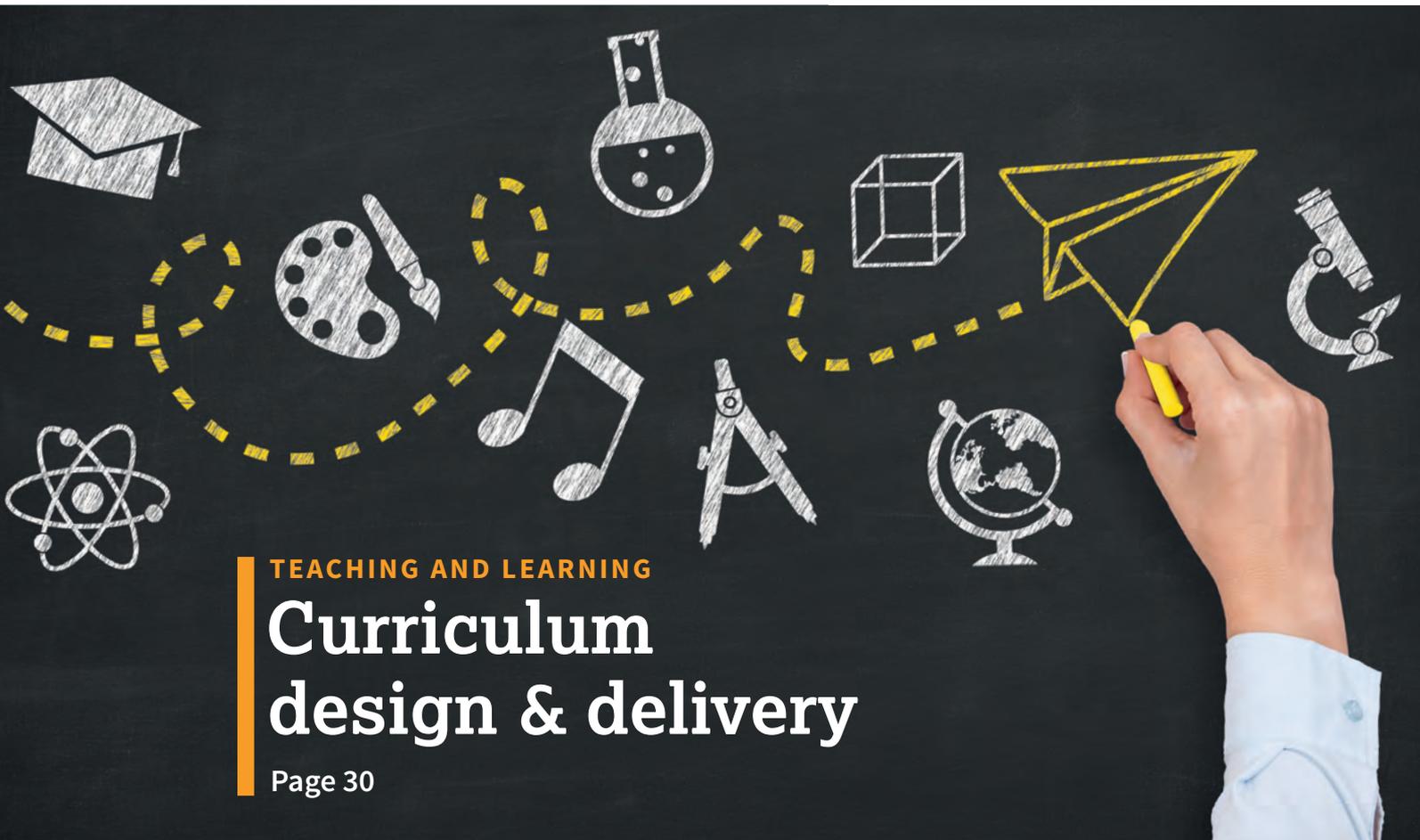


# Insight

Updates, guidance and resources for your whole leadership team



**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

## Curriculum design & delivery

Page 30



**LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

Efficient data collection

Page 10



**SCHOOL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

Rethinking the recruitment journey

Page 22



**SEN AND SAFEGUARDING**

Auditing your behaviour policy

Page 44

Visitors to all the skills events are students, young people, families, graduates, teachers and careers professionals.

**skills**NorthEast

17 & 18 September 2019  
Utilita Arena, Newcastle

**skills**Yorkshire

2 & 3 October 2019  
Centenary Pavilion,  
Leeds Utd FC, Leeds

**skills**Humber

4 & 5 March 2020  
Bonus Arena, Hull

**skills**SouthWest

11 & 12 March 2020  
Plymouth Pavilions, Plymouth

**skills**NorthWest

25 & 26 March 2020  
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**skills**NorthernIreland

20 & 21 November 2019  
Titanic Exhibition Centre, Belfast

**skills**Scotland

GLASGOW  
6 & 7 November 2019  
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**skills**Scotland

ABERDEEN  
12 November 2019  
TECA, Aberdeen

**skills**Scotland

EDINBURGH  
13 (evening only)  
& 14 November 2019  
Royal Highland Centre

**skills**Cymru

CARDIFF  
9 & 10 October 2019  
Motorpoint Arena, Cardiff

**skills**Cymru

LLANDUDNO  
16 (evening only)  
& 17 October 2019  
Venue Cymru, Llandudno



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Centenary Pavilion,  
Leeds Utd FC, Leeds

**NationalCareerGuidanceShow**

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17 March 2020  
Olympia Central, London

**NationalCareerGuidanceShow**

CENTRAL  
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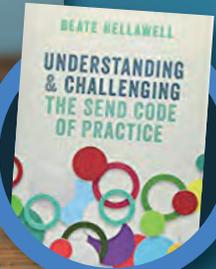
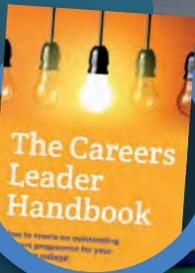
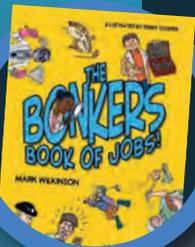
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# Welcome to Optimus Education Insight

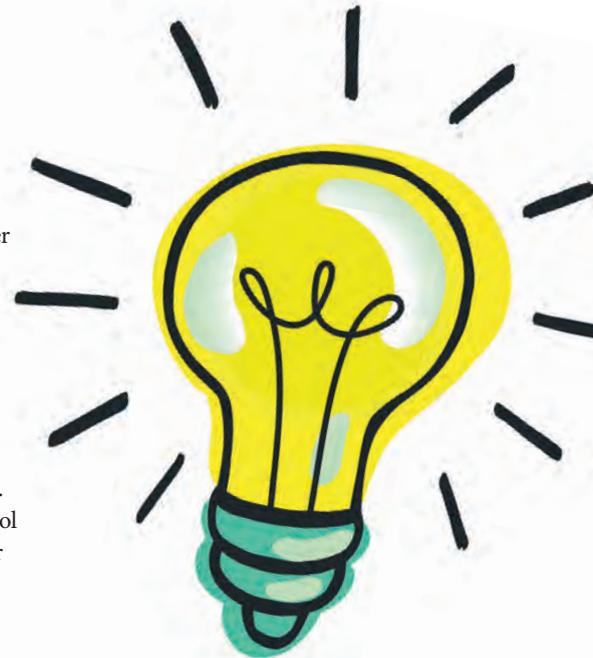
## Dear Reader

One definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results. As Simon Hepburn points out in 'Rethinking the recruitment journey', the days of posting an advert and getting 20 applicants to choose from are over. A different approach is needed. Turn to page 22 for his three key strategies – none of which necessitate spending more money.

Data collection has been identified as one of the biggest headaches when it comes to teacher workload. On page 10, strategy manager Jo Hockton shares a framework for reviewing purpose and processes around data. Simple questions such as 'why are we collecting this data, and are we actually using it?' could help you identify things to stop doing.

Is your behaviour policy working for you? Try using Simon Scarborough's behaviour audit (see page 44). Bringing stakeholder voices together with data findings means you can develop a policy that works for your context.

With the new Ofsted framework looming, everyone is thinking hard about the curriculum. In Josephine Smith's school, the process started by discussing questions around whole school curriculum intent with leaders, framed by Ofsted research and resources. She outlines their model on page 30.



## Time for a rethink



**Liz Worthen**  
Head of Content  
Optimus Education

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# Conference Calendar

Optimus Education's one-day conferences bring school leaders and managers together, helping you stay up to date with new legislation, guidance and best practice in education. Find out what's coming up in your focus area



## APRIL

### Appeals and Admissions

WEDNESDAY, 24 APRIL, LONDON

Build a watertight school case, minimise appeals and conduct hearings efficiently.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

### Supporting Student Wellbeing in Independent Schools

TUESDAY, 30 APRIL, LONDON

Embed a whole-school approach to wellbeing which provides positive support to pupils and staff.

[SEN and Safeguarding](#)

## MAY

### HR & Employment Law in Education

THURSDAY, 02 MAY, LONDON

TUESDAY 07 MAY, MANCHESTER

A comprehensive legal update, with interactive mock scenarios and clear guidance on managing absence and simplifying contracts.

[School Business Management](#)

### Achieving Efficiencies in MATs

THURSDAY, 09 MAY, LONDON

Develop innovative procurement strategies and assess your MAT's efficiency to achieve economies of scale.

[School Business Management](#)

### Delivering a Broad and Balanced Curriculum

TUESDAY, 21 MAY, LONDON

Clarify new expectations and develop a rich and deep curriculum.

[Teaching and Learning](#)

### 17th Annual SEND Update

THURSDAY, 23 MAY, LONDON

Constructive and practical guidance that will enable you to cater to the needs of your SEND pupils and help staff deliver high quality education.

[SEN and Safeguarding](#)

## JUNE

### Supporting Wellbeing and Progress in the Early Years

WEDNESDAY, 05 JUNE, LONDON

Clarify new expectations and create an environment that supports the individual needs of each child.

[Teaching and Learning](#)

### Protect and Support Vulnerable Teenagers

THURSDAY, 06 JUNE, BIRMINGHAM

Ensure effective safeguarding and work with teenagers and young people at risk.

[SEN and Safeguarding](#)

### DPO Training

THURSDAY, 06 JUNE, BIRMINGHAM

Ensure you are equipped and able to evidence training for your GDPR compliance role.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

### Engage and Support the Progress of Boys

THURSDAY, 13 JUNE, LONDON

Develop healthy and equitable whole-school strategies to close the gender gap and improve attitudes towards learning.

[Teaching and Learning](#)

## SEPTEMBER

### MAT Leadership Programme 2019/20: Module 1

THURSDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER, LONDON

The MAT Leadership Programme will provide you and your team with the knowledge and support needed to drive strategic and cultural change to improve educational outcomes across your MAT.

[Leadership and Governance](#)

### Child Protection in Education

THURSDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER, LONDON

THURSDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER, BRISTOL

THURSDAY, 03 OCTOBER, MANCHESTER

Ensure you are fully briefed on the latest safeguarding guidance and can implement robust child protection procedures across your school.

[SEN and Safeguarding](#)

## OCTOBER

### MATs Summit 2019

Thursday 10 – Friday 11 OCTOBER, BIRMINGHAM

An immersive two-day event that aims to provoke thought, inspire you to move beyond boundaries and enable you to build peer-to-peer relationships and network nationally.

[Leadership and Governance](#)



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# What's in this month's Leadership and Governance section?

Workload concerns are likely to constantly be on the minds of you and your team. How can a work life balance be achieved and, importantly, maintained? Josephine Smith explains how her school used the DfE workload reduction toolkit and the impact it had, and data manager Jo Hockton shares strategies for reducing teacher workload by making data collection more purposeful and time efficient.

The GDPR has been in force for nearly a year now and requires you to explain your legal grounds when answering a subject access request. Turn to page 18 to find out what is involved in receiving one and how to respond.

Building positive relationships with parents can be challenging, and when parents are based overseas there are new issues to contend with. Mike Lamb offers suggestions to overcome any barriers. The other relationship in the spotlight this issue is that of the CEO and chair of trustees. Read more about how to get this dynamic right in our case study.

**Lisa Griffin, Senior Content Lead**

## Top leadership and governance blogs

**Dealing with challenging parents**

[oego.co/challenging-parents](https://oego.co/challenging-parents)

**Damian Hinds' plans for teacher retention**

[oego.co/teacher-retention](https://oego.co/teacher-retention)

**Teaching hungry children: the impact of food insecurity**

[oego.co/hungry-children](https://oego.co/hungry-children)

See more at [blog.optimus-education.com](https://blog.optimus-education.com)

## Contributors in this issue



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# How can the DfE workload reduction toolkit be used?

Managing staff workload is a constant priority. **JOSEPHINE SMITH** explains how senior leaders in her school used the DfE workload reduction toolkit to evaluate practices and the impact it had

**No school leader** can possibly be immune to the discussions around teachers leaving the profession, a high percentage within the first two years of completing their QTS, due to excessive workload. Those of us who have been teachers for a long time will recognise the feeling that no matter how hard you work, the to-do list never seems to reduce.

With experience we learn how to work efficiently, how to prioritise and which corners to cut, but staff also rely on the leadership teams in their school to do the same at organisational level.

In a recent meeting of our staff wellbeing group (made up of a variety of staff with different roles and responsibilities in school), they were asked what they would change about the school to promote their wellbeing. They came up with suggestions such as flowers in the staff room, a revitalised social committee and bacon rolls the morning after late parents' evenings.

Nowhere did they ask for less marking, reduced data collections or fewer meetings. I assumed that was because teachers see many of these aspects of their professional routines as necessary and common to all schools.

## Using the DfE toolkit

The DfE workload reduction toolkit ([gov.uk/government/collections/workload-reduction-toolkit](http://gov.uk/government/collections/workload-reduction-toolkit)) challenges leadership teams to evaluate their school practice in many of these areas under the following headings.

- Using technology effectively
- Feedback and marking
- Curriculum planning
- Data management
- Communications
- Managing change
- Performance management and staff support

It encourages leaders to lend a fresh pair of eyes to established school systems. The challenge is sorting the great ideas out from the ones that aren't applicable or relevant to your setting.



*No matter how hard you work, the to-do list never seems to reduce*

We tried and tested a route through the toolkit that would be suitable for:

- a secondary school (there are recommendations for primary colleagues too)
- an Ofsted 'good' or 'outstanding' school where systems are already in place and working effectively but could be adapted, or a less effective school looking for ways to help staff prioritise their work.

The steps below can be followed over a couple of months alongside other leadership meeting agenda items.

## Step 1 Pre-reading for your SLT

What follows are instructions for a five-person leadership team, directing them to some pre-reading and then asking each member of the team to look more closely at one topic within the toolkit. The pre-reading materials can be found by searching on gov.uk.

The topics fell quite neatly into different SLT whole-school roles for us. Feel free to adapt for your setting as appropriate.



## Evaluation of current practice

	Member of SLT	Meeting date	Other Information
Communications			
Curriculum planning			
Data management			
Feedback and marking			
Managing change			

1. Start by reading the DfE ‘Ways to reduce workload in your school(s)’ (advise 15 minutes to read and another 15 minutes to read the associated case studies).
2. Access the ‘Example staff workload survey’ to help identify workload issues (allow five minutes).
3. Finally, refer to the ‘Workload reduction toolkit’ (advise 20-30 minutes reading time) and each take one of the following sections. See above.

Based on the pre-reading, ask staff to consider any ideas and come up with a short summary (around five minutes) to share with the rest of the SLT over future meetings.

- What are we doing well already?
- What could we improve on?
- What do we need to prioritise?
- Are there any case studies, policies or examples of best practice from other schools we should all look at, borrow or adopt?

### Step 2 SLT meeting discussion

At a series of meetings, we dealt with the topics in turn. Starting with a five-minute summary of the theme led by one member of SLT, we then allocated about 30 minutes to a discussion of next steps for us.

Sometimes we undertook some of the specific investigations posed by the toolkit, for example we:

- completed a time versus impact analysis of our marking and feedback policy
- discussed the usefulness of a staff survey
- considered ‘pinch points’ in planning our school calendar
- reviewed our communications policy in the light of a case study school’s version.

### Step 3 Involving other staff

As a result of our discussions we prioritised areas where we felt we might make appropriate changes. To ensure that we weren’t addressing workload purely from our leadership perspective, we asked middle leaders and members of our staff wellbeing group to undertake some of the audit activities in the previous step.

Their observations were shared with us before we made further plans.

### Step 4 Making changes

Having considered workload at the school from a range of perspectives, we drew up a plan that dovetailed with our school improvement priorities. We were clear we didn’t want to be distracted from key aims set out in our plan but, where we could, we would also schedule changes

to address workload. Over the next few months we have planned the following.

#### 1. Take the opportunity to make changes to our communications policy when next up for review.

We will be clearer about email protocols between staff, review the way we share messages with students each morning and provide clear guidelines for parents about how staff will reply to any queries or concerns. All this is intended to provide a professional and accountable set of expectations for staff, while also protecting them from feeling that they must reply to colleagues and parents’ calls or emails instantly.

#### 2. One of the tasks teachers spent most time on, with questionable impact on student progress, was the style of our annual reports to parents.

We plan to look at other more time effective methods for reporting and are prepared to compromise on the style of reports we send out to save time on a potentially low-impact activity.

#### 3. Our T&L group have been tasked with making some recommendations about how to improve the marking and feedback policy when undertaking its annual review.

The aim is to have a policy which maintains best practices in helping young people improve their knowledge and skills as a result of feedback from their teachers.

We’ll use the feedback and marking section of the toolkit and the accompanying communicating change letter to help us explain to parents the changes we are making and why. You will likely have different priorities but can also use the toolkit to provide tools for discussion and suggestions for time savings. ■

### Managing Staff Workload and Wellbeing

Look out for upcoming details of our *Managing Staff Workload and Wellbeing* conference taking place later this year. Offering strategies to save time, increase productivity and improve work life balance, details will be posted on our website soon!



# Data collection: questions for data managers

Data manager **JO HOCKTON** shares strategies for reducing teacher workload by making data collection more purposeful and time efficient

**I've never met** anyone who became a teacher because they wanted to collect data. Some data we collect because we don't have a choice – the government requires us to collect it. Other data we collect to support pupils on their journey to fulfilling their potential.

But, as cited in 'Making data work' by the Teacher Workload Advisory Group, data collection is causing problems for teachers.

*Time associated with data collection and analysis is not as significant as other parts of a teacher's job, such as marking and planning. However, it is most frequently cited as the most wasteful due to a lack of clarity amongst teachers as to its purpose.*

So how can we ensure that the data we do collect is used purposefully? Use these principles and key questions to evaluate your practice.

## Key principles for data management

- Purpose and use of data must be clear and relevant to the intended audience and in line with school values and aims.
- Precision and limitations of data, and what can be inferred from it, should be well understood.
- The amount of data collected and the frequency with which it is collected is proportionate.
- School leaders should review processes for both collecting data and for making use of the data once gathered.

'Time associated with data collection and analysis is most frequently cited as the most wasteful due to a lack of clarity amongst teachers as to its purpose'

### 1. Is this information relevant and important to us?

You don't need to collect data on everything and everyone. For example, if you've only got six EAL pupils in your school, it may not be useful to track them as a group – you won't have enough data to draw meaningful and valid findings.

### 2. What do you want to measure, and why?

- By measuring, can we change anything?
- Is this a school development plan priority?
- What are our key issues, as revealed by exam, attendance or behaviour analysis?

### 3. Will the data help us to progress?

- Are we using the data we already have?
- Why do you need that piece of information? What are you going to do with it?
- What are we expecting to find, and how would it enable us to change practice?

- How quickly can the data be turned around from collection?
- If we didn't collect it, what would happen? What couldn't we decide without it?

### 4. Will the data be accurate? What other sources can we use?

Build in checks and comparisons to ensure that your data is accurate and valid.

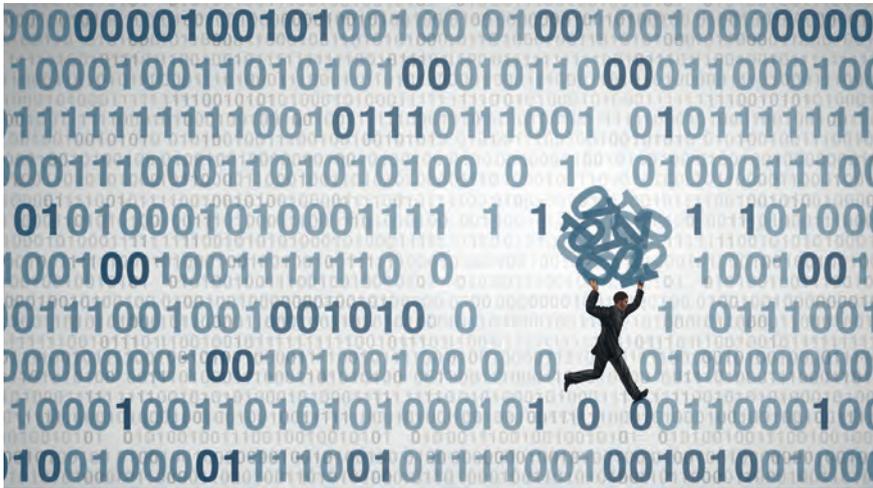
Using other data sources (such as attendance, behaviour and homework) helps give a more rounded picture of your pupils. For example, if a pupil is underperforming, check to see if there's been a dip in their attendance.

**Top tip: don't reinvent the wheel. Check if there is existing data or a process before starting something new.**

### 5. Does our data presentation make sense?

When presenting data to staff, students or parents, keep it simple. Use consistent and common language. Understanding is vital!

Timing also matters. Are you getting the right data, to the right people, at the right time – so that they can make the right decisions? Transparency, clear timetables and deadlines and good



*You don't need to collect data on everything*

communication all make a difference.

Consider what training is required for all levels of staff. Drop in sessions, digestible content and hands-on experience are better than big sessions where staff are talked at. Look out for good practice that can be shared with others.

### 6. Can we stop collecting any data?

In my school, we used to collect 'effort' and 'behaviour' grades. But there was no consistency or clear rationale in how these grades were given. They were too subjective. So now we use evidence we've already got, such as information from our behaviour tracking system.

We've also stopped doing written reports. What's the point of waiting until the end of the year to find out that Billy's done nothing in geography? Instead parents can:

- see live data from systems such as our behaviour tracking module
- attend parents' evenings
- see feedback in exercise books.

It's also useful to consider 'opportunity cost'. What else could you be doing with the time currently being spent on this data collection? Another factor in our decision to stop written reports was the amount of time spent on proof-reading and

correcting them. We decided there were better ways to use this time and resource.

Sometimes it's helpful to set a time period on data collection. For example, we experienced an issue with damage being done to toilets during lesson times.

By collecting data on which pupils were leaving lessons and when, we were able to isolate the problem down to a group of Year 10 boys. Once dealt with, we no longer needed to collect this data.

**Top tip: if you don't use the data that you collect, stop collecting it.**

### Housekeeping for data managers

- Have a clear assessment pattern set out at the start of the year that is shared and understood.
- Define the data to be collected – what is a current grade, a WAG, a TAG?
- Check to see if there are reports that you produce that could be standardised.
- Make sure you are not duplicating information collection. ■

### Key questions summary

Purpose	Process
Does our data management system align with our values and ethos?	Does this, or similar data, already exist?
Are we focusing on the right things for our school?	Can we use an existing process?
What do we want to measure and why?	Are we getting the right data, to the right people, at the right time to make the right decisions?
What are our key issues?	Can we provide assurance of the accuracy of our measurement – is the data valid?
How does the data help us to progress as a school?	Can we stop collecting any data?
What are we expecting to find, and how would it enable us to change practice?	What is the opportunity cost (time that could be spent on another task)?
What will we do with the data and when?	What training is required?
What would happen – what could we not decide – without it?	What can we learn from others?
Will it be accurate, and what other sources should we use to give a rounded picture of our pupils?	Over what time period will we collect it? When will we stop collecting it?
Will the way we present our data make sense to those people who need to use it?	How can we collect data to avoid the need for reinterpretation or excessive work to present information?

*Adapted from the workshop delivered by Jo Hockton at the 2019 Data Use and Assessment in Secondary Schools conference.*



# Have you poverty proofed your school?

Prosperity for all? Nowhere near. **JOHN DABELL** looks at how poverty proofing can be achieved in the classroom

**Britain has a** deep social mobility problem and there are considerable inequalities in educational attainment which are linked to social disadvantage. The Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts the number of children living in poverty will soar to a record 5.2 million by 2022. A storm is brewing.

After years of budget cutting and a shrinking welfare state, austerity has changed everything and narrowed aspirations. Poverty is a huge feature of the UK's social and economic landscape and the gap between the better-off and the least well-off is growing.

You might believe that all children should have equality of opportunity and life chances should not be affected by where you were born or what you were born as. Making that a reality is a Herculean task, but mountains are there to be climbed, not looked at.

## What can schools do?

It starts with awareness that the school experience is a costly one. The Children's Commission report on 'Poverty: Cost of the School Day Inquiry' says that 70% of parents have struggled with the cost of school.

We can't make assumptions about what people can afford. Understanding issues related to the impact of socio-economic deprivation on the experiences of children and young people in school is paramount. This is about being tuned into how school structures, policies and practices affect children from low income households and where difficulties and financial barriers to participation exist throughout the school day. It is essential to go under the bonnet and see if your school's policy and practice doesn't inadvertently discriminate or stigmatise pupils whose families have fewer financial resources.

Children shouldn't feel shame, stigma or left out because of family income pressures but they do. Many dread non-uniform days because they lack decent casual clothes to wear so taking a day off can be a better option than run the risk of being bullied. Asking children to donate to charity can be hard because their family might be relying on charitable donations themselves.

The barriers some children face are life-shaping and soul-destroying. The poorest may not have access to the correct uniform, PE kit or computers to carry out their homework.

## 'Poverty proofing schools helps disadvantaged pupils to relax and not feel under pressure because of their backgrounds'

Lunch, trips, fun events and clubs all add up and are key barriers to children's participation and experience.

Cash-strapped schools can't change society and they can't eradicate poverty. However, as frontline organisations they can do plenty to help disadvantaged pupils and make a difference.

Schools can pro-actively engage with adopting a poverty-proofing approach to the school day to lessen poverty stress and shame associated with family income pressures. This involves taking practical steps to remove poverty-based exclusion and stigma and protecting children from disadvantage. Being fully inclusive and having whole-school buy-in is key.

## Poverty proofing

Looking at the school year with affordability in mind by spacing events and activities out is an obvious way to poverty proof. When there are lots of costs that come at once this can be overwhelming.

Thinking about how school uniforms could be made less expensive is another area of poverty proofing that demands deeper thinking. Education in Scotland have produced the 'Face Up To Child Poverty' pack and recommends the following.

- Calculating the total cost of the required school uniform and weighing this against the amount made available to families through clothing grants.
- Considering appropriate responses to breaches of the uniform code that are likely to be linked to a child living in poverty.
- Setting up 'swap shops' and other such systems (perhaps promoting these as a form of environmentalism, thus challenging the stigma of second-hand clothing).



- Recycling of lost property/items of uniform that are no longer needed or have been outgrown.

Other ideas include offering pupils a free drink and snack before exams, improving IT access, offering more breakfast clubs, changing the ways school meals are administered and cutting the number of non-uniform days.

### Changing mindset culture

Schools can get help with poverty proofing ideas and strategies through the charity Children North East. They help schools to poverty proof the school day and provide a toolkit to lessen stigma, remove obstacles to learning and help schools explore the most effective way to spend pupil premium.

Their toolkit involves a school audit process questioning pupils, staff, parents and governors followed by the creation of a personalised action plan to address any unintended stigmatising policies or practices. Following a review visit, schools get the opportunity to be awarded an accreditation.

The scheme encourages schools to adopt simple measures to help those living in poverty. Their strapline is: 'Ensure all activity and planned activity in schools does not identify, exclude, treat differently or make assumptions about those children whose household income or resources are lower than others.'

Poverty proofing schools helps disadvantaged pupils to relax and not feel under pressure because of their backgrounds. An



*Breakfast clubs can help families living in poverty*

example of this in the news recently is the school that have banned pencil cases in a bid to stop pupils from poor families being stigmatised.

### And finally

Going through a poverty proofing process promotes a shift in whole-school ethos and culture and the opportunity to make a difference. When barriers to learning are removed there is clear evidence of increased attendance and attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

Schools that fully commit to poverty proofing aren't afraid to have hard conversations. They keep equality on the agenda at all times and ensure that poverty is not a barrier to success. ■

#### Top tips

- Actively challenge any staff prejudices or stereotypes and provide information to dispel poverty myths.
- Rethink registers so that FSM doesn't appear next to a pupil's name projected on the whiteboard.
- Don't just think about pupils in receipt of FSMs; over half of all children living in poverty are in working households, struggling with low pay.
- Use evidence to help you decide the best way to spend pupil premium and involve children and parents in this. Look at the barriers to learning first, then select your interventions.
- Ensure governors are aware of requirements in relation to pupil premium accountability and reducing the attainment gap.
- Invest in training for teachers and governors to explore the impact poverty has on the lives of pupils.
- Limit the number of charities you raise money for. Only ever ask for donations and consider a family payment to help families with multiple children.
- Make dressing up clothes, or resources to make costumes, available so that no child is left out of dressing up days/events.
- Encourage parents to give thank you notes to teachers at Christmas rather than presents.
- Provide spare PE kits. Looking for any aspect of your school where pupils may become aware of financial differences is extremely important. For example, asking children what they did at the weekend and holidays can lead to less well-off children feeling awkward and uncomfortable.

#### Pupil premium review

Our experts can carry out a two-day *Pupil Premium Review* to ensure you effectively utilise this funding. The review includes:

- half day preparation out of school analysing relevant documents
- a day in school bespoke to your setting and pupil premium needs
- half day comprising of a comprehensive report with recommendations of how you can improve provision and outcomes for pupil premium pupils.

Find out more at [oego.co/PP\\_review](https://oego.co/PP_review)



## CASE STUDY

# Building the CEO and chair of trustees partnership

How do you get the dynamic between the CEO and chair right? **TIFFANY BECK** describes how she built a successful relationship with her CEO to achieve their vision for the MAT

**For better or worse**, the relationship between a chair of trustees and CEO can have a dramatic effect on the entire organisation.

When it's dysfunctional, the relationship can include issues such as:

- lacklustre ambition or cosiness that doesn't move anything forwards
- lack of trust which leads to problems being swept under the rug
- friction that seeps out of the boardroom throughout the organisation
- collusion or lack of oversight that leads to disaster.

When it's at its best, the relationship between the two leaders can:

- set the tone, pace, and level of effectiveness for the entire trust
- drive a vision, ambition, and culture that results in fantastic outcomes for children and a working environment that people want to be a part of
- shape the strength and resilience of the organisation
- be an exceptional source of both support and challenge for each other.

How do you go from being mere termly colleagues to a partnership of leaders who inspire, drive, challenge and support each other, creating a thriving, responsive organisation in the process?

**'Everything that drives positive impact comes down to honesty and trust'**

### Honesty and trust

Everything that drives positive impact comes down to these two elements. Ideally there is a commitment to openness and honesty from day one about problems, how things work, and having a thick skin to enable truly fierce conversations. If you're already struggling to get it right, then you must have the difficult conversation about resetting the relationship to fulfil both roles effectively and move the MAT forward.

It takes time and you must be on the same page. Meet regularly. Share challenges, ideas, experiences. Develop plans and figure each other out. I remember planning for a looming inspection and having a breakfast meeting at a restaurant which offers free coffee refills. CEO Nick Osborne and I ended up working all day having paid for only two coffees which were probably refilled five or six times.

We emerged with several of his biggest headaches alleviated, new ideas scribbled into his notebook, and a plan which helped me build a MAT board which would later win an award.

### Building trust

When I think back to day one with Nick (at the time I was the new chair of a single maintained school and he was the recently appointed executive head), he sat down with me and gave me the entire picture of the school. He told me the history, what had gone wrong and why, the impossible challenges he had to overcome in a tight timeframe, the strategies he was using and the impact those would have, and what the school could be.

I had no idea what he was talking about. Everything education was entirely new to me. I told him I didn't know anything about schools or governance or what I was supposed to do. He said he'd never seen effective governance before, but what mattered was that I asked questions that got him thinking in a different way. I asked him what he needed from me. He took a deep breath and stared at me. 'What I need, is someone to talk to.'

He needed someone to unload on, who would listen and coach him through. Someone he could trust who would help him stay on track. He needed someone to tell him when his ideas were too crazy, or when they might just be crazy enough to work. He needed someone who would figure out education enough to help him become a better leader. The next day I was enrolled in every training offer I could find.

### Building a partnership

We had to learn to work together. I learned education and leadership alongside him, and together we created a



*People and relationships mean everything*

whole new organisation around a bigger, broader, and even wilder version of that vision from day one. Ask us about our entrepreneurial curriculum, learning to measure what we value, and our innovative school improvement model and we won't stop talking!

Because of the honesty and trust established from the start, he knows any crisis, any challenge, anything that keeps him up at night, he can take to me and we deal with it together. He also knows he can bounce any idea off me. Sometimes I think it's brilliant, sometimes I take it off in some wildly ambitious direction.

That dynamic also means I can take anything to him. He might say I'm thinking too far ahead, or he might say 'this could work if we do it like this' as he takes off with it. Because we have a firm foundation of trust and safety, we aren't afraid to challenge each other, and we don't hold back. That brutal honesty and vulnerability means no stone is ever left unturned. It also means we know when the other is struggling and needs support.

### Shaping the board

That openness has transferred to the whole

board, and our trustee meetings are no holds barred. I've never had the privilege of working with a more forward-thinking, innovative group of people.

Sometimes there is solemnity, other times stress, often laughter, but always there is flow. We take immense pride in openly admitting our mistakes and learning from them. We are all united towards a vision we embrace, we are all in it together, and we are all trying to find the best way forward.

At our last board meeting I knew of an issue that was worrying Nick, and I brought it out into the open by asking him a simple question and letting him explain it. Because we operate with trust and safety, he laid it all out. I watched as one of our trustees gave him the inspiration he needed and got him thinking in a different direction.

I saw his face shift as he realised the challenge he'd been dealing with was an opportunity to do something meaningful. We've learned how to work together, and how to create and develop an entire organisation from big ideas.

### Keep working at it

We certainly aren't par for the course, but our personalities have pushed and pulled

until we've figured out what works for us. My texts and emails contain countless words of what is no doubt thoughtfully considered brilliance; his are rarely longer than five words.

But we've also laughed a lot and we are always driving each other to be better leaders for our MAT. I've helped him shift his mindset from executive head to CEO, which is a massively difficult transition. He's helped me come into my own as a leader, giving me confidence and a firm kick when needed. He taught me a growth mindset, a completely foreign concept to a recovering perfectionist.

### Shaping the MAT

People and relationships mean everything. Realising the culture we had developed as chair and CEO had transferred to the board, we came to understand the importance of shaping and modelling a culture that creates the environment for our vision to happen.

This isn't a realisation we came to naturally or easily. I happened upon it when researching growth management and organisational development. Nick said I was focusing on the wrong things and forgetting how schools work. Very long story short, he then accidentally read a book I gave him. He took the idea and ran with it.

Over the past few terms Maritime Academy Trust has worked towards defining and embracing our culture and vision. Being part of Maritime means something now. We believe we can positively disrupt education and spark something great in our schools, together. That's what being part of Maritime is. ■

### MATs Summit 2019

Now in its fifth year, our MATs Summit is taking place on 10-11 October 2019 in Birmingham. Register for your place now at [oego.co/MATs-19](https://oego.co/MATs-19)



# Working with parents of overseas boarders

Developing successful relationships with parents based abroad is key in helping pupils settle in. **MIKE LAMB** offers suggestions to overcome common barriers and form successful relationships

**Overseas parents have** already made a significant commitment in sending their children to a foreign country. They may feel they are handing over their children to someone they trust and are keen to develop independence in their children.

Many parents may feel that they don't need to or want to be that involved. This can be appealing to schools used to spending large amounts of time with involved and 'helicopter parents' but the lack of communication and feedback can lead to problems not being dealt with and becoming more significant.

## Communication difficulties

Language differences can lead to a variety of problems, from what uniform to wear to more significant misunderstandings around expectations. Email works well as it allows for the use of translation software or reading in one's own time rather than more difficult conversations over the phone. If matters are non-urgent email can be very effective for communicating. Replies will often come the next day which, if planned in advance, is useful in dealing with the issue of different time zones.

Due to language concerns parents may be reluctant to write much, as they may be worried about making a mistake or coming across as rude. Inviting parents to write in their own language and then translating it at the school's end can encourage more communication, however care should be taken to ensure translations are as accurate as possible.

For more urgent discussions when phone calls or face-to-face meetings would normally be most effective, this can be difficult. However, most parents would be understanding to being woken up in the middle of the night if there were considerable issues regarding their children.

Conference calls or video calls can work well and ensuring this is set up in advance (e.g. making sure Skype addresses are known), and parents know this medium can be used, should ease the process for everyone.

## Cultural differences

An open-minded approach to other cultures is essential for school staff dealing with overseas families. Patience, forward planning, communication skills and even specific language skills are often invaluable.

## 'An open-minded approach to other cultures is essential for school staff dealing with overseas families'

Many cultures hold teachers in higher esteem than in the UK and communication can often be polite, formal and very respectful. Careful consideration must be given to cultural differences that may affect daily life in the school, such as religious practices or diet.

- Ensuring there is effective information sharing in advance can help pre-empt many of these issues.
- Make sure that the correct questions are asked and answered on personal details and medical forms, so that your school is prepared to support all new arrivals.
- If the correct information is not being shared then forms should be modified and updated.
- Information about cultural expectations of the host school and country also help pupils and parents prepare for the new experience and reduce culture shock.

## The role of guardians

For many overseas boarders, schools may work with guardians instead of parents. Due to a variety of reasons, such as language, access to certain schools or regions or extra support, guardians may be the key contact for schools for most, and certainly every day, issues. Guardians may:

- be provided by a company
- be close family, friends or a host family
- be identified and recommended by schools.

Overseas parents are often unable to attend events like parents' evenings and the regular programme of feedback can



be interrupted. This means the role of regular feedback in other formats is key, often provided online through parent/school communication systems. Guardians will sometimes attend (which may be at an extra cost to parents) or schools may be able to make alternative arrangements, such as individual teacher/parents meetings at a convenient time, email/phone call feedback, or by using video calls if appropriate.

### Parental support

UK based parents may discuss concerns and challenges with other parents at the school gates, at school events or via Facebook, Whatsapp or similar online groups. Parents who are remote and less able to be involved in such groups will have fewer people to ask or rely on and smaller concerns can go unanswered. This could potentially be dealt with by setting up online support groups and bringing together parents remotely online, however such set ups may need translation, monitoring and management.

### Managing pupil behaviour

Due to the logistics of arriving via international travel, sometimes overseas boarders may arrive late for the start of term, meaning they begin their school year late. They might miss key expectations that are outlined which may immediately make them feel different. However, they sometimes want to be treated differently. For example, pupils may pretend not to understand when they break a rule and use language/culture as an excuse.

In schools with different types of pupils (day, flexi, weekly, full boarders), this consistency across pupils can be difficult to maintain. The challenge can be exacerbated when pupils reach 16 or 18 and are 'looking after themselves' in a foreign country and yet must still follow the strict rules of a school. Clear expectations and communication with pupils remains key.

Another natural behaviour of overseas pupils is to make friends with and spend time with only pupils from their home country. It is human nature to want to associate with who and what you are most familiar.

Be mindful of this and provide all pupils with opportunities to make friends with other pupils to ensure a well-mixed, inclusive environment. This also allows overseas pupils to experience a more genuine British school boarding experience, rather than just joining a group of pupils from their own culture and not mixing any more freely.

### Managing parental expectations

To enable effective parental relationships, detailed, comprehensive and accessible information needs to be sent out early in the process to allow for reading time and any questions to be raised and answered.

Appropriate lines of communication need to be opened to allow overseas parents to feel part of the wider school community despite their distance. They should be treated in the same way

## 'For many overseas boarders, schools may work with guardians instead of parents'

as all parents (invited to events, informed of progress etc.), but more may need to be done in considering the best methods of communicating certain pieces of information with them. Expectations from home on pupils can be very high, especially in academic terms, and this is often multiplied by the pressure of parents paying large fees (which can include school fees, guardian fees, and flights) and the value certain cultures place on the importance of education. This can be difficult for pupils who are obviously keen not to disappoint parents. Staff need to be aware of this and able to identify such issues and support pupils. Go to [my.optimus-education.com/pressure-parents-how-manage](https://my.optimus-education.com/pressure-parents-how-manage) for strategies on working with parents to manage pressures on pupils. ■

#### Key points

- Comprehensive information packs being sent out well in advance of the start of the year/term, combined with prearranged meetings with parents, are all likely to help overseas pupils and their parents settle into their new and foreign school.
- Ensuring staff are trained in dealing with overseas parents and pupils is vital.
- Developing communication skills, cultural awareness and even language skills of key staff will help with managing difficult transitions and situations.
- Implementing a culture where staff can be observed, mentored and coached by more experienced staff can help them to gain confidence in dealing with the diverse pastoral issues that come with dealing with the boarders.
- Inviting parents to write in their own language and then translating it at the school's end can encourage more communication.
- Make sure that the correct questions are asked and answered on personal details and medical forms, so that your school is prepared to support all new arrivals.

#### Leading Parent Partnership Award

The *Leading Parental Partnership Award* (LPPA) gives schools a coherent framework to deliver effective parental engagement from early years to post-16. Find out more at [oego.co/LPPA\\_19](https://oego.co/LPPA_19)



# Responding to a SAR

Under the GDPR you are required to explain your legal grounds when answering a SAR. [LISA GRIFFIN](#) describes what is involved in receiving a right to access request

A **subject access** request (SAR) allows individuals to access their personal data held by an organisation. If you receive what you believe is a SAR, the first step is to establish whether the information requested falls within the definition of personal data.

## Personal data

Personal data includes any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (the data subject). This could be, but is not limited to, a name, photo, school report or register, CCTV image or medical or safeguarding report.

A data subject is defined as 'any person whose personal data is being collected, held or processed'. It means anything that is done to, or with, personal data, such as collecting, storing, sharing and deleting data.

Individuals can submit a SAR to understand how and why you are using their data, and check you are doing it lawfully. There are no restrictions on who can submit a SAR. You may receive one from a pupil, parent or carer, staff member, visitor or contractor.

There are also no restrictions on how to submit a request. SARs can be made verbally, in writing, electronically on email, in person, via social media etc. Any of your staff could receive a request so it is important to train staff to be able to recognise a SAR, and how to deal with requests as efficiently as possible.

## Responding to a SAR: what to do

You have 30 days to respond to a request so reply as soon as possible (and at the latest within one month from the day the SAR is received). If you have doubts about the identity of the person making the request, you can ask for more information to verify that they are who they claim.

You should let the individual know as soon as possible if you need more information from them before you respond to their request. You can extend the 30-day period by a further two months where requests are complex or numerous. If you do extend the period, you must inform the individual within one month of the receipt of the request and explain why it is necessary.

Provide the individual with a copy of the personal data requested free of charge and in a commonly used format (electronically if the request was received that way). Use a concise, transparent, and easily accessible form, with clear and plain language.

Guidance from the ICO states that you can charge a 'reasonable fee' for admin costs when a request is manifestly unfounded or excessive, or if an individual requests further copies of the same data.

You can refuse a request if it is deemed too expensive and time-consuming, is vexatious or if it repeats a previous request from the same person. You'll need to provide the requester with a written refusal notice if you do so. Most importantly, when handling a SAR, aim to be open, fair, transparent and co-operative.

## Removing data about others

If a document contains personal data about other individuals, including the data subject, you should not disclose the information about the third parties. When answering a request, you may have to redact parts of a document if it contains personal data about other individuals.

## Evidencing a SAR

The ICO recommends having a process for recording details of all requests you receive. This should include each stage of handling the SAR until completion.

- Keep copies of the correspondence between yourself and the data subject, and between yourself and any third parties.
- Keep a record of any correspondence used to verify the identity of the data subject.
- Record all decisions and how they were made.
- Keep a copy of the information sent to the data subject.
- Report the SAR to the SLT and governors.

## Information to provide

As well as providing the personal data that you hold on the requester, you must also give the following information.

- What you are using the data for, who you are sharing it with and where it came from.
- How long you will store the data, and how this decision was made.
- The individuals' rights to challenge the accuracy of your data, have it deleted, or object to its use.
- The individual's right to complain to the ICO.
- Whether data is used for profiling or automated decision making and the process for doing this.
- If data has been transferred to an international organisation or third country, what security measures were taken. ■



# What's in this month's School Business Management section?

The DfE's 'Teacher recruitment and retention strategy', published earlier this year, promises to help transform approaches to flexible working in schools. That requires not just cultural change, but also practical solutions to make job shares and timetabling work. Turn overleaf for examples (both good and bad!) of flexible working in practice, and lessons for leaders to draw on.

A flexible working culture might help promote your school to new recruits. Simon Hepburn is encouraging schools to rethink the recruitment journey, using marketing strategies to attract talent and simplifying the application process. A must read for this time of year! Not recruiting the staff you need for September has got to be high on your risk register. How risk aware are you as a school? See page 24 for Nickii Messer's guide to different facets of risk, looking beyond health and safety to compliance and governance. And do you have a fraud risk mitigation process in place? While no-one wants to consider the possibility of staff behaving in a fraudulent manner, it does happen. Training and culture are the key to prevention, argues Cate Hart.

**Liz Worthen, Head of Content**

## Top school business management blogs

The big switch off [oego.co/switch-off](http://oego.co/switch-off)

The problem of obesity and school responsibilities  
[oego.co/obesity-problem](http://oego.co/obesity-problem)

Why I took the zig zag path to career development  
[oego.co/zigzag\\_career](http://oego.co/zigzag_career)

See more at [blog.optimus-education.com](http://blog.optimus-education.com)

## Contributors in this issue



**Androulla Nicou** has been deputy CEO of the Enfield Learning Trust since it was established in September 2016. She oversees operations across the trust as well as being CFO.



**Cate Hart** is an experienced school business manager. She is a former trustee of NASBM and was made a life member in 2011. She previously worked in banking and at the Church of England. [@31\\_cate](https://twitter.com/31_cate)



**Liz Murray** is a former SENCO, teacher, curriculum leader and assistant headteacher with over 20 years' experience in education. She is the founder of Spotlight Education Support. [@liz4885](https://twitter.com/liz4885)



**Simon Hepburn** runs Marketing Advice for Schools. He worked in recruitment marketing before becoming a teacher. He now combines teaching with consultancy and training for schools. [@Mktadvice4schls](https://twitter.com/Mktadvice4schls)

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# Flexible and part-time working: a practical guide

Could flexible working be a solution to recruitment and retention challenges? **LIZ MURRAY** looks at perceived barriers, benefits and examples from practice

**The DfE's 2019** 'Teacher recruitment and retention strategy' firmly prioritises the need for a rethink of approach to flexible working across the profession. The report recognises that school cultures need to shift and that school leaders must lead the way in demonstrating positive attitudes to part-time and flexible working roles. (A note re terminology: part-time working is a form of flexible working; other forms of flexible working include job sharing, compressed hours and working from home.)

The UK education sector is lagging behind other industries in terms of flexible working. As cited in the 'Teacher recruitment and retention strategy', 8% of male teachers work part-time, compared to 12% of men in the UK workforce, while 28% of female teachers work part-time, compared to 40% of women in the UK as a whole.

**'It is easy to dismiss a job share in secondary, but it can be a very good option'**

## Practicalities: possible structures and considerations

Flexible working arrangements can be effective in school, with careful planning and monitoring. The following examples highlight some key areas for consideration.

### Primary job share

There are many successful job shares in the primary sector where teachers share a class. Helen, an experienced primary teacher with a successful job share, explains the factors which make it work.

*Overlap is essential. There is a cost implication to the school, but it means there is proper handover. The ratio of the job share is important too! When I worked four days with somebody covering Friday, I was essentially responsible for everything and the Friday was just a cover person. I now do three and a half days with another person doing two days. We have an hour together Thursday morning. One teacher does lead more than another and as I teach the beginning of the week and more days it is me, but I then have another session of PPA. It is generous of the school but as I do more planning and assessments, they are happy that I have the same PPA as a full-time member of staff.*

But what about more senior roles? Helen's experience of a previous part-time role was more challenging.

*I was a phase leader on a 0.6 contract. I was in class but covering PPA time. I had some tricky staff that I managed and working Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday didn't work. We were in RI and lots of initiatives were being put in place. I would come back in on a Monday and the staff had not done what was expected of them. I changed*

## Changing attitudes: from barriers to benefits

Perceived barriers	Potential benefits
Staff will be less committed.	Increased loyalty. Employees often feel a greater commitment to supportive schools for accommodating a flexible working situation.
Staff will be less efficient.	Increased productivity. In Vodafone's 'Flexible: friend or foe' survey, 83% of respondents reported increased productivity as a result of flexible working patterns.
Staff will be less effective.	Increased creativity. Time away from work (whether spent caring for family or pursuing other interests) gives the opportunity for reflection and generation of ideas, which come to fruition when teaching.
It will lead to split classes and timetabling difficulties.	Increased collaboration and better value. It might be a challenge to timetable, but there are solutions. A common flexible arrangement is a job share. When this arrangement is thoughtfully structured, the school benefits from teachers collaborating to discuss their pupils' needs, resulting in better pupil outcomes. Two brains are better than one!



*my days to Monday, Tuesday, Thursday which made managing staff much easier.*

*My question was always whether my management TLR should be paid in full rather than 0.6. I led the same number of staff, parents and governors meetings as the full-time phase leaders but my TLR was paid on a part-time basis.*

Helen's story illuminates the need to consider context and structure carefully.

- Is there time for overlap if doing a job share?
- How will the role work in practice? Are some working days of the week preferable to others?
- Is the role remunerated to reflect the responsibility and workload?

### Secondary job share

It is easy to dismiss a job share in secondary, but it can be a very good option. Karen is a secondary English teacher.

*I work three days a week and have done for the last four years. I usually share classes with another teacher/s, and this requires flexibility and communication. Each year there are timetabling challenges. For example, one year I needed to change my days off to fit with the option blocks. I was happy to do this as I had been involved in early discussions and understood the context. Another year we couldn't make it work as there were two part-time teachers in the department, so we had to split a GCSE class.*

*This was initially seen as a problem, but we talked it through and found a positive solution. I saw the group for three lessons and the other teacher had just one session. I focused on the main literature text-based work and the other teacher did English language work. As we kept to a routine, the students knew what to expect. We*

*worked to our strengths and they got a brilliant deal. We committed to teaching the group for two years and I knew that I might have to change my day off in the second year, but this was fine as I knew that in advance.*

### Middle and senior leadership positions

In the context of budget cuts, some schools have allowed middle and senior leaders to work part-time hours to save on staffing costs – but without reducing the role. For example, Sian, an assistant headteacher, works four days a week.

*I work four days per week and am not timetabled to teach on a Thursday. However, I still fulfil my leadership responsibility in its entirety. For me, the part-time hours give flexibility to be able to take my children to school one day a week, but I also take a pay cut and always work on my day off. I love my job but feel as though I am being pulled in too many directions and am considering leaving the profession for better paid part time work.*

Schools must think about how to support leaders like Sian. For example:

- provide a deputy or a clear point of contact for days off
- balance the need to reduce staffing costs against what's in the staff member's best interests
- give another member of staff additional responsibility to take on an aspect of the leader's workload.

Jane, head of maths at a secondary school, explains how careful consideration has made her role work.

*I am a successful head of maths with a great track record. After the birth of my second child, I wanted to return to work part-time but didn't want to step down from my subject leader role. I had a great headteacher who was keen to make it work in practice. We discussed*

*the challenges of the arrangement in terms of the entire workload rather than just thinking about the day that I would not be in school.*

*We asked the assistant head of maths to 'act up' on my day off, as well as taking on some responsibilities that would normally be mine alone. He was rewarded financially and given an additional PPA period to compensate. It works well because my workload is pro rata'd as well as my salary. Then it's up to me to be disciplined enough not to turn on the computer on my day off! ■*

### Top tips for making flexible working work

- Ensure regular and open communication. Carve out time for job sharers to discuss their role.
- Review part-time or flexible working arrangements regularly. Ask how things are working and be solutions-focused if issues arise.
- Create clarity with a written plan of how the role will work in practice, building in additional support from the workforce if necessary. Consider the whole role, not just time offsite.
- Consider timing for meetings so that as many staff can attend as possible to keep everyone in the loop.
- Create a positive culture around flexible working. Be respectful of non-working days, look for the positives and celebrate them when they happen.

### HR & Employment Law in Education 2019

Our annual *HR & Employment Law* conferences take place in London on Thursday, 2 May and in Manchester on Tuesday, 7 May. Attend for a comprehensive legal update, with interactive mock scenarios and clear guidance on managing absence and simplifying contracts. Details at [oego.co/HRemploy19](http://oego.co/HRemploy19)



# Rethinking the recruitment journey

**SIMON HEPBURN** explains how using a marketing approach will help your school attract and retain the best teachers

**Many schools are** finding it harder to recruit good teachers. Fewer teachers than needed are applying for jobs, especially in secondary schools; the number of pupils is rising; more teachers are leaving the profession; and teacher pay is dropping relative to other graduate professions.

The problem is worse in some areas of the country, notably London and the South East; and in some secondary subjects, particularly maths, design and technology and physics. (For more information on these trends, read ‘Teacher Workforce Dynamics in England’, NFER, 2018.)

The results are clear. Traditional recruitment methods have stopped working – a secondary head I spoke to at the Optimus *Effective Financial Management* conference said that none of his external advertisements had resulted in a successful recruit this year.

And even if they do yield some result, applicant quality is dropping. A Manchester school I spoke to recently asked a prospective maths teacher from an agency to try a GCSE paper and they scored 0%.

## What is the solution?

Stop thinking of recruitment as solely an HR process. This worked in the past when there were more teachers and the challenge was to find the best one from 10, 20 or even more applications. It didn’t matter that all job adverts looked the same or that all interviews took place on the same day. Now you need to take a marketing approach. There are three key steps.

1. Create compelling messages by listening to staff and developing the benefits of your school.
2. Use ‘high trust’ channels to target the teachers that are out there.
3. Make the application process as easy and convenient as possible.

Doing this means you will be able to take staff through the ‘new recruitment journey’ (see the diagram at the bottom of the page) and ensure the future success of your school.

## 1. Create compelling messages

Teachers know that they have a wide choice of schools to select from when looking for a new job. That means that they will choose from schools that offer something different to meets their needs.

Your school needs to bring together what it already offers, find what teachers in your area want from schools, and try to add new benefits, considering the financial issues that many schools face. The combination of these key messages is often referred to as an ‘employer brand’.

As an example, teachers often cite professional development as a key issue when looking for work – but as our ‘Teacher Recruitment and Retention Survey 2018’ shows, few schools offer such opportunities. Could your school implement some of these approaches to help it stand out? For example, holding annual career discussions, giving individual training budgets, providing mentors and offering work experience in leadership roles (visit [my.optimus-education.com/rethinking-recruitment-journey](http://my.optimus-education.com/rethinking-recruitment-journey) to see the full survey results).

Other areas schools are working on include access to housing, discounts on shopping, flexible working and even ‘duvet days’!

Once you have identified what makes your school different, make sure that this is clearly laid out on your website and other recruitment material – and perhaps backed up with teacher testimonials and even video interviews. If you’re asked to justify the costs of these, think of the cost of even the smallest national advert!

And when you place adverts you must use these messages to focus on what you offer applicants, rather than the all too common focus on what the school needs.

## The new recruitment journey





### Which is more appealing?

'We require an outstanding and passionate teacher of maths to start in September 2019. The ability to teach maths at a high standard across the key stages is essential.'

#### Or:

'We put professional development at the centre of our work, offer a mentoring programme for all staff, and have a flexible range of benefits including discounted childcare.'

- 'I can only manage one or two applications a week.'
- 'I don't want to have to tell my current school I'm looking.'
- 'I've already applied to several schools – let's see their response first.'
- 'I can't make the advertised interview dates.'
- 'I applied to that school last year and they didn't get back to me.'

## 2. Use 'high trust' channels

There are two groups of teachers who might be willing to work for your school: those who are looking for work (including student teachers) and those who might be tempted to move to a school that was better suited for them.

Traditional recruitment methods focus on the first group – those who read job adverts or have signed up with recruitment agencies. These are 'low trust' routes – advertising executives are the least trusted group in the Ipsos Veracity Index and recruitment consultancies are not far behind – and only work when there are large number of job-seekers.

The solution is to use 'high trust' methods – targeting people who already know your school. Read on for some examples.

**Engage your existing community.** Your local community is a powerful source of contacts who know your school and its strengths. Current parents and former students may also be interested in working or retraining as a teacher themselves. Engage them with job adverts in your weekly newsletter, regular social media posts or by arranging events for former students.

**Who do you already know?** There's often a reluctance in schools to ask current or former staff to help with job-hunting – but they are often the best source of new recruits. For this to work it is vital that people leave on good terms, and that staff are happy with the school!

**Work with local ITT providers.** There are a wide range of teacher training organisations – according to the DfE over 80% of the population live within 10 miles of a training provider. Developing relationships with HE institutions, SCITTs and School Direct providers (perhaps by taking on student placements or offering staff as mentors) can give you access to a huge pool of potential recruits.

## 3. Make the application process easy

- 'I've already got a job.'

There are a number of common reasons teachers don't apply to advertised jobs. If you are going to increase the number of applications you receive, it's worth seeing how many of these barriers you can remove. Here are some suggestions.

**Offer an informal visit or phone call.** Filling in an application form can take several hours. Someone is far more likely to make this effort once they have found a school that they know is interested in them – and meets their needs. Jobseekers can also test if the school is for them before having to admit they're looking for work when they request time off for an interview.

**Simplify your application form.** School application forms haven't changed for years. While there are some essential parts, it's worth asking what information you really need to create a shortlist. And the form should be as easy to complete digitally as possible.

**Offer flexible interview dates.** The traditional school interview day involves everyone shortlisted turning up at the same time and doing the same activities in rotation around the school. While this might be efficient with lots of applicants, it doesn't always work for staff with caring responsibilities or outside interests. If you can get back to an applicant quickly and offer an early interview you might also stop them taking a job elsewhere.

**Think about enhancing your job offers.** Schools will have to negotiate job offers now rather than just offering a straight 'M1' position. If you are recruiting for a shortage subject think about what else you can offer – from pastoral or leadership responsibility to flexible working or a relocation allowance.

**Give feedback to all applicants.** Word travels fast in the teaching community – and if you're the sort of school that is seen to be helpful to applicants (even unsuccessful ones) you will find people more prepared to apply to you.

Our survey suggests that many schools are not following these ideas – giving you the chance to stand out! ■



Download the results of Simon's recruitment and retention survey from [my.optimus-education.com/rethinking-recruitment-journey](https://my.optimus-education.com/rethinking-recruitment-journey)



# Creating risk awareness

Risk awareness is a different matter to risk assessment, argues **NICKII MESSER**, and it involves an understanding of strategic, governance, financial, legal and reputational risks

**Schools are good** at creating reams of risk assessments to help control, manage and avoid dangers which threaten the health and safety of our children, staff and visitors. Risk awareness, however, is fundamentally different. It is the recognition and identification of potential exposure to dangers, a necessary first step to risk control.

For schools to be more comprehensively secure, risk management must be underpinned with an awareness of different categories of risk and the potential impact on the current and future success (and viability) of the school.

## Risk and responsibility

Governors also need to be aware of risks associated with their strategic role. The DfE's 'Schools causing concern' guidance cites governors 'not sufficiently managing risks associated with strategic priorities and school improvement plans' (see page 15) as one of several weaknesses in governance which may lead to a warning notice.

Creating a culture of risk awareness requires knowledge, understanding and commitment. Comprehensive risk awareness requires those responsible to keep abreast of legislation, regulations, guidelines and policies. They need to scan the education environment with the current and future context of their school in mind.

## Different types of risk

Schools are mostly very aware of personal or human risks. These are the risks and hazards associated with the health, safety and wellbeing of children, staff and visitors. Examples of personal risks include children out on trips and visits, improper use of tools or equipment, insufficient safer recruitment and overuse of display screens.

These risks tend to be well understood and documented, but it is still important for everyone to be aware that there may be other risks that might not have been identified previously.

## Strategic risk

Like all successful organisations, schools need a clear vision for their future and plans for achieving it. Working without clearly defined and articulated direction, aims and goals, leaves the school at risk of losing its way. To quote educator and management theorist Laurence J. Peter: 'If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else'.

But even the most robust improvement or development plans can be susceptible to risk. As part of the senior leadership team, the

SBM is well positioned to help identify, and mitigate, risks such as:

- lack of staff buy-in
- insufficient funds to achieve priorities for action
- changes required from Ofsted or the DfE
- staffing restructures
- a resistant school culture.

As Peter Drucker warns: 'Culture eats strategy for breakfast!'

## Financial risk

There are inextricable links between strategic and financial risks, including how effectively the school improvement plan has been costed to ensure affordability. The SBM has a duty to make the SLT and governors aware of all financial risks which might impact the school's ability to achieve necessary standards. 'Schools causing concern' makes it clear that 'evidence of poor financial management' may lead to a warning notice.

Encouraging a culture, especially at SLT and governor level, where the risks associated with funding pressures are openly recognised and discussed, helps create a more proactive environment to control potential dangers, such as insufficient cash flow, lack of financial staff expertise, unaffordable staffing structure or unrealistic reliance on income such as grants.

## Governance risk

'Schools causing concern' explicitly warns of the risks of poor governance. Where governor underperformance may be prejudicial to pupil standards of performance, action can be taken against the school. Being aware of such risks should help governors put in place a more rigorous and proactive framework for its own improvement, development and sustainability.

Governance risks cited in 'Schools causing concern' include high governor turnover, the governing body having an excessive involvement in the day to day running of the school, and lack of appropriate engagement with data.

## Legal or compliance risk

The increasingly litigious society in which schools operate makes compliance a significantly onerous responsibility for SBMs. SLT and governors may be unaware of the scale of dangers involved in non-compliance, which can even lead to a prison sentence for



those holding accountability.

Members of SLT and governance may need help in recognising the complexities of compliance responsibilities, and the consequences of failing to meet compliance thresholds. In large or more complex school settings, it may not be possible for the SBM to keep up to date with every area of compliance, which will include health and safety, HR and finance. With little or no LA support, many schools – especially those no longer maintained – buy into specialist compliance advisory services.

### Fraud risk

Schools have clear guidelines on probity and processes to reduce the risk of fraud (see the anti-fraud, bribery and corruption policy at [oego.co/bribery-fraud](http://oego.co/bribery-fraud)). But the growing number of fraud cases highlight the fact that these risks still exist, however robust policies may be.

Fraud often originates through opportunism rather than premeditated action and acknowledging this as a risk will help the SBM understand the imperative for rigorously applying agreed policies, as well as being prepared to take speedy action if things don't seem right. (For more on fraud prevention, see the article overleaf).

It may seem insensitive to talk about the risk of fraud, especially with senior staff and governors, so the SBM needs to explain the risks objectively, making everyone aware of the significant consequences to the school, colleagues and governors involved. All staff and governors also need to know how to use the school's whistleblowing procedures (see [my.optimus-education.com/whistleblowing-model-policy](http://my.optimus-education.com/whistleblowing-model-policy) for an example).

### Reputational risk

Inevitably most school risks also present a danger to the school's reputation. Bad news travels fast, and it can take years to recover from a reputation damaged in a very short space of time. But reputational risks should be considered in their own right too. Start by recognising the importance of a good reputation and how it is achieved. This helps the school better understand the potential for harm if things go wrong.

People have the most potential to damage a school's reputation, and that includes staff and governors. A rigorous and explicit code of conduct embedded, read and understood by all staff is essential and should form part of the induction process for all new staff. This goes for governors too: 'all maintained schools should have a code of conduct setting high standards of the role, conduct and professionalism of their governors' ('Schools causing concern').

While pupils are often positive ambassadors, they can also bring disrepute on their school, especially through their behaviour outside school gates. Parents and children alike should understand the implications if pupils dress and behave inappropriately when in

## Example risk awareness matrix

Category	Risk identification	Impact on school improvement	Impact on person or property	Impact on reputation
Strategic				
Financial				
Governance				
Legal/compliance				
Fraud				
Reputational				

uniform, including on trips or travelling to and from home.

Parents increasingly use social media to voice opinions and concerns. What people say on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and how well the school responds, can have a significant impact on the school's reputation, so include a strategy for positive and proactive communication through social media in the school's marketing strategy.

### Taking action

The SBM can have a vital role in making risk awareness part of the school culture by creating a positive framework for action. Don't assume that everyone has the same level of awareness of risk nor their responsibility to be risk aware. Placing risk awareness on every leadership and governance agenda, and building it into strategic planning processes, reminds key stakeholders of their role in identifying and planning for risk. Use Inset days and training sessions to get the message across to all staff, especially in a way that everyone can understand and buy into.

Being actively risk aware should provide a platform for more rigorously identifying possible dangers and make the school a safer, more successful place for all stakeholders. Although it can be useful to categorise risks, they are rarely autonomous, so avoid only viewing them in isolation. For example, poor financial planning may create human risk, as staff face redundancies. A matrix like the one above can help create a more structured analysis of risk and potential areas of impact. ■

### Efficiencies in MATs

The next *Achieving Efficiencies in Multi-Academy Trusts* conference takes place in London on Thursday, 9 May. Attend sessions on procurement, financial reporting, project management and HR and ensure you're achieving economies of scale. [oego.co/MATeff19](http://oego.co/MATeff19)



# Identifying and preventing fraud

School business leaders, headteachers and governors are at the forefront of preventing fraud in schools. **CATE HART** explains why culture is key

**Sadly, we've all** seen stories in the media regarding fraud in schools. Perpetrators range from school business managers to heads and other staff. Millions of pounds have been stolen, exam results altered, and reputations tainted.

SBMs, heads and governors should take every action to prevent fraud in schools, with all staff receiving training and required to read fraud policies. Crucially, there must be a culture and ethos of fraud prevention in school –

openness, honesty, respect, with a robust whistleblowing policy and protection from recriminations.

## Fraud: what and why?

Fraud is wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain. There are a range of reasons it happens, including:

- human nature and greed
- complacency – ‘none of our staff would do such a thing’
- poor financial procedures
- lack of controls and reporting
- lack of technical knowledge
- opportunities to find ways round controls.

## Fraud uncovered

There are various ways that fraud can take place in school – and it isn't always about money. The table on the left highlights examples of fraudulent situations and how they can be avoided or resolved.

## What could make you suspicious?

- Improper paperwork, such as invoices or receipts missing, or no countersigning. Absence of a key member of finance staff resulting in checks not being carried out.
- Asking for signatures on the fly. For example, finding signatory when they are busy; invoices or orders

Example	Mitigating action
Headteacher uses credit card to pay for family member's taxi fares. Head pays credit card bill directly from school funds by cheque so it's not noticed.	Credit card bills should always be checked by someone who isn't a card user. Cheques should be signed by two people.
IT manager orders extra computer parts and sells them on for personal gain.	Invoices should be counter-signed by a member of staff with relevant technical knowledge; finance officer to check if not sure.
Agency staff member changes time sheets once signed by line manager and sends them off to agency.	Time sheets should be sent by the signing manager, and invoices checked by another person before payment.
Cash taken from weekend lettings (e.g. clubs) but not paid into petty cash and no receipt system.	Ideally money should be paid to school by cheque or transfer. Receipts given and checked against booking. Go cashless.
'Borrowing' petty cash for personal use.	No petty cash to be taken unless a formal order is signed for. Petty cash to be checked weekly by independent member of staff and balanced against outstanding paperwork. Using petty cash should be a last resort. Go cashless!
Payroll – are all staff on payroll working in your school?	Additions to and deletions from payroll should be checked by someone other than the payroll officer and signed off. Check total of payroll against budget projections for the month and balance differences.
Appointment of staff as favour to a friend without following proper procedures.	Check all new payroll entries have proper appointment forms on file. Sign off for audit purposes.
Exam results changed to improve school's rankings or performance.	Exam papers must be handled by the exam secretary or person in charge and sealed immediately. Check that no one has access to the completed scripts.



covered up when signature asked for.

- Changes of lifestyle: has someone started having expensive holidays, new cars, new clothes? Or needing more resources for department, or not taking holidays in order to be there to cover the fraud?
- Lack of counter checks – procedures are lax and paperwork is chaotic. Hard to have segregation of duties in small schools with few staff to carry out counter checks.
- Remarks made in SLT or line management meetings around staff being absent or leaving but still being paid; requests for further payments for a similar or duplicate resource; requesting a change to a standard procedure to make it easier to order or pay for resources.
- Reordering same resources. Why have 40 computer mice been ordered again this month?

### Acting on suspected fraud

Staff need to know how to apply the whistleblowing policy and report to the appropriate person. For all staff under suspicion, other than the headteacher, concerns should be reported to the headteacher and SBM. If the headteacher is suspected of acting fraudulently, the chair of governors should be informed.

Don't confront. Gather evidence, keep it safe and then use your whistleblowing policy. Advise relevant bodies, for example the local authority, governors or trustees, external auditors.

Once the issue has been dealt with, assess how it happened and review procedures, reporting to governors the action taken or lessons learned. It is always better to report a suspicion, even if investigation finds there is no issue.

## 'Gather evidence, keep it safe and then use your whistleblowing policy'

### Strategies for reducing the risk

- Do you have risk assessment procedures in place? Each governing body, as far as possible, will ensure that the principles of internal check and segregation of duties operate in their school. (For example, that the duty of checking and certifying payments is separate from the ordering and receipt of goods and services.)
- What are your accountability measures and who sets/reviews them and how often? Are they appropriate for the number of finance staff in your school?
- Who countersigns for what? Are Bacs payments examined alongside the invoices? Who does this? It shouldn't be the person who sends the payment or who ordered the resources!
- Do you have a responsible officer who delves into procedures and transactions? While it's not mandatory, it is good practice. Spot checks often highlight an issue or problem with procedure. See them as your friend and protector.
- External audit: how often is this carried out and who receives the report? Who supplies the information and files to the auditor? The action plan should be written and presented to governors then checked and monitored by them.
- Check procurement methods. Are budget holders able to order to a certain level without checks? Does their SLT line manager countersign invoices over a certain amount and

thoroughly look at the resources ordered?

- Train your staff. See below...

Remember: prevention is better than cure. See the DfE's 'Academy trust guide to reducing fraud' for useful questions and resources.

### Whole staff and governor training

Staff and governors must know the financial processes and procedures, even if they are not budget holders, so they can understand if someone is not following the rules. This should be part of induction.

All the relevant policies must be made available to staff. They should feel confident that reporting their suspicions will not result in action being taken against them. Staff should also be comfortable being investigated, even if they have done nothing wrong. If someone gets the process wrong, it doesn't necessarily mean they are committing fraud but may need a refresher in the procedures!

- Outline some cases to staff and demonstrate how they were dealt with both in reporting and procedures.
- Provide policies in an easy to find place for them to read and understand.
- Explain processes such as petty cash, ordering, signing and invoices process.
- Stress the importance of being honest with public funding.
- Ensure staff are reassured by the policies in place.
- Ask for cooperation rather than suspicious snooping! ■



Check and update your policies around whistleblowing, financial procedures and risk assessment by visiting [oego.co/modelPolicy](https://oego.co/modelPolicy)



# MAT estate management

**ANDROULLA NICOU** explains how to manage school estates effectively, so that boards are confident in suitability and safety for staff and pupils

**Good management of** the estate reduces the risks associated with buildings and premises. It helps to prevent the need for significant capital expenditure and disruption which can follow building failure.

The leaseholder, usually the Trust, is responsible for the land and buildings including:

1. the safety and security of pupils and staff
2. maintaining the condition of land, premises and equipment
3. making decisions about investment in the Trust estate and prioritising maintenance.

## Estate management

Good estate management should provide safe and well-maintained premises, appropriate teaching facilities and a positive pupil experience.

Planning for jobs in advance will help procure the best deal and achieve the most value for money. It's always worth trying to negotiate prices and remembering that you don't have to take the first offer. Even 10% off where appropriate can make a huge difference to spend and increase value for money. As a Trust we have put in place arrangements for the following.

**Long-term planning:** this might be in the form of an estate strategy, where you consider future maintenance needs, projects and funding priorities for buildings and land.

**Asset management planning (AMP):** producing an AMP for the estate will help you plan, manage and deliver the maintenance works and improvements highlighted in the long term plan.

**Day-to-day management:** the delivery of ongoing services and maintenance

requirements to ensure that buildings operate as intended daily and support the continued delivery of education.

It is vital that everyone is aware of the lines of responsibility and accountability so that any concerns can be quickly reported and escalated where necessary.

## Condition survey

The ESFA's Condition Data Collection (CDC) programme is designed to enable fair distribution of capital maintenance funding. A condition survey is required when bidding for capital funding. Carried out by qualified professionals, it uses a common grading system to enable fair comparison across sites and effective prioritisation.

The survey includes detail on current building conditions, the cost of any remedial works, planned maintenance costs, risks, recommendations, concerns and further necessary action. It helps MATs to understand maintenance needs, wider property issues and prioritise delivery of works with available funds.

## Ensure compliance

Legal requirements relating to the occupation of the estate include: health and safety law and other relevant laws and regulations; planned preventative maintenance; and statutory inspecting and testing.

An understanding of asbestos and fire is particularly important. A record of all asbestos, known or assumed to be in Trust premises, must be held. A risk assessment identifying the general fire precautions needed to safeguard persons in case of fire must be undertaken and regularly reviewed for all school premises.

Those with duties for health and safety

in the Trust should make sure that the policies and the condition of the estate are compliant with appropriate legislation.

## Plan for emergencies

Unforeseen circumstances can arise that result in severe damage or disruption to Trust premises. You should be aware of what insurance is in place to cover emergencies, and what the arrangements are for:

- ensuring the safety and security of pupils and staff and communicating promptly with parents and carers
- contacting emergency services and meeting the requirements of the statutory bodies
- where necessary, making alternative arrangements for education to continue as soon as possible following the incident
- invoking emergency and business recovery plans
- seeking professional advice on immediate and longer-term action required to replace or repair the affected area/s.

## Spend wisely

When evaluating spend on the estate, first consider how you decide what to spend on capital projects and maintenance each year. You can then prioritise and plan your expenditure per project to be sure you're getting value for money.

Regularly review your contracts for maintenance, facilities management and professional support and advice. Ask yourself if you're getting the best deals, or whether you can work with other schools to reduce costs. ■



# What's in this month's Teaching and Learning section?

We don't (at the time of writing!) have a finalised Ofsted inspection framework for September 2019, but we do know that curriculum intent and implementation are going to be high on the agenda. Josephine Smith explains how senior and subject leaders in her school are getting discussions going about what curriculum means to them and highlights useful resources (see overleaf).

While Ofsted deliberates, teachers will be getting on with the daily business of classroom learning. And the marking never stops! On page 36, Tom Fay shares how whittling feedback down to three key questions is promoting purposeful learning and lightening the marking load in his schools. But if you're thinking about introducing a new programme or initiative, take time first to consider how you will know if it's benefitting learners, and read Owen Carter's guide to impact evaluation.

What do you think of when you hear the term 'academic language'? In the first of a series of articles, Diane Leedham investigates key terms and principles, highlights risks, and prepares the way for further work on vocabulary, sentence and text.

**Liz Worthen, Head of Content**

## Top teaching and learning blogs

Creating a school garden [oego.co/garden](http://oego.co/garden)

Establishing yourself in a new school: my top tips for behaviour management [oego.co/school\\_behaviour](http://oego.co/school_behaviour)

Why teachers need more sleep [oego.co/teachers-sleep](http://oego.co/teachers-sleep)

See more at [blog.optimus-education.com](http://blog.optimus-education.com)

## Contributors in this issue



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# Training subject leaders in curriculum design

The new Ofsted framework focuses on the quality of the curriculum and its impact. Headteacher **JOSEPHINE SMITH** offers questions to ask when planning your curriculum and training subject leaders

**At the time** of writing, the key proposals for Ofsted’s consultation on changes to the inspection framework include:

- a new ‘quality of education’ judgement, which focuses on the curriculum
- looking at outcomes in context and whether they are the result of a coherently planned curriculum, delivered well
- no longer using schools’ internal performance data as inspection evidence
- separate judgements about learners’ ‘personal development’ and ‘behaviour and attitudes’
- extending on-site time for short inspections of good schools to two days.

There is a draft 2019 inspection framework available for the purposes of the consultation (which closed on 5 April). While we await a finalised framework – due to come some time in summer 2019 – what can you do to prepare? Here I’ve shared the process we’ve undertaken in our school to start discussions and training for subject leaders, as well as some key points raised in the Ofsted research.

## Curriculum design in your school

The focus on the curriculum and its planning and delivery is a welcome shift away from inspection judgements based, almost entirely, on student outcomes and

achievement data but might involve a different way of thinking.

I suggest organising your planning into the areas below. You will find that you have some robust school systems already in place to address elements of them.

- Articulating your whole school curriculum intent
- Training subject leaders in curriculum design
- Monitoring the implementation of your curriculum
- Measuring the impact of your curriculum

## Whole school curriculum intent

Have this conversation among your senior leaders and then explore the same themes at subject level with your subject leaders. The following questions might steer your discussion. They are like those asked of school leaders during Ofsted’s research. We made this a single agenda item at a recent SLT meeting.

- What’s the intent behind your curriculum?
- How does it meet students’ needs?
- What’s the balance of time between subjects?
- What’s the rationale behind your (e.g.) two-year Key Stage 3 and three-year Key Stage 4 curriculum?
- What is core and what is optional?
- What training have you had in curriculum design?

- How do you quality assure the implementation of the curriculum?
- What do you do to coordinate the curriculum across subject areas? For example, how do history and English teams sequence teaching about World War I and the poetry of the First World War to make best sense of the content for students?
- What’s the balance in your curriculum between knowledge and skills, and how are you able to track the extent to which students acquire both?
- How are governors involved in curriculum decisions?
- To what degree are you limited by financial constraints regarding what you can offer?
- How does the curriculum relate to your school vision and ethos?
- What part does enrichment play in the curriculum?
- To what extent are different groups of students able to access and benefit from your enrichment programme?

## Training subject leaders

I imagine a lot of subject leaders would say that curriculum design is something they have picked up as their careers have progressed, or that they are ‘self-taught’. By the time you get to subject leadership any colleague should have benefitted from growing up professionally in departments where curriculums have been audited, mapped, redesigned, and reviewed and



this is all part of on the job training.

The new syllabuses at GCSE and A level will have driven a new form of curriculum design and the best schools will have provided time for colleagues across different schools to discuss their curriculum.

In our school we've planned training for our subject leaders dedicated to the themes below. We'll use Ofsted training materials during those sessions because we want to be part of the same conversation and use the same curriculum terminology Ofsted are using.

1. Building a curriculum: components and composites
2. Memory and recall: metacognition for students
3. Valid assessment: what it looks like and how to use it

Other materials already available include curriculum videos at Ofsted's YouTube channel (see the playlist 'Ofsted leaders talk about...') and their 'Curriculum Workshop' slides, available via SlideShare. They may save you a lot of time with your senior team or subject leaders.

### Monitoring the implementation

Take this opportunity to review whether your whole school quality assurance systems have a suitable focus.

- Do you talk to subject leaders about the intent and implementation of their curriculum as much as you do about the outcomes it produces?
- What about the focus of work scrutiny and pupil voice activities?
- Does that ask questions that help you understand the effectiveness of curriculum implementation?
- Is department level quality assurance doing the same? For example, does your head of science monitor both the coverage of the curriculum across different science classes and the levels of the depth of

knowledge and skills in each of the classes?

Senior leaders will quickly get smarter about asking more purposeful questions about curriculum implementation, and smarter still at supporting subject leaders who are inexperienced or having trouble with this aspect of their role.

### Measuring the impact

Many schools have developed increasingly sophisticated systems to measure impact. Achievements that are externally verified (such as public examination results) will remain a significant measure but there are plenty of other ways to demonstrate impact.

Stakeholder feedback, minutes of governance meetings, student participation levels and even numbers on roll against PAN are all indicators of success.

### Three phase research project

Ofsted's research around curriculum design and delivery, undertaken in three phases, involved visits to 127 schools.

**Phase 1** of Ofsted's research (search for 'HMCI's commentary: recent primary and secondary curriculum research' on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) for detail) attempted to understand the current state of curricular thinking in schools.

**Phase 2** (search for 'HMCI commentary: curriculum and the new education inspection framework' for detail) sought to look at schools that had particularly invested in curriculum design. The discussions revealed several common factors that appeared related to curriculum quality. These included:

- the importance of mapping subjects as individual disciplines
- using the curriculum to address disadvantage and provide equality of opportunity
- regular curriculum review
- using the curriculum as the progression model

- intelligent use of assessment to inform curriculum design
- revisiting and recalling previously learned knowledge 'baked into' the curriculum planning
- distributed curriculum leadership.

**Phase 3** (see 'Commentary on curriculum research - phase 3' for detail) involved designing a research model in which the curriculum intent discussion with senior leaders and subject leaders, corroborated by first-hand evidence of curriculum implementation, informed a series of indicators on the extent of curriculum quality.

### The 25 curriculum indicators

One detail in the research is the development of a list of 25 curriculum indicators. These are effectively nine key subdivided areas, developed by researchers, as a way of defining the various elements that contribute to good curriculum design and delivery. (The indicators are listed in the commentary on phase 3 of the research – scroll down to figure 9.)

The indicators won't be directly translated into the inspection framework. However, they act as a good starting point for any school seeking a mechanism for assessing their school's quality of education and considering curriculum intent, implementation and impact. ■

### Clarifying curriculum expectations

Want to know more about curriculum design and Ofsted plans? Our *Delivering a Broad and Balanced Curriculum* conference, taking place in London on 21 May, will provide clarity on what a broad and balanced curriculum looks like and strategies to help build a strong curriculum for your school. Find out more at [oego.co/Curriculum-2019](http://oego.co/Curriculum-2019)



# What is academic language?

**DIANE LEEDHAM** unpacks what we mean when we talk about academic language, and why it matters

**Academic language** is a topic that's of much interest in schools, particularly in terms of its perceived value in closing elusive 'gaps' in attainment for disadvantaged learners. I've been exploring academic language and literacies in my work with schools, and would like to share some of the strategies and approaches we've found useful.

But before getting into the detail of subject specific word, sentence and text level analysis (which we'll be doing in upcoming articles), I think it's important to interrogate exactly what we mean when we talk about academic language. Last year I attended a Naldic seminar on 'What Counts As Academic Language', led by Professor Fred Genesee – an expert in language acquisition. He was cautious about offering a simple definition, and that certainly gave me pause for thought before writing.

So, please consider this article as an attempt to map the territory, before we set out on the journey.

## Are academics all speaking the same language?

We can probably all agree that acquiring a ready proficiency in the language associated with academic study, in order to access the widest opportunities for learning, and public accreditation of that learning, is vital for our students. And we may also agree on some observations on the practice of academic language, at least when it's in English.

- Academic language is widely recognised as being expressed in standard English (or other language) rather than any non-standard language variant or dialect.
- Academic language is also generally thought to reside at the formal end of any informal/formal language continuum.
- Academic language is commonly a form of language which is closely associated with writing rather than talk (whether or not the actual output is written or spoken).

But even if these principles are agreed, there are potential uncertainties. Academic language is not always written down. If you are giving an academic presentation, for example, there are various linguistic practices considered appropriate in that context, ranging from reading a written paper aloud to more flexible oral improvisations and interactions, which sometimes



*There are intrinsic links between speaking, listening, reading and writing*

may even include informality, and non-standard interjections.

Though academic writing is generally subject to stringent style guide requirements, these are not fixed in perpetuity. Pat Thomson, Professor of Education at Nottingham University, writes a blog called *patter* aimed at PhD candidates, which frequently explores issues around language – see 'starting the PhD – learning new vocabulary' for example.

Simple rules and sweeping proscriptions to encourage the use of academic language in school may therefore be misleading and simultaneously run the risk of misguidedly demonising normal communicative practices, alienating those learners whose 'everyday language' is most non-standard and least like writing.

For example, the exhortation to 'speak in full sentences' in class is linguistically implausible, since nobody, not even the most fastidious scholar, actually does this in real life, unless they are reading aloud a pre-written script.

## Useful concepts: nominalisation

Of course, teachers want to develop a learner's oral language. This will enable articulation of complex knowledge, abstraction and concepts in ways that will enlarge their thinking – and be accredited by exam boards. Research rightly places oracy at the heart of the curriculum in a variety of ways, and the intrinsic connection between listening, reading, speaking and writing is something I'll return to in future articles.



But learner confidence in a process such as **nominalisation**, or noun-making, in both oral and written language is likely to have more impact in reaching this goal than ‘speaking in a full sentence’. Nominalisation is a daunting sounding word for something that most teachers do so automatically that they have largely stopped realising that they do it. Concepts are largely noun driven. Compare the examples below.

*The man is poor. His children beg for food.*

*Poverty has increased the number of child beggars.*

The first example relies on verbs and provides **description**. The second provides **explanation**, using nominalisation for at least one of those verbs: ‘poverty’ rather than ‘is poor’. So now we and the learners can start talking about poverty as a concept.

## Vocabulary development

Talking about nominalisation segues naturally to the topic of vocabulary, and the importance of vocabulary acquisition for academic success.

There is no dispute that having more words at your disposal is a good thing and vocabulary development is generally at the heart of most teachers’ ambitions for their students’ academic language.

However, there is less agreement about which words are needed for academic language and how or when these might best be presented and retained. (For more on this debate, see Barbara Bleiman’s articles ‘A dictionary is a hard thing to swallow’ at [www.tes.com](http://www.tes.com) and ‘Bigger Than Words – It’s Meanings We Need to Focus On’ at [www.englishandmedia.co.uk](http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk).)

So, yes, attention to vocabulary is vital for academic language. But it’s not sufficient for the development of proficient academic language without further reflection about what this might look like in practice.

## Words, currency and context

It’s currently popular to adopt a tiering approach to language, with vocabulary allotted a place in categories along the lines of:

- everyday words
- specialist and general academic words
- technician or subject specific words.

With this system, everyday language is often eschewed by teachers in favour of what my sceptical daughter likes to call the ‘fancypants’ words in the other two categories. The aim is to increase knowledge, raise aspiration and ambition and match the perceived requirements of the academic genre in question. But there are drawbacks with such an approach if it’s applied too rigidly and without wider considerations.

One problem with categorising words in this way is that many words don’t just mean one thing. The technical term is **polysemy** – ‘the coexistence of many possible meanings for a

word or phrase’.

A single word might fit in two or all three tiers, and may even have different connotations in different subject or academic areas. For example, consider the word ‘cell’. How many meanings or uses can you think of for it? There are multiple, context-driven options with ‘everyday’ meanings being as significant for purpose as those in the other tiers.

Rejecting ‘everyday language’ as inherently lacking is misguided and runs the risk of encouraging florid or even obfuscatory expression (which contrary to some popular opinion, won’t necessarily win marks from examiners).

## Seeking fluency

Ultimately, it is knowledge and understanding combined with fluency in the subject specialist conventions for expressing that knowledge and understanding which is at the heart of academic language or ‘disciplinarity’.

The proficient development of academic language is inevitably interdependent with teacher recognition and understanding of those conventions, and their subsequent confidence in using their knowledge to **plan and teach** the necessary **vocabulary, language structures** and **text relationships**, which are aligned with the concepts and content they embody.

Academic disciplinarity is underpinned by the particular demands of an intended form and audience and the writer’s purpose in addressing them. This applies across ages and stages – whether you’re a KS2 learner or a PhD candidate.

The successful acquisition of academic language is thus a gradual, deeply embedded, recursive process, underpinned by both knowledge and meaning; true ‘powerful knowledge’, not a performative gloss likely to be achievable with SPaG requirements, keywords and sentence starters alone. ■

## Further reading

*Beverley Derewianka – Exploring How Texts Work*

*Pauline Gibbons – Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning*

*Pauline Gibbons – English Learners, Academic Literacy, and Thinking*

*Stuart Webb and Paul Nation – How Vocabulary Is Learned*

*Karl Maton – Knowledge and Knowers: Towards a realist sociology of education*

*‘English for academic purposes’ at [legitimationcodetheory.com](http://legitimationcodetheory.com)*

## Engage and Support the Progress of Boys

Academic language and the development of oracy will be under discussion at the upcoming *Engage and Support the Progress of Boys* conference. For more on this and topics such as self-motivation, parental engagement and reading for pleasure, join us in London on 13 June. Details at [oego.co/Boys\\_19](http://oego.co/Boys_19)



# An end-to-end guide to impact evaluation

Are you planning an initiative or intervention in your school? First follow this guide to evaluating and improving impact from **OWEN CARTER** of ImpactEd

**In our schools** we invest huge amounts of time, money and energy in a variety of initiatives and interventions to benefit pupils. We train our teachers on the latest strategies, we run curriculum boosters and catch-ups, and we provide targeted support to our pupil premium learners.

Sometimes these activities will work and have a profoundly positive impact on the young people involved. But sometimes they don't and can even be counterproductive.

Impact evaluation matters because it aims to assess the effects of the things you are doing and help teachers to reliably identify what is working. Unlike large-scale impact evaluation, which aims to find out whether an approach works on average across a range of school settings, in-school evaluation aims to help you find out what is working in your context.

Done well, impact evaluation can:

- inform your decisions on whether to expand, modify, or stop doing a programme or initiative
- improve outcomes for pupils, by feeding into school development plans and helping you prioritise those activities making the biggest difference
- save teachers time, by enabling them to work smarter, not harder, to improve outcomes.

Here is a short guide on how to set up, run and analyse impact evaluations.

## 1. What's your question?

Most good evaluations will start with a

research question. This might sound a bit off-putting, but really a good research question can be quite simple. Here's a useful structure.

- **Choice** – what change are you measuring?
- **Outcome** – what are you measuring?
- **Context** – who with?

For example:

'I would like to know if running **maths booster sessions** over the Easter term will improve **maths attainment** for **Year 6 pupils**.'

'What impact does our **new English mastery curriculum** have on **Year 7 pupils' engagement with reading outside the classroom**?'

Avoid trying to measure too many things at once and keep your focus simple initially. You should be coming back to this question throughout the course of the project, so it needs to be something you can stick to.

## 2. How will you measure it?

First, decide what type of evidence you need for the question you are trying to answer. For some initiatives that are relatively easy to implement, informal feedback from teachers may be enough evidence for what you are trying to achieve. For more involved projects that are aiming to make a sustained difference to pupil outcomes, you may want to look at more robust measures, potentially against a control group.

You should also be selective about your outcome measures, both intermediate and longer-term. The range of indicators you could look at is huge and could include the following.

- Academic attainment. Consider carefully the validity and reliability of your data – national, moderated exam results and standardised assessments will give different sorts of data to classroom assessments.
- Pastoral and school engagement measures. For example, looking at measures of behaviour, exclusions or attendance. This data will often be readily available and may be high quality.
- Broader skills. Many initiatives will be looking to develop outcomes such as pupils' levels of motivation, self-efficacy or metacognition. In many cases there are pre-existing questionnaires that can be used to measure these outcomes.

Sense check this all against workload and your existing school processes. You don't want to create a need to collect lots of new data, or to overhaul all your systems. Evaluation should reduce work by helping you focus, not create more.

## 3. What will you compare against?

One of the major challenges in school-based evaluation is **noise**. This has a statistical meaning but the gist of it is that a lot of

things affect how pupils progress in school, from home life to the quality of their teaching to interactions with their peers. Isolating the impact of any one change therefore is always going to be challenging.

One key way to do this is by having a control or comparison group. The issue with just using pre/post measures is that they don't control for anything else that may be happening at the same time. But if, for example, we can compare two classes taught by the same teacher, and a strategy is being trialled in one but not the other, we can get a bit closer to nailing down what might be driving change.

### Comparison groups

Two major methods for creating comparison groups are **random assignment** and **matching**.

Random assignment means that you would randomly assign pupils to intervention and control groups. This allows you to control for differences between groups you don't know about, as well as those you do. Typically, you would randomly assign pupils to groups, check that they are balanced (in terms of attainment and basic demographics) and re-randomise until the groups are broadly comparable.

In a school setting, you could use a 'business as usual' approach: control group pupils do not receive any intervention and continue to be taught as usual. Alternatively, you could use a waiting list design: a programme could be used with all pupils but be introduced to some groups earlier than others (using the later groups as control groups for the first).

In many cases, however, random assignment may be logistically impractical or raise ethical issues. A good alternative is matched control groups of pupils similar to those receiving a new programme. In this case, you would identify a group of pupils already not taking part to act as your control group,

with broadly similar characteristics (attainment and demographics being most crucial). You could even compare against previous year groups or similar pupils in other schools. The key is to ensure the groups are as comparable as possible and to have a well-thought through rationale for your approach, which you could explain to others.

### 4. When will you measure this?

Once you have decided on your measures, you will typically want to have both baseline and outcome data – where were young people when you started with an initiative, and where did they end up? Collect this both for those pupils that you are looking to see change in and for any comparison groups.

Don't feel that this will necessarily require new data collection or administrative burdens. In many cases, your school will conduct regular assessments that can be triangulated against interventions for this purpose. If staff are trying to improve non-academic outcomes, be clear about that – you may want to consider measures such as pupil questionnaires or pastoral outcomes from your MIS.

### 5. Delivery

Don't let evaluation get in the way of the actual change you are trying to achieve. Although many evaluations will rely heavily on baseline and post-test data, you could also consider live monitoring information.

For instance, you could look at pupil attendance at sessions, results from tools like exit tickets and RAG ratings, and – just as importantly – ongoing pupil and teacher reflection on how it is going. But be clear about the limitations of this data: it is more about helping you assess how implementation is going, rather than allowing you to make summative judgements about impact.

### 6. Record and report

From the beginning you should hopefully have a clear sense of what you want to do with your data. There are various visual presentation tools you can use within Excel and systems like Tableau, Power BI, or ImpactEd (visit [impacted.org.uk](http://impacted.org.uk) for more information).

But ultimately, once you have got your findings, the key is to act on them. If your evaluation finds that what you were doing wasn't effective, what are you going to do with that? Will you drop the initiative entirely, redesign some components of it, do some further research?

Evaluation won't necessarily give you the answers – what it will do is give you some evidence that you can use alongside your professional judgement.

### 7. Tying it all together

What's the end goal of all of this? The primary purpose of a good evaluation process will be to figure out what is working, and what isn't, in order to maximise the chances of doing the best possible things in the future.

But there's also a value in the process itself. Toby Sutherland, headteacher of one of our partner schools, St Clement Danes, describes the importance of evaluation as 'before we start doing anything, being really rigorous about what we are trying to achieve, how we'll know if we have achieved it, and what we will do as a result'.

So, while impact evaluation should give you some specific lessons about the value of the different initiatives you might be trialling, it can also pave the way for wider cultural change. When we want to make some improvement in school, our default response shifts from 'do more', to 'figure out what's working and do more of that' (and less of everything else!). That change in approach is something that we think can really make a difference. ■



# Simplify your marking policy with WIN feedback

**TOM FAY** explains how a simplified marking strategy has enabled teachers to focus on feedback that makes a difference

There has been much debate about the usefulness of marking and written feedback as a vehicle to drive improvement in our classrooms. We all know the feeling of marking books and papers for hours with very little subsequent gain from our pupils. Our profession suffers from a 'red pen' culture and too often marking quantity and frequency replaces quality and progress.

Nevertheless, marking pupils' work, and the evaluation of a learner's progress over time, is an integral part of teaching and learning. In this article I'll explain how the 'WIN' marking and feedback strategy works and why it's been adopted by teachers across our trust.

## My marking principles

Pupils need to be taught that homework, assessments and marked work is not being done for the sake of the teacher but for themselves as valuable indicators of progress. They also need to know that there is no failure in tasks, only feedback to act upon (FBI = feedback to improve).

Marking pupils' work should allow teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and to inform future planning, intervention, homework and assessment, and empower pupils to reflect and improve their learning so they can reach their full potential.

In short, marking and written feedback should enable pupils to reflect, take action and make progress.

- This is what I can do (areas of strength).
- This is what I cannot do (areas to develop).
- This is what I need to do to improve my grade and to meet/exceed my targets (next steps).
- This is how I am going to improve and show evidence (change over time).

## Why WIN marking and feedback?

- **WHAT** have you done well?
- What **IMPROVEMENTS** need to be made?
- What are your **NEXT** steps to make these improvements?

## Written feedback: 10 non-negotiables

1. Feedback should be predominantly encouraging and constructive, not derogatory in nature.
2. Relate to the task in hand with clear success criteria.
3. Challenge the pupils to reflect upon their learning.
4. Create opportunities for further dialogue with teachers and peers.
5. Provide clear direction for improvement.
6. Reflect the proximity of pupils to their target grade (where relevant or possible).
7. Be clear and concise enough for progress to be easily evidenced over time.
8. Show parents their child's strengths and areas for development over the academic year.
9. Contain models of excellence to aim for.
10. Have time bound next steps so learning can be interleaved in a timely fashion.

WIN has positive connotations, is easy to remember and has applications in every subject area regardless of the phase of education you work in. I have seen many convoluted marking policies that were poorly understood and generally disliked by teachers and pupils. Often these policies contained phrases like 'weaknesses' or 'underachievement'. The components of the WIN acronym are all we need to make improvements.

## What gets marked?

Not everything a student does requires marking. Teachers should not have to spend time ticking and marking their own notes! To make WIN work team leaders should decide what tasks and activities are 'winnable' every half term. Mapping the teaching sequence to the curriculum is therefore vital. As a rule, WIN tasks should be 'weighty' enough to evaluate true cumulative learning. The WIN tasks should reflect a sequence of knowledge and skills that can be rigorously assessed (in lesson time).

Interim and end of term summative assessments are good WIN tasks, as is any activity that evaluates written competencies that match learning or assessment objectives. WIN tasks are different to consolidatory homework tasks in that they rely on the retention of information and the application of knowledge over longer time frames.



They do not replace homework activities but are supplementary and more valid (most teachers now arrange peer marking strategies to assess simple homework tasks or use self-marking digital resources like Educake).

### Mapping your WIN tasks

Forward thinking subject teams have mapped their WIN tasks back from the final examinations the pupils will sit in a year group. They have used WIN activities to put 'markers in the sand' at defined time frames over the year to track progress. Core subject areas choose at least three WIN tasks every 7-8 weeks to consolidate learning. Their model runs as follows.

### Example WIN tasks timeframe

Week 1	Consolidatory homework task
Week 2	WIN task (in lesson)
Week 3	Consolidatory homework task
Week 4	WIN task (in lesson)
Week 5	Consolidatory homework task
Week 6	Summative WIN task (in lesson or at home)
Week 7	Consolidatory homework based upon the term's WINs

This is just a guide; the timeframes can be tweaked according to schemes of work. Non-core subjects often have one WIN task every six weeks, and two consolidatory homework tasks in the interim period. Subjects that take a project-based approach use the final outcome as the WIN task.

It's important to remember these points.

- The type and extent of marking and written feedback will vary from subject to subject.
- Marking that provides no constructive feedback should not be required.
- WIN tasks are marked by the teacher.
- Teachers should review pupils' work to ensure feedback is acted upon. Once the expected standard has been reached, that could be indicated with a symbol.
- Marked work should be returned promptly so misconceptions, errors and omissions can be addressed.

### Learner response

It is expected that teachers provide time to enable pupils to engage in the learning dialogue provided in the written feedback. This time can be in or out of lessons.

Learners are required to reflect upon their work, or the work of their peers:

- to consider the depth of their learning and understanding (W)

## 'I have seen many convoluted marking policies that were poorly understood and generally disliked'

- to alter and change their work where necessary (IN)
- to respond to questions posed by a teacher (N)
- to address literacy errors and improve the quality of their written communication (IN)
- to further develop their responses (IN)
- to meet grading criteria (IN)
- to develop confidence (W)
- to improve timings and/or exam technique (IN).

Changes should be explicit and provide evidence of new learning. Complete re-drafts are not necessary.

### Making expectations clear

The WIN strategy will only work if very clear expectations are discussed and reinforced from the outset. Pupils are experts at picking out inconsistencies between lesson standards, so the success of any marking process will depend on staff buy-in and an understanding of how the strategy can work.

Remember: many pupils, and teachers, have poor experiences with marking, so the core principles may need to be reinforced over the academic year.

### Lessons learned

Both teachers and pupils benefit from WIN marking. Over 90% of learners surveyed (155) understood WIN marking and indicated that it made interpreting written feedback much easier: these pupils were in years 5-11.

Teachers' marking load has greatly reduced as they have developed innovative ways to create the WIN sheets. For example, pre-populating the sheet with the task success criteria, marking criteria, skills being assessed, assessment objective (where applicable) and the literacy expectations.

Teachers indicate that this strategy makes leaders think about what is important to mark and assess. It has made them tweak their long-term curriculum plans, assessment strategies, in class WIN activities and homework tasks.

Middle leaders need to constantly check the quality of the WIN feedback to ensure consistency, especially the N section (next steps). This is the most important part! ■



# Improving post-maternal wellbeing

Returning to work after pregnancy can be a dizzying experience for teachers. **ASHMI MORJARIA** explains why they need a helping hand

**The six-week** summer holiday can leave teachers at a loose end. Some of us turn into insomniacs the night before the autumn term. Anxiety takes over as our minds are filled with a million questions.

Now imagine having 52 weeks off and being the only teacher to return to work half way through the year. Such is the reality for teachers who return after maternity leave.

## The post-maternity lull

The post-maternity lull comes with an array of personal and professional challenges. Not only are you suddenly responsible for an entirely new life, you can also feel sleep deprived, emotionally imbalanced and – let's be honest – a physical mess.

Despite all of this, you are expected to slot neatly into the already-progressing academic year. I remember my very first Inset after returning from maternity leave. We were discussing our school's Ofsted findings, and the person leading the course asked me if I had anything to add about reading.

'I'm the English leader, of course I should have something to say,' I thought, 'but I don't know what!' I panicked. I could feel all the eyes watching me. I remember waffling something vague and feeling incredibly silly. I felt like I had a long way to go before I could just 'slot in'.

## The first month

In just one month, my return to work included an array of tasks, including a borough review, carrying out observations for the performance management cycle, covering classes across the school and supporting

## 'For mothers returning to work, the greatest fear can be being judged'

Year 6 pupils through SATs. Juggling all of this, working three days a week, came with challenges and doubts. Simple questions like 'How did you find that lesson?' left me baffled, and at times speechless.

During this period, my headteacher was very supportive. Not only did she check in regularly, she also showed that she values me by involving me in important tasks and discussions. Other members of staff showed the same warmth and support, making sure I left school in time to carry out the nursery run.

## Worries and anxieties

For the first time in my teaching career, I have questioned my subject knowledge. In the dark hours of the night (when the little ones are sleeping), I've found myself revising what greater depth writing looks like, the difference between present progressive and past, as well as scanning over curriculum and school documents for any changes I may have missed. And of course, there's a lot I have missed – education changes quickly.

## What can schools do?

I strongly believe that schools need to work to establish a 'post maternity welcome to work' programme. A programme where a member from the senior leadership team talks you

through changes to school policy. A place for you to share your worries and anxieties. Schools should look to set aside designated time, where teachers returning to work can fill in the gaps and have their concerns addressed.

For mothers returning to work, the greatest fear can be being judged for having taken this 'time'. For this reason, I strongly believe there needs to be an open dialogue on the challenges returning mothers can face. If knowledge is power, why do we know so little about this?

Many times, I've heard comments like 'he won't get it, he doesn't have children', or 'she didn't get it before, but now she has children she does.' Surely, there is some irony in the fact that a profession with children at its heart can fail to support mothers accordingly. Schools need to find ways to allow part-time and flexible working. If they don't, we will ultimately fail our future leaders.

I would strongly urge schools to be kind and patient. The post-maternity teacher may not have the answer yet, but she will. I promise you she will. She will, because the post-maternity teacher is strong, determined and driven. If you just bear with her, she will be loyal. She will be the mover and shaker, because more than anything else, she wants her children to know – women can do it! ■



# What's in this month's SEN and Safeguarding section?

With rising rates of anxiety and self-harm, mental health is at the forefront of everyone's minds. Turn to page 48 for Dr Helen O'Connor's advice on managing pupils' phone use. For guidance on talking to young people about suicide, see page 50.

Wellbeing isn't just a cause for concern among pupils. With the current retention crisis, self-care for staff is more important than ever. How can teachers support their pupils if they're struggling to look after themselves? See page 46 for some tips.

All staff are responsible for protecting their most vulnerable students. Turn overleaf to find out how TAs can support pupils with SEMH needs. To help improve outcomes for autistic girls, read Gareth D Morewood's piece on page 42.

The significant rise in the number of teachers struggling with behaviour is also concerning. See Simon Scarborough's behaviour policy audit guidance to help improve behaviour and promote a positive culture in your school.

**Charlie Roden, Junior Content Lead**

## Top SEN and safeguarding blogs

Why understanding our own stress matters  
[oego.co/stress-matters](https://oego.co/stress-matters)

Creative interventions to enhance student wellbeing  
[oego.co/interventions-enhance](https://oego.co/interventions-enhance)

Using sensory stories for learning [oego.co/sensory-stories](https://oego.co/sensory-stories)

See more at [blog.optimus-education.com](https://blog.optimus-education.com)

## Contributors in this issue



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# Unlocking TA potential: developing SEND leads

How can TAs with experience in SEND widen their contribution across school? **NATALIE PACKER** shares how support staff can access professional development through the introduction of SEND leads

**TAs comprise a** significant proportion of the school workforce. Across primary, secondary and special schools in the UK, 28% of people working in schools are TAs. According to DfE statistics, the overall number of TAs has declined recently, undoubtedly reflecting the effects of cuts to school budgets. However, support staff continue to be an extremely valuable resource and, particularly in the light of reducing numbers, it is increasingly important that school leaders ensure maximum benefit and value from their TA colleagues.

Over the last few years, researchers from the Institute of Education at University College London have been running the Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA) project. Building on the findings of research, the project aims to improve the way TAs are deployed in schools to contribute to learning. Project lead Rob Webster notes in a recent blog that feedback from the schools involved shows that 'releasing the latent potential of TAs is demonstrable, achievable and indisputably worthwhile.'

Many TAs have a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding that can be tapped into and developed further. Effective school leaders ensure this happens as part of the school's wider strategic improvement plan.

## CPD and career progression

Providing opportunities for TAs to access professional development and progress in their careers is key to valuing their contribution and raising the profile of their role. In our teaching assistant toolkit,

'All SEND leads should have a general understanding of the SEND Code of Practice and of the school policies and procedures relating to their lead area'

available at [my.optimus-education.com/teaching-assistants-impact-toolkit](https://my.optimus-education.com/teaching-assistants-impact-toolkit), three questions are outlined for teachers and school leaders to consider.

1. Does your school have a clear CPD model for TAs?
2. Are CPD priorities for TAs linked to the needs of the whole school?
3. Are CPD priorities for TAs linked to the conclusions from appraisal?

Effective school leaders carefully consider how CPD is planned and linked to career development opportunities for all their staff, including TAs. The non-statutory professional standards for teaching assistants define characteristics that all TAs can demonstrate and can be used to inform the appraisal process and to identify training and development needs.

## SEND lead key responsibilities

Within this model, under the direction of the SENCO or another senior leader, each SEND lead has a key responsibility for supporting pupils with a particular area of need and for providing whole school support within the area. Depending on their level of confidence and expertise, this can include:

- supporting the SENCO to develop whole school provision for their lead area
- supporting implementation of individual pupil assessments within their lead area
- providing direct support for a caseload of pupils with particular needs
- delivering and reviewing interventions focusing on their lead area
- providing guidance and support to other staff on strategies to use with pupils
- sourcing or developing resources for their lead area
- working in collaboration with parents and other external professionals who support pupils with particular needs, for example speech and language therapists, physiotherapists or specialist teachers
- undertaking action research in their lead area and sharing good practice across the school.

The model of SEND lead TAs could be applied within an individual school setting, particularly where there is the capacity and need to develop a team approach. Alternatively, it is a model that some MATs are now developing, where SEND leads also provide outreach support across a number of schools or academies, as well as supporting within their own school.



## The role of the SEND lead

Many TAs spend the majority of their time working with pupils with special educational needs. This will often involve TAs working with individuals or small groups of pupils, adding value to the work of the class teacher. For TAs who are particularly experienced, or have a specific interest in this field, it may be appropriate to widen their contribution across the school. One way schools can develop this is through the introduction of SEND leads. This involves individual TAs being appointed as the lead on one of the four broad areas of need as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice. This results in the school having a team of ‘experts’, often led by the SENCO, in the following areas:

- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning
- social, emotional and mental health
- sensory and physical.

## Person specification for a SEND lead

Effective recruitment of SEND leads can be supported through the appraisal process, where leaders have a thorough understanding of the knowledge, skills and experience of their TAs, and can take into consideration their individual areas of interest. But what might be included within a person specification for such a role?

All SEND leads should have a general understanding of the SEND Code of Practice and of the school policies and procedures relating to their lead area. They should also have a thorough understanding of some of the challenges faced by pupils with particular needs and be familiar with a range of strategies that can support pupils.

Excellent communication and interpersonal skills, along with a willingness to work alongside and support staff, parents and other professionals will, of course, be essential personal characteristics.



Many TAs have a range of skills and knowledge that can be developed further

To highlight a particular example of the above, some of the requirements for a communication and interaction lead could include:

- a minimum of 12 months recent experience of working with a range of pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)
- knowledge of the characteristics of speech, language and communication impairments and the implications for learning and development
- experience of using speech and language screeners to support initial identification
- experience of using, and understanding the impact, of strategies to enhance and promote language and communication
- knowledge of alternative communication methods used by pupils and how to support and promote the pupil’s ability to use these effectively
- experience of delivering intervention programmes for pupils with SLCN and an understanding of how to evaluate their impact on learning.

It may be unreasonable to expect TAs to demonstrate a high level of expertise in all areas from the start, however, a commitment to improving their own practice and to engage in CPD around their lead area will be key to enable them to develop in the role.

## Further resources

For guidance on developing higher level support in the classroom, planning and delivering meaningful interventions and unlocking the potential of TAs through appraisal and training, download the ‘Teaching assistants with impact: a toolkit’ at [my.optimus-education.com/teaching-assistants-impact-toolkit](https://my.optimus-education.com/teaching-assistants-impact-toolkit) ■

## 17th Annual SEND Update

Attend this year’s SEND Update conference and take away practical strategies to help manage the increasing pressure on SEN departments, giving staff confidence in effective teaching to SEND pupils. Taking place in London on Thursday 23 May 2019, further details can be found at [oego.co/SENDUpdate-19](https://oego.co/SENDUpdate-19)



# Autistic girls: my steep learning curve

To better support girls with autism, we need more research. Here's what **GARETH D MOREWOOD** has discovered so far

**Previously I have** written about my growing understanding of autistic girls and more recently I have had the opportunity to learn further from our pupils and specialist staff. I never consider myself to be 'expert' in anything, and most certainly not regarding autistic girls; I feel I have so much more to learn. In this piece I will try and share some of the key things I've learned to date and hope this helps colleagues in the journey towards greater understanding and improving outcomes for pupils in their schools.

## Why are things different for girls?

Some of the key learning points for me have been that for autistic girls, challenges often present very differently to boys. For example: difficulties understanding unwritten rules and expectations, understanding and managing anxiety, along with difficulties navigating the increasingly complex social world of school and life. Girls' skills in masking these difficulties and demonstrating age appropriate interests may make it more difficult for their needs to be identified in relation to current diagnostic criteria (Mandy et al. 2012).

School staff and parents/carers with less knowledge of how autistic girls present may be surprised that someone who appears able, can participate in reciprocal conversations, and use appropriate affect and gestures may have a diagnosis of autism (Gould & Ashton-Smith, 2011). Therefore, getting a diagnosis, and perhaps most importantly, the specific challenges faced by autistic girls, can and are routinely missed (Honeybourne, 2015; Moysse & Porter, 2015).

When girls' needs are identified, there is also a lack of specific guidance on what should be put in place to meet their needs, although there has been some general guidance emerging recently ('Girls and autism: flying under the radar', NASEN, 2016). This highlights that there is much more work needed in understanding and supporting these pupils in our schools, which is why I was delighted to have the opportunity, with colleagues from the University of Manchester, to consider the real experiences of autistic girls in relation to our saturation model, the outcomes of which will be published this year.

'Truly understanding that each pupil is an individual is an important starting point'

## What are the specific challenges?

There are many current challenges with regard to research and specific information.

- Limited research about autistic girls.
- The fact that the number of girls in special schools/PRUs is small and under-represented.
- There are limited opportunities for girls to develop appropriate peer relationships with other girls.
- Often girls face the same academic challenges as boys but are not as vocal as boys – they will not ask for help and will try to hide any difficulties.

These factors all add weight to the existing landscape and provide opportunities for pupils to be 'missed' and 'anonymous' in some settings.

## Key issues to consider and improving outcomes

Some of the key issues that present for autistic girls are around friendships and relationships, learning and communication, interpreting the world and in recognising the positives (Honeybourne, V., 2015).

When I consider what we can do to improve outcomes for autistic girls in school, I often think to previous research I have been involved with and what makes a good investment in learning. Some common themes appear from this work, but also from talking to some of our pupils at school. When research matches 'lived experiences', I'd suggest that there is a likelihood that this knowledge helps us to improve the educational experiences for some of the learners with whom we work.

One of my favourite phrases is 'bringing structure to the



*Encourage an atmosphere that embraces difference*

unstructured'; echoing our work on interventions, providing a range of activities for pupils at break and lunch times can make a significant positive impact for pupils during the school day.

Another fantastic personal analysis that one of our pupils mentioned was when she said: 'make us feel good about ourselves'; 'help us to accept that this is the way we are'; 'show us why misunderstandings have occurred without judging us'; 'allow us to have our own goals, targets and hopes, not ones that have been imposed by the school or other people'.

Truly understanding that each pupil is an individual is an important starting point; grasping the concept of personalisation would appear to be key. Other examples that have seen a positive impact for autistic girls include:

- providing clear guidelines for group work – including allocating specific roles and making expectations clear
- making it 'ok' for students to use a quiet space when they need some time alone
- allowing and encouraging different ways of communicating and learning in the classroom (through discussion, writing, video, one-to-one etc.)
- providing quieter ways of learning, and offering more time
- mean what you say and say what you mean – have clear and consistent rules and expectations
- use sensory profiles of a type and level of detail relevant to the needs of individual pupils, ensuring these are regularly reviewed and used to inform curriculum delivery
- adopting a respectful language policy, which supports positive and inclusive practice.

The best thing educators can do for autistic girls is to find out about them, as individuals. Allow girls to work to their strengths, and encourage an atmosphere which embraces difference, making it the norm to be unique.

### First hand experiences

I often say, 'don't take my word for it' and was recently fortunate enough to chair an annual review for a Year 11 pupil. She articulated her experiences powerfully, and these matched many of the main points of my growing understanding of autism and girls. These are some quotes from the review (published with permission).

This young lady was excluded from her primary school but has thrived over the last few years. Working with her in planning a pathway into post-16 provision and adulthood has been nothing short of inspirational. Here are some of the things that have been important to her.

English: 'I work independently in this lesson because I have built up a relationship with my teacher and I know that I can go to him if I need somebody.'

Maths: 'I am independent in it. Sir has brought me up (to the front of the class) from the start in September to answer maths questions even though sometimes I don't want to, but it's brought my confidence up a lot.'

Social times: 'I normally have lunch in the cafes and then go to the quads with my friends, especially the quiet quad. It is relaxing, and I chat to friends and teachers on duty.'

French: 'I love French, this is my favourite lesson. My teacher started when I did. She is such an amazing teacher. I answer questions in French and have the confidence to speak to Miss. She is very caring and can always cheer me up if I am upset.'

'I am looking forward to college and feel I am ready to be more independent as I'm nearly independent in everything already!' ■

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# Auditing behaviour policy: a step-by-step guide

Does your school's behaviour policy need to be improved? **SIMON SCARBOROUGH** provides a step-by-step guide of things to include when auditing a behaviour policy

**One of the** fundamental responsibilities of a school is to provide a positive and safe environment in which pupils can access high-quality teaching to fulfil their potential. A fit-for-purpose behaviour policy that supports all members of the school community is essential in achieving this aim. As such, it is vital that SLTs schedule regular audits of their school's behaviour policy and how well the systems are being implemented.

## What shapes behaviour policy?

When considering auditing a school behaviour policy, it is worth considering that the policy may be shaped by:

- a school's ethos and values
- the construct of a school's cohort, based on the number of pupils, gender, SEN, PP, EAL
- staff structures e.g. house (vertical) versus year group (horizontal), pastoral structure, support staff structures, pupil support and pastoral leaders
- whether the school is part of a MAT, who may or may not impose certain restrictions on the policy.

## What should a behaviour policy aim to achieve?

It is important to remember that there is no 'one size fits all' system that would work in every school. However, an effective behaviour policy should celebrate and recognise pupils in all aspects of school life, supporting the growth of a positive culture in the school. It should support all pupils to

stay in the classroom and ensure pupils can learn free from disruption.

## How can this be achieved?

The policy needs to be clear and simple, understood by both pupils and staff. The management of behaviour incidents needs to be timely and applied in a consistent manner, and all staff should be trained in understanding the impact of unmet need and know how to manage and de-escalate behaviour in an emotionally intelligent manner. Every member of staff should implement the policies with confidence, building consistency.

## Carrying out the audit

### Step 1. Collating the data

Using the criteria set out above for a successful behaviour policy, the first step in considering an audit is to ask to what extent the current behaviour model successfully achieves these aims. This process should be overseen by senior leaders, although other staff can be involved in the collection of information.

### Step 2. What does the data tell you?

Once this data has been collated, senior leaders should then look to answer the following questions.

- To what degree is the current policy working successfully/unsuccessfully?
- What is needed to make the necessary adjustments or improvements in order to be successful?

Through discussion at senior leader level, it should be considered whether any of the areas of the audit are affected by each

other and to what extent the systems require changing or improving.

### Step 3. Presenting the findings

Once the data has been analysed, the findings will need to be presented to all stakeholders. Your leadership team should consider providing several formats for different stakeholders.

Firstly, the SLT should be privy to all of the data to allow meaningful discussions about how to move forward. The wider staff body should then be provided with the key headlines and proposed outcomes. Finally, the pupils and parents/carers can be provided with the most succinct version of the findings with titles that may include 'what you told us', 'what is working well', 'what is working less well', and 'what needs to change'. At this stage, pupils and parents or carers will want to know what change will come about from the audit. While it may not be fully decided, there should be some indication as to what to expect.

### Step 4. A plan for change

When planning for change, it is important to keep at the forefront of discussions what you want the behaviour policy to achieve. A working group consisting of all staff will ensure that staff at all levels feel that their voice is being heard, and that they feel empowered to influence change.

The timing of the introduction of a policy change should be considered, with a possible transition phase for pupils to become accustomed to the new expectations. Initial training and on-



## Data collection

Source of information	Key questions	Staffing strategy	Considerations
SIMS records	Behaviour – the number of behaviour incidents, by year group and subject. Attendance – of key pupil groups such as SEN or PP. Exclusions – fixed term and permanent, with a focus on the behaviours that resulted in the exclusion. Time spent in school, but out of lessons e.g. in alternative provision/internal isolation.	This work can be undertaken by any member of staff that can run the reports, including data managers or senior leaders. The senior leader overseeing the audit should be explicit about what information they want to gain from the audit if someone else is collating the data.	The responsibility of interpreting the data should remain with the SLT. What story does the data tell and how can it shape next steps?
Pupil voice	Do pupils feel the system is easily understood, fair and consistently applied?	Pupil voice could be collated through class discussions. Feedback could then be given through pupil council and reviewed by senior leaders.	This needs to be managed in a way that prevents pupils from being personal against specific members of staff. A range of pupil groups should be consulted to prevent skewed results.
Staff voice	Do staff feel the system is easily understood, fair and consistently applied? Do they feel it empowers them to teach outstanding lessons?	Survey monkey or Google forms could collate this information. This will need to be led by the senior leaders overseeing the audit and each member of staff encouraged to complete their own survey.	Anonymous surveys might give staff more confidence to tell the true story. It's important for the questionnaire to identify what role the member of staff has in the school to understand the various perspectives from staff across the school.
Parent/carer voice	Do parents/carers feel the system is easily understood, fair and consistently applied? Do they feel it enables their child to make good progress in school? Do they feel it supports their child effectively when they are finding it hard to comply to the school expectations?	Every interaction between a school and a parent/carer is important. Behaviour can be an emotive topic, so any direct contact should be made by senior leaders.	A survey monkey or Google form could collect important data. However, an opportunity to come into school and meet with staff to discuss concerns and shape future policy will be welcomed by many parents.
Observations	Do staff know the policy? Are staff at all levels consistently applying the policy? Are support staff processing consequences to behaviours consistently and in a timely manner?	Heads of department should be well placed to know how the staff within their team are applying the current policy. Pastoral leaders will also have a valuable insight into how members of staff are implementing the policy across the school.	Some staff may feel threatened by the prospect of being judged on their implementation of the behaviour policy. If this is the case in your school, reassure staff that the audit wants a snapshot of practice across the school as part of the bigger picture.

going support for staff should be a high priority to ensure the policy is successful.

### Sneaky strategies for success

- Use assemblies to promote the positive values of the school. Assemblies should be strategically planned, so that consistent messages are given to both pupils and staff.
- Provide staff with scripts to use in a range of scenarios so that conversations between all staff and pupils have a consistent message

that links to the expectations underpinned by the policy.

- Seek opportunities to remind staff of the expectations and the importance of modelling the behaviour expected by all members of the community.

- Regular updates for staff on the most vulnerable pupils to build an understanding of the complexity and diversity of their needs to build compassion when managing challenging behaviour. ■

### Excellence in Pupil Development Award

The *Excellence in Pupil Development Award* (EPDA) offers a structured and supportive whole-school framework that enables schools to develop pupils' life skills, and to set high standards of conduct. Find out more at [oego.co/EPDA\\_19](https://oego.co/EPDA_19)



# The importance of supervision for self-care

Educators spend so much of their time looking after the mental health of the pupils in their care, but what do we do as leaders to safeguard staff wellbeing? **KELLY HANNAGHAN** shares tips for improving teacher wellbeing

**As the school** year progresses, pastoral leaders are met with increasing demands and caseloads that are bursting at the seams. Couple that with the daily responsibilities of the job and you can understand why so many educators are reaching burnout before the end of each half term.

## You can't pour from an empty cup

So often when you are looking after everyone else, your own self-care is sabotaged. It is impossible to serve a diet of wellbeing to others when your own wellbeing cup is empty. We need to place an emphasis on self-care within education to sustain resilient leaders, who can effectively support the emotional needs of our most vulnerable young people in education.

Self-care and prevention of burnout are especially important to protect teacher retention, in a climate where statistics show that there is an increasing struggle to hold onto teachers within the profession.

## Identifying symptoms

The specific symptoms of career burnout can include any of the following.

- Low energy
- A change in sleep patterns
- A change in eating habits
- Headaches
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Boredom
- Detached feelings
- Resistance and denial
- Feelings of being overwhelmed

Behavioural impacts include a decline in work performance and job satisfaction, impairments in social and other interpersonal relationships, and an overall withdrawal from the job, both physically and emotionally.

'Placing an emphasis on emotional care doesn't have to be financially constraining'

## Measuring staff wellbeing

A valuable way to prevent poor emotional health in work is to regularly measure staff wellbeing (for example via a survey) and plan strategically to support with early intervention.

Measuring wellbeing is beneficial in two broad ways. Firstly, schools can use information to establish wellbeing leads and strategies, targeting those areas of staff wellbeing and engagement most in need. Secondly, employees receive easy to understand feedback, that allows individuals to take positive action to improve their own health and wellbeing, driving up employee wellbeing as a whole.

## Reducing stress and improving relationships

One of the most important roles of a teacher is to build positive relationships with the pupils: if we strengthen the teacher-pupil relationship then the education outcomes are better. Providing a menu of wellbeing for staff that includes a rich diet of learning around self-care, resilience and growth will help build positive relationships.

The following are some strategies to reduce stress and protect the wellbeing of staff.

- Help teachers to understand the pupils as a whole-being and offer professional advice regarding vulnerable pupils.
- Respect that looking at wellbeing is a unique process and regularly collect voices on needs.
- Provide supervision and coaching sessions for staff.
- Give staff the opportunity to partake in staff wellbeing measuring processes.
- Provide a directory of high-quality services and agencies.
- Work with teachers to implement the use of reflective and empathic language.



### Top tips for practicing safe supervision

There is no one way to facilitate supervision, but here are a few principles.

- Supervision allows a person to focus on an aspect of their practice in a way that they would not normally do.
- The supervisor will offer and facilitate a safe reflective space and will often challenge the staff member to think outside of their current ways of thinking.
- The supervisor will offer support and advice to the supervisee to learn alternative ways of working and specific skills.
- Ensure a contract is set out at the start of any process, identifying firm boundaries for the sessions.

- Continually develop a collaborative professional relationship among staff.
- Offer mediation services for staff who experience conflict.
- Provide up to date CPD in mental health.
- Release the stigma around talking about mental health.

### A space to reflect: supervision

We have found the introduction of supervision to be a vital strategy within our wellbeing plan, which has added incredible value to the lives of teachers within education. It has created a space for professionals to reflect on their systems of knowledge, attitudes, and values related to teaching, while providing an insight into their professional development.

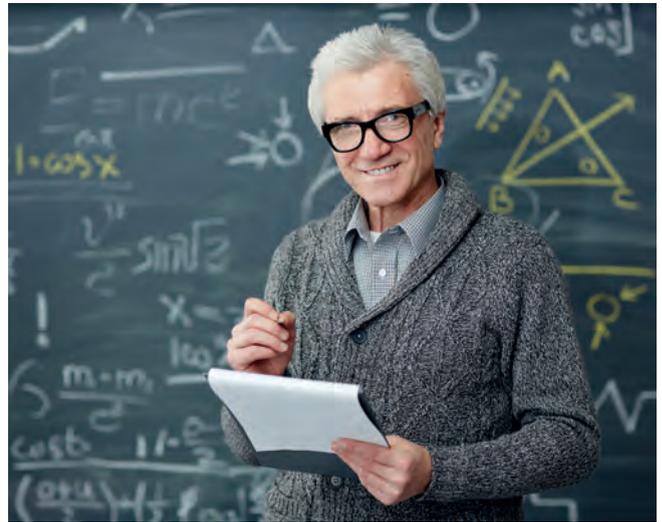
Supervision is the most effective method of reflecting on human behaviours and interactions. The teacher is professionally trained in the academic improvement of pupils, but not always in relational emotional development and we expect our teachers to fully embrace challenging models of behaviours and emotions within their classrooms. We secure weekly timeslots for supervision, where staff can sign up for half hour sessions. These sessions take place within the school therapy room.

### Tangible outcomes

One member of staff shared how the supervision sessions ‘enhance my teaching practice and empower me to facilitate pupil learning.’

School leaders have noticed that staff are taking more responsibility for their personal performance and are more able to use a solution-focused approach with any issues that arise within the protected supervision time. Staff absences have been reduced and long-term absences due to stress have decreased.

Senior leaders have also reported experiencing a decrease in the amount of personal problems brought to them by staff. The time saved contributes towards operational aspects of the school, allowing procedures to run smoothly.



*Schools can't afford not to look at approaches to wellbeing*

Of course, teaching staff still have concerns sometimes; however, these are now managed within boundaries in a safe, meaningful space. Staff wellbeing surveys show an increase in teacher happiness in the workplace. Staff feel heard, valued and respected; this is having a huge benefit on academic outcomes for pupils.

### Creating a brighter future in education

We have made supervision and self-care work at Lessness Heath because senior leaders are on board and fully embrace our wellbeing strategies. Having regular wellbeing meetings provides staff with a space to voice their ideas and needs around the mental health and the wellbeing of all stakeholders within our school. Being creative with our approaches has sustained our action plans. The take-up of supervision is increasing as word is spreading on its impact on wellbeing, teaching and learning.

While budgets are tight, our headteacher, Kate O'Connor, believes that schools can't afford not to look at whole-school approaches to wellbeing. She has had to be very creative to make the sums work! But placing an emphasis on emotional care doesn't have to be financially constraining: it's the little approaches that make the most difference.

Insights into practices of self-care are prevalent within our provision. We continue to take steps in promoting ways that staff can look after themselves in order to do the amazing jobs they do, just as we do for the mental health of our pupils. ■

### Wellbeing Award for Schools

The *Wellbeing Award for Schools* (WAS) focuses on ensuring effective practice and provision is in place that promotes the emotional wellbeing and mental health of both pupils and staff. Find out more at [oego.co/WAS\\_19](https://oego.co/WAS_19)



# Managing mobile phone use in boarding schools

How much do we know about the impact of screen time on pupil wellbeing? **DR HELEN O'CONNOR** explores the evidence and offers ways to manage phone use and improve mental and physical health

**It has been** found that adolescents who spend more time on electronic communication and screens and less time on non-screen activities demonstrate less happiness than adolescents who spend a small amount of time on electronic communication.

## Statistics

Worrying statistics are emerging about the use of mobile phones among our youth.

- On average 16-24 year olds in the UK spend less time sleeping than they do on media and communications.
- 83% of 12-15-year olds have their own smartphone.
- 39% of eight-11-year olds have their own smartphone (Ofcom, 2017).

This is likely to be indicative of children in boarding environments due to the need to remain in contact while away from home and more commonly now being encouraged by schools to use their own technology for learning. It is therefore key to try and assess the potential for children to remain connected while considering the likely impact on their overall wellbeing and education.

## Improving wellbeing

We know that using mobile phones is similar to a 'dose-response' relationship, where each extra hour of screen time impacts significantly on children experiencing more socio-emotional problems (Public Health England). Talking to others releases oxytocin, unlike instant messaging which removes young

## 'Digital use puts a young person's mental health at risk as it is a purely sedentary and often lonely activity'

people from interpersonal relationships and the natural release of feel good hormones (Seltzer, Prosoki et al, 2012).

An erosion of healthy relationships has also occurred through the increase in social media and the decline in face to face time. 'Facebook depression' exists in its users due to the comparisons people make, and in the lack of real contact (O'Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Increased stress was reported in girls who could not speak to their mothers after an exam but messaged instead. This was linked to them not releasing oxytocin, but rather having higher levels of salivary cortisol. The lack of talking did not provide them with the opportunity to release their stress (Seltzer, Prososki et al, 2012).

## Physical health impact

Physical health can be affected by phone use. Most commonly cited is the impact of phone use on sleep and the decline in physical activity. Blue light which naturally occurs and makes our sky blue is responsible for our circadian rhythm. It helps us to feel alert and affects reaction time and mood. Artificial blue light in mobile and computer devices lowers the production of melatonin, which is the hormone responsible for helping us to know when to sleep.

There is an association between longer

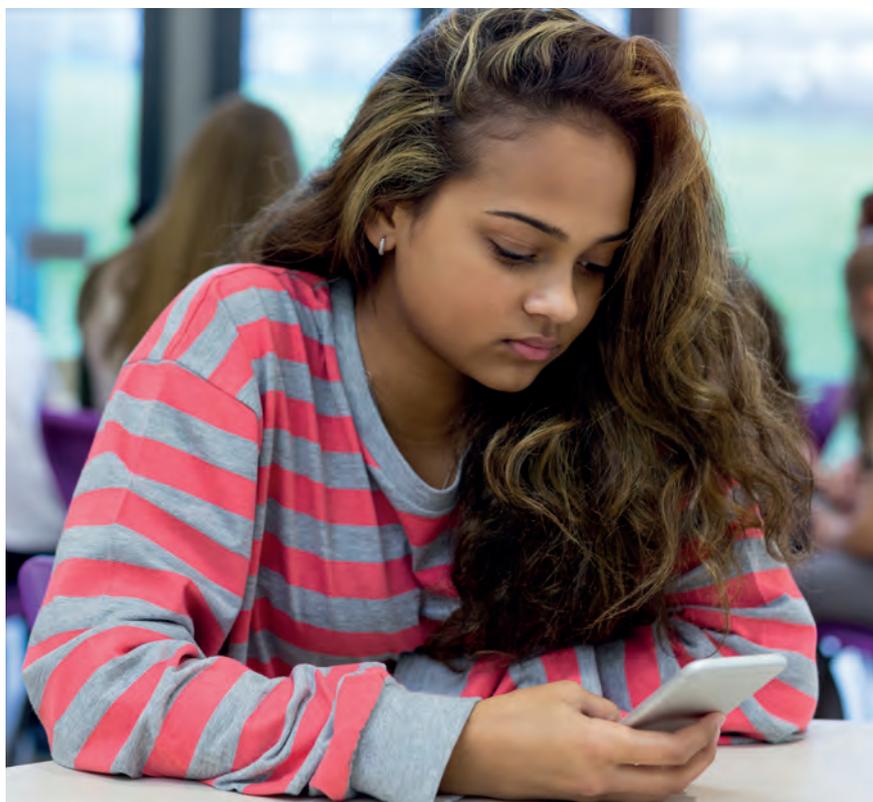
periods of time spent on phones and poor mental health, including poor quality of sleep (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al, 2018). There is also demonstrated to be a reduction in sleep quality when people spend time on their phones in the evening (Yoshimura et al, 2017).

It is well reported that links to mental health and increases in mood can be alleviated by being active. Digital use, however, puts this at risk as it is a purely sedentary and often a lonely activity. It has been perceived as having an impact on mental health, wellbeing and showing signs of increasing depression (Sigman, 2017). Monitoring from parents is difficult due to the activity of phone use often being private and occurring in bedrooms.

Relationships can be affected through mobile phone use, not least due to cyber bullying, intense social comparison, competition and peer influence on unhelpful or difficult behaviours (APPG report on 'A Fit and Healthy Childhood' [royalpa.co.uk/the-aqppg-on-a-fit-and-healthy-childhood](http://royalpa.co.uk/the-aqppg-on-a-fit-and-healthy-childhood)).

## School approach to mobile phone use

Schools need to be mindful of both advantages and disadvantages of screen use among their pupils. Provide clear boundaries and guidelines about how



Mobile phone use encourages isolative behaviour

much phone use is acceptable in a day, what can be done as an alternative, and provide reasons behind any advice.

### Set limits

Acceptable limits of screen time are considered to occur generally at less than two hours a day; over this more associations between screen time and health risks are reported (Sigman, 2017). Ideas for approaching this in a boarding environment would be to consider no phone use in rooms, unless to make calls to parents (particularly after a certain time), regardless of age. After all, it is well documented and encouraged that no one should sleep with their phones in the bedroom.

### Encourage companionship

Mobile phone use encourages isolative behaviour thus advice should be to ensure phones are kept to a minimum in rooms (if at all allowed) and are used in communal areas. Promote the idea that being communal and around others

encourages less screen time and more face to face communication.

### Use of role modelling as a tool

Consider the impact of role modelling on the boarding community. Appropriate role modelling from adults and older children to the younger ages in a boarding house would be beneficial. Modelling as a psychological concept is one of the most powerful tools for changing behaviour in others. Seeing senior pupils and adults in a boarding house engaging in other activities and not continuously using mobile phones promotes a positive message.

### Don't deny physicality

Promote opportunities for physical activities to try and encourage the use of non-sedentary activities and greater interactions with others. While some young people will be easier to involve in exercise type activities, opportunities for non-sedentary activities can occur easily in the boarding house. For example, board

games or baking activities could be used for those less likely to engage in the more traditional sport type physical activities. To assist with becoming more active, challenges could be set to see pupils increasing their steps and reducing screen time (apps are available for both of these).

### Educate

What better way to educate children than in an educational setting. Boarding houses are similar to the child's home; we would encourage a conversation about mobile phones at home, so why not in a boarding house. Ask questions related to the child's use of the phone to enable a thoughtful approach. Consider simple questions which pose the child to think about the risks of screen time in house, such as 'How long is long enough?' ■

### References

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- 'The impact of social media on children, adolescents and families' Pediatrics (2011)*
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### Protect and Support Vulnerable Teens

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# Talking to young people about suicide

Suicide is a traumatic event with devastating consequences. **SARAH KESSLING** offers helpful things to say to young people who have been bereaved by suicide or are experiencing suicidal ideation

**Suicide is a** complex behaviour caused by a range of factors and is rarely the result of a single event or problem. Talking about suicide with young people is unique and individual. Whether they are experiencing suicidal ideation themselves or they have been bereaved by suicide, it can often feel daunting to strike up a conversation. Many people fear they will escalate the level of distress for a young person.

However, talking about suicide in a calm and straightforward manner, along with providing information and support, are all ways of helping young people to manage their feelings or make sense of what has happened. Listening is crucial when talking to young people about suicide. It helps young people feel safe, supported and unjudged.

## Ask questions

It's important to be thoughtful and sensitive when you talk to young people about suicide as it's immersed in stigma and taboo. If you suspect a young person is suicidal ask them clear and direct questions.

- Are you thinking about suicide?
- Are you thinking about killing yourself?

It is a myth that talking about suicide will put the idea into someone's head. By asking clearly and directly you are washing away stigma and fear. You are also ensuring you are not underreacting or overacting to a situation.

For those young people who are bereaved by suicide, it is natural to want

**'It's a myth that talking about suicide will put the idea into someones head'**

## Helpful things to say

- I have been feeling concerned about you lately.
- You're not alone in this.
- You are important.
- How are you? (Try asking this question twice, as people often change their answer when asked a second time)
- So, you are telling me... (this allows for a period of reflection)
- You are doing the right thing by asking for support.
- I'm sorry to hear that.
- It can't have been easy to say this, you're very brave.
- How can I best support you right now?
- When did you begin to feel like this?
- I want to help this is what we can provide.

to protect them from what has happened. However, because of the likelihood of overheard conversations, media coverage, gossip and visits from the police, it is hard to keep this a secret.

Young people would rather they hear the truth from people who love them than from someone at school, at college or on social media. The National Suicide Prevention Alliance offer many helpful resources when talking to young people. *Help is at Hand* is a free handbook specifically designed to support people through suicide bereavement.

## Further support

Harmless provides a range of services about self-harm and suicide prevention including support, information, training and consultancy to people who self-harm, their friends and families and professionals and those at risk of suicide. You can contact them at [info@harmless.org.uk](mailto:info@harmless.org.uk)

The Tomorrow Project was set up in response to a number of suicides within a local community in 2012.

A confidential, community-based suicide prevention, intervention and postvention service, The Tomorrow Project offers help and support in times of struggle.

For more information contact them at [crisis@tomorrowproject.org.uk](mailto:crisis@tomorrowproject.org.uk) or [bereavement@tomorrowproject.org.uk](mailto:bereavement@tomorrowproject.org.uk) ■

## Child Protection in Education 2019

Register your place at our annual *Child Protection in Education* conference. This safeguarding compliance update helps ensure you can implement robust child protection procedures across your school. For more information, go to [oego.co/CP\\_19](http://oego.co/CP_19)

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