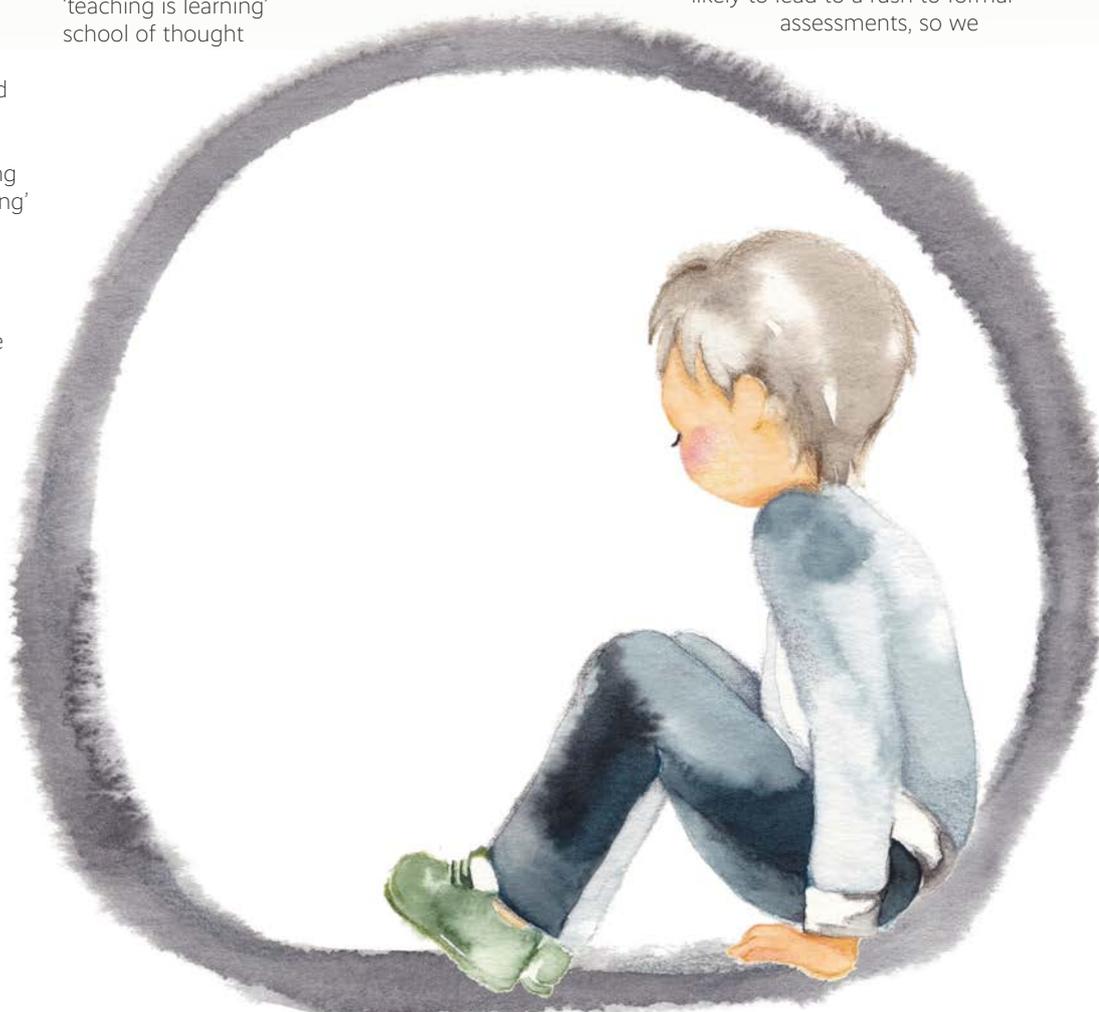
safeguarding issues. But this highlights a more fundamental misconception: that receiving teaching is the same as learning. As any classroom teacher will tell you, there is a significant gap between what is taught and what is learnt. All children, even those with a replicated school day being livestreamed into their home are going to have missed key parts of their education. Education and schooling are about more than book learning and teachers standing up in front of the class delivering instruction. It is about the interactions and relationships that are at the heart of learning.

Those who adhere to the 'teaching is learning' school of thought

are deeply concerned about the time children have missed in the classroom. They see a need to make up this lost time and missed learning as quickly as possible. They are focused on children who will not meet 'age expectations'. We will need to accept that children have missed school and will not be at the same point as previous cohorts. We will need to respond to what children have learnt, not what we expected them to have learnt.

## SENSE OF EXCLUSION

The concern about 'age expectations' is likely to lead to a rush to formal assessments, so we



“The greatest necessity in the return to school will be to make children feel safe, valued and wanted”

know where the children are academically and can fill the gaps in their learning. However, this approach will further exacerbate the inequalities.

Pushing children (and teachers) into ‘catch up’ – including holiday and Saturday classes – will force children into learning they are not emotionally ready to access. Rather than help them to ‘catch up’, it will exacerbate the inequalities. It will add to the sense of exclusion increased by calls for learning which they struggled to access without internet access, appropriate resources or a quiet space to learn. It will leave children feeling lost and unsupported as they struggle to deal with bereavement, loss and

separation. It will confirm their feelings that somehow school rejected them when it shut down and so it is not a safe place for them.

If we get this wrong and focus solely on academic learning which children are not ready or able to access it will intensify their feelings of disconnection, leading to disengagement from school and learning. If the focus is on academic catch-up and telling children how much they have missed, it will be ineffective and counterproductive.

### PROPER LEARNING

Whatever their educational experience during lockdown, children will have been learning – even those who accessed no formal schooling. It is too easy to feel that if work was not set by the school and is not measurable in academic terms that it is not ‘proper’ learning and doesn’t count. If we are to re-engage children in school, we must recognise, value and celebrate their learning of all kinds.

Much of this learning will be different to ‘school learning’ and not on the curriculum. We need to take time to find out who has experienced baking a cake, building a wall or becoming an expert on the Roman Army or the life of an Amazonian

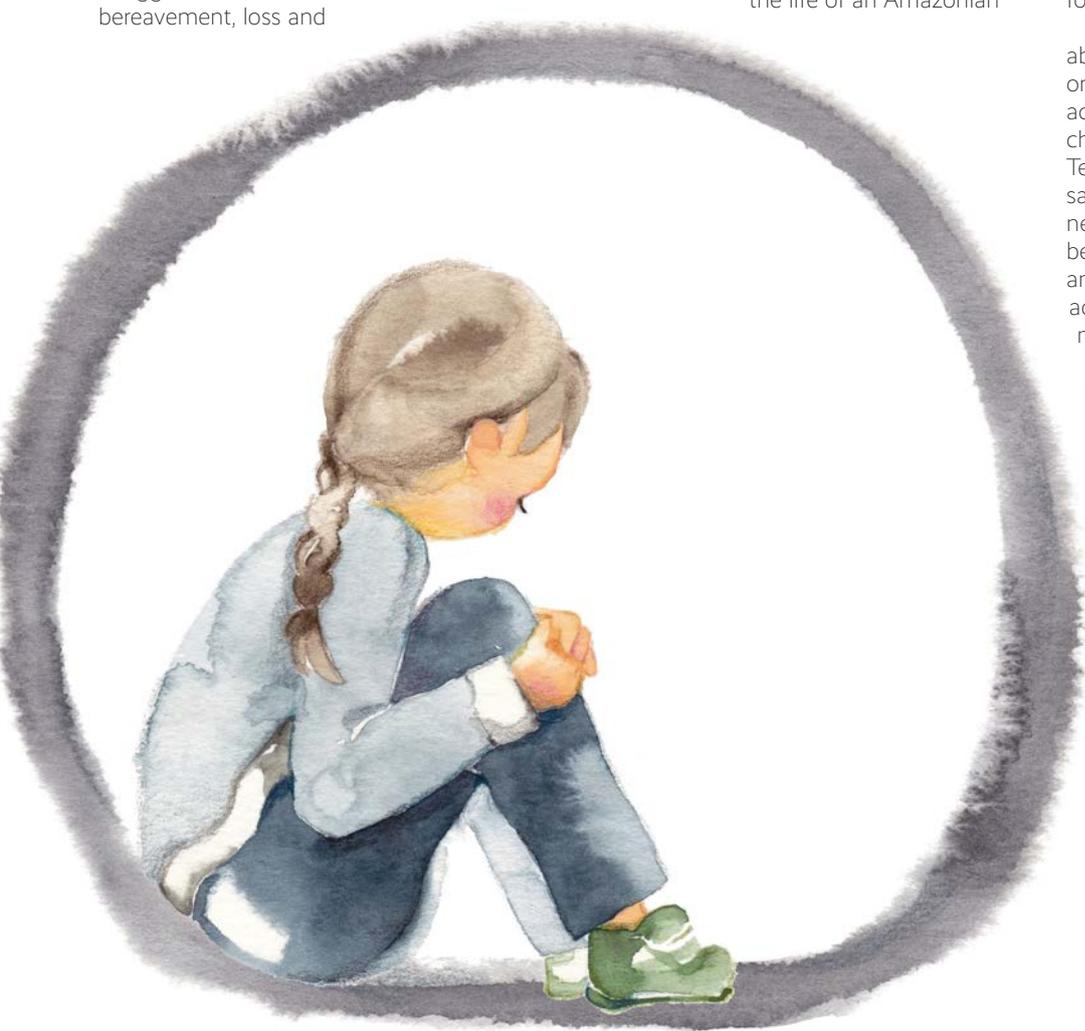
dolphin. Even more importantly, who has been a carer for a sick relative or dealt with grief for someone they couldn’t see?

This learning and possible trauma may not be on the curriculum but will be key to who our children are. Teachers’ responses will be key to how children are able to reintegrate into school and the people that they will become. If we dismiss this as not being ‘proper’ learning and focus solely on ‘catch up’, we devalue children’s experiences and deliver damaging messages about school and their place in it.

### NEW NORMAL

For children to catch up and re-engage with school we will need to give them the time and space to understand and process their experiences of lockdown. They will need to learn and adjust to the expectations and routines of the ‘new normal’. It will take time and support for children to create trusting relationships with adults and each other. This will not be a quick process and will be different for different children.

For many who have experienced abuse and trauma, it may take weeks or months for them to be ready to access learning. Without this support children will not be able to ‘catch up’. Teachers know that unless children feel safe, they cannot learn. The greatest necessity in the return to school will be to make children feel safe, valued and wanted. Only when we have achieved this, can we begin to move their academic learning on. This may feel impossible, but it is the challenge met yearly by the best practice in EYFS. This can act as our model for supportive transitions to enable our children to re-engage in learning and catch up when they are ready.



**Sara Alston is an independent consultant and trainer with SEA Inclusion and Safeguarding and a practising SENCo.**

 @seainclusion

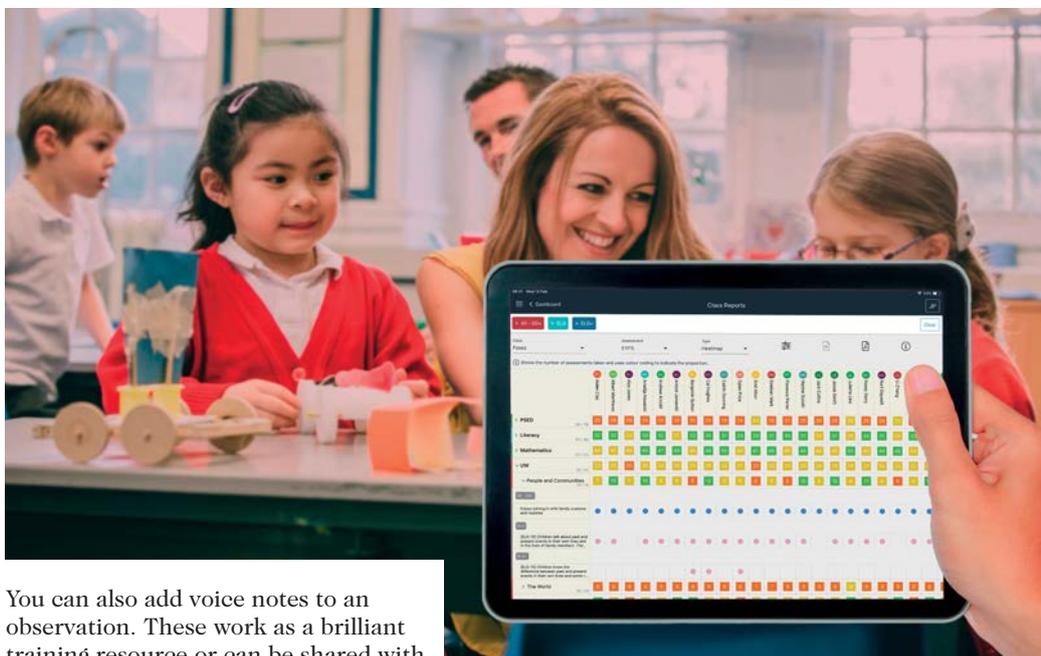
 [seainclusion.co.uk](http://seainclusion.co.uk)

# ReallySchool

A tablet app designed to help teachers and TAs capture observations in the classroom

- Simple-to-use tablet app which allows for easy and flexible capturing of observations
- Capture and record assessments from an in-built list of assessment points
- Identify child-initiated activities and capture photos to support evidence
- Generate journals and reports to ensure staff can see who is on track

Reviewed by: Adam Riches



You can also add voice notes to an observation. These work as a brilliant training resource or can be shared with parents to encourage engagement.

The app is a good way of breaking down barriers between school and home by including the parent in what their child is doing at school. In addition, commentaries are helpful for those who are less accustomed to primary schooling, as well as those with English as an additional language.

ReallySchool also lets you record video files to add to an observation. This is helpful for clearly evidencing your assessment judgements. The app also allows staff to share achievements and progress of selected items with parents – all with a single click. In addition, parents can keep track of their child's progress via the observations timeline. Families can also print their child's journal or share with family and friends straight from the app.

The streamlined reporting interface allows staff to gain a clear overview of pupils' progress via the Class Report grid. This shows the number of observations captured per assessment point for each child in the class, so you can see where more attention is required. Navigating the content is simple and intuitive. You can simply select the view you need by filtering by subject or categorising by assessment area – or view assessment coverage as an easy-to-visualise heatmap.

In conclusion, ReallySchool allows you to be more informed about the pupils in front of you.

ReallySchool allows teachers, TAs and parents to track progress of children using video, picture and sound recording. The app also allows staff to add notes and explanations, helping parents better understand their child's learning journey. Aimed specifically at Early Years and primary settings, ReallySchool comes preloaded with all current UK assessment criteria.

Downloading the app is quick and easy. It's designed to work with pre-existing databases so you can import students and staff from your school's MIS system via a CSV file or Wonde integration. If you need to add them manually, simple-to-use tabs allow you to input information and assign individuals to groups or classes.

The primary feature of the app is the easy and effective recording of students' activity. You can create observations from an iPad or Android tablet, or with a Windows PC or Mac. What is particularly special is that you can support your observations and reporting with visual evidence. Attach pre-existing photos or capture new ones straight from your device as activities are being completed.

**PSM**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## VERDICT

- ✓ Designed with simplicity and functionality in mind
- ✓ Quickly and effectively report to parents
- ✓ A well-designed interface and intuitive displays make the app easy to use
- ✓ Variety of evidence recording options to suit a plethora of scenarios
- ✓ Compatible with a variety of hardware and school MIS

## UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for a way to track student progress, collect evidence of successes and engage with parents.

From £125, depending on pupil numbers, [reallyschool.com](http://reallyschool.com)

# Introducing British Sign Language

Online signing course which acts as a comprehensive introduction for anybody interested in learning BS



- Independent lessons allow for sequential or modular learning
- Themes allow you to focus on your area of interest
- Clear and easy-to-interpret illustrations
- Video support for extra accessibility
- Mirror function allows you to practise back to yourself (webcam required)

Reviewed by: Adam Riches



Introducing British Sign Language is an introductory course that helps you learn and understand sign language, regardless of previous knowledge. The course is set up in a sequential way which allows you to master the basics of sign language through the use of text, videos and other mediums.

The lessons are accessible whenever, meaning that there are no time constraints on when tasks can be completed. Although the recommendation is one lesson a week or fortnight, those wishing to work at a more rapid pace can easily do so.

Each lesson is designed to be completed in the order it is set out on the site. By using this sequential approach, knowledge and understanding of sign language is built sustainably. Retake each assessment as often as you like to try to improve on your previous score.

The lessons are designed to take one and a half to two hours to complete but you're not constrained. Spend as long as you need to take in all of the information before moving on to the next lesson.

Something that stands out from the outset is that Introducing British Sign Language is designed with the user in mind. You can switch between left and right-hand preference, adjust the speed

of the video demonstrations (brilliantly helpful when practising) and if you have a webcam, you can use your screen as a mirror so that you can see what you look like signing. This is really useful because clarity of frontal communication is of such importance. The mirror function opens up another small window so you can compare your signing to an example video. This, coupled with the slowing down function, makes figuring out dexterity so much easier. This is the kind of feature that shows that the creators of this course really know how to teach their craft.

The course boasts simple functionality which is clearly signposted. There are 'next' and 'previous' arrows on each screen and embedded videos are in a letterbox format which means you don't have to open another tab to watch them. Although in places there are some subject specific terms, these are clearly defined and the jargon doesn't make the course content inaccessible. In fact, the additional knowledge makes accessing course materials more straightforward.

What is striking about the course is that you aren't just simply learning how to sign. You also learn about the intricacies of communicating using nonverbal methods, the science of dexterity and, most importantly, the ins and outs of another language.

**PSM**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## VERDICT

- ✓ Designed with simplicity and functionality in mind
- ✓ Exceptional way to quickly and effectively learn elements of sign language
- ✓ Well-designed interface with embedded videos and mirror function
- ✓ Variety of contexts cover many areas of everyday interest
- ✓ Course is accessible anytime for your convenience
- ✓ Easy to get started

## UPGRADE IF...

You want to train staff on the basics of how to communicate using sign or are interested in developing your own knowledge and understanding of how to communicate with those with hearing difficulties.

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## CUT THE ADMIN

Efficiently managing your pre- and after-school clubs can often prove to be a bigger job than initially expected. Kids Club HQ is a cloud-based system built to solve this problem, featuring an online booking system for parents and numerous administration functions for school and club staff.

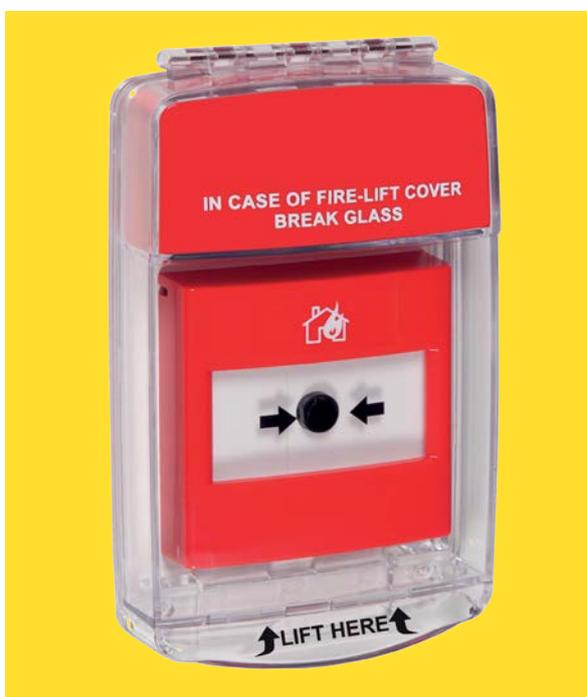
Automatic invoicing and payment reminders, along with up to date registers, mean that schools like yours can save lots of time previously spent on various administrative tasks. For more details, contact [hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk](mailto:hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk).

[kidsclubhq.co.uk](http://kidsclubhq.co.uk)

## 3 FALSE POSITIVES

Disruptions to vital teaching, interference with crucial tests, unnecessary evacuations – false fire alarms can present huge issues within the education sector. Following a recent revision to British Standard '5839-1:2017 Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings', the British Standards Institute now recommends in section 20.2b that: "All manual call points should be fitted with a protective cover, which is moved to gain access to the frangible elements." Safety Technology International supplies a range of protective covers, ranging from integral covers to sounder models, in variations to suit all applications. These covers are specifically designed to prevent false alarms, be they accidental or malicious.

[sti-emea.com](http://sti-emea.com)



## 2 ASSESSMENT ALTERNATIVES

More Than A Score is a coalition of heads, teachers, education experts and parents campaigning to change the current system of high stakes assessment in primary schools. They point out that government policy presently focuses on accountability to the detriment of children's education, and that the time has come to debate alternatives which would better serve schools and, most importantly, pupils. This term sees the pilot of reception baseline assessment, which is opposed by an overwhelming majority of primary school leaders. Over 5,000 schools have opted not to participate – to find out more, email [campaign@morethanascore.org.uk](mailto:campaign@morethanascore.org.uk).

[morethanascore.org.uk](http://morethanascore.org.uk)



## 4 ONE OF A KIND SIGNS

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[signs2schools.co.uk](http://signs2schools.co.uk)



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## WHAT WILL PARENTS' EVENINGS LOOK LIKE?

Parents' evening - it's never easy. This year, social distancing and new health and safety policies could make the event particularly complicated.

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- Offer video and telephone appointments instead of face-to-face meetings.
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- Involve all parents so no one misses out on the opportunity to meet.

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[parentmail.co.uk/parents-evening-manager](http://parentmail.co.uk/parents-evening-manager)

## 7 MANAGE YOUR DATA EASILY

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[tascsoftware.co.uk](http://tascsoftware.co.uk)



## 8 SHINE A LIGHT

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## EXPAND YOUR SPACE

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Canopies are a perfect addition to an educational setting. Commonly used to provide additional play and learning space, they can be fitted almost anywhere and can help to extend classrooms,

provide attractive entrance covers or weatherproof covered walkways.

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[enquiries@twinfix.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@twinfix.co.uk)

# SO THAT'S THE WAY IT IS!

We are just the government's babysitters claims Louis Walker

**T**he government guidance for reopening has shown us our place!

Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic we have learnt a lot about the role of schools in our society. No longer can we consider ourselves simply as educators of children, we may have suspected it before, but now it is clear, we send children to school to keep them out of the way of economically productive adults. We are the national babysitting service!

It is all too clear that the government regretted their decision to close schools to all but key-workers. Ever since they have found themselves battling against their own social distancing rules to reopen them. The guidance for reopening fully in September has made it equally clear that schools will be kept open, at almost any cost! To paraphrase the 18,000-word guidance document: do whatever it takes to get all children back to school and if anything can be done to make things safer, please do it.

## BLAMED

I have never seen such liberal use of the phrases 'wherever possible', 'if possible', 'where possible' and 'is not always possible' (there are 60 incidences I could include). Following the Prime Minister throwing care home workers under the bus in July by indicating the care home mortality rate was their fault for not following the guidance, how long before schools are blamed for an increase in the transmission rates for not following guidance starting 'wherever possible'.

Much of this guidance also gives the impression of tokenism. For example, the enforced separation of children into class or year group bubbles is likely to have a very limited impact given children naturally segregate themselves in this manner. The bubble system could be simplified to being a 'no assembly' rule. Allowing teachers to move freely between bubbles is also very



“Much of this guidance also gives the impression of tokenism”

pragmatic to ensure PPA and staff cover can continue, yet for teachers who provide the cover, there will be a sense that they are not being afforded the same protection as the children.

## BUBBLES

Similarly, while the segregation of bubbles must be enforced during school hours, there is no such requirement for breakfast or after-school clubs. Schools will be keeping children separated through the school day, only to allow them to join together on the school premises after hours. Once again, we see expediency in providing wrap-around-care to enable traditional working patterns at the expense of safety guidelines.

In short, they have recognised that it is not possible to open schools with the same safety standards that the rest of the country are entitled to. They are gambling on children being more resistant to the

illness, and making staff collateral damage in the process. The guidance suggests this is now possible because the prevalence of the illness is lower and the test-and-trace system is now up and running, but evidence suggests that they simply cannot open fully without accepting these risks.

Even at the best of times, schools should not work - the idea of thirty (or more) children in the care of one of two adults and all crammed into a small room is something that can only function because schools have been honed and streamlined over years. If they 'break' school, it is not a simple task to put it all back together again. With this in mind, if the priority is for schools to be open to all children full-time, they need to work in as similar a way as possible to how they did before - whatever the cost.

**Louis Walker is a primary school teacher**

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