

Spring Term 2012 • Issue 73

Prep School

Reflecting the best in the prep and junior school world



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The power of sport**

Orchestras: the power of high quality provision

Wild storytelling

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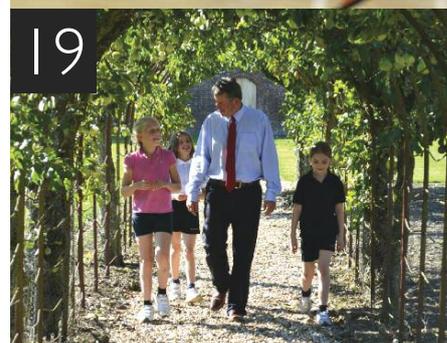
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support and training in prep schools

Front cover photograph: Windlesham House School, Sussex. P19

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From the editor



Welcome to the New Year, a time traditionally associated with new opportunities. January is always a good time to look back on what has passed and think about what may be ahead. Time spent reflecting on your career in this way is unlikely to be wasted even if – or perhaps especially if – you conclude that you are in exactly the right job. If, however, you think it might be time to move on then what you need is Paul Ainsworth's article on 'getting that job'. Or you could try writing your first article for *Prep School*. We can't promise that it will lead to a flourishing second career as a writer or to a successful interview for a Headship ... but you never know.

At this time of year our instincts tell us to stay inside where it is warm and dry. Nevertheless, natural daylight is vital to our wellbeing at all times of year and never more so than in the depths of winter.

In this issue we are unashamedly urging you to take your students outside. The rise of something that Richard Louv called 'nature deficit disorder' (*Last Child in the Woods*, 2005), coupled with alarming statistics about children's declining familiarity with nature, should persuade us to make sure that pupils spend learning time outside all year round and not just when the weather is fine. Fresh air, experimentation and risk-taking are all important aspects of growing up. If children don't use sticks and mud to make pictures, or leaves and branches to build dens, how will they find out that freely available natural materials can be as much fun as – and infinitely more adaptable than – expensive, battery-driven toys made by someone else? Are your pupils imaginative and independent? Are they resourceful enough to invent and build their own games? To find out, take them outdoors and watch them amaze themselves. Many of us are privileged to teach in schools with excellent outdoor spaces for learning and if we don't have wonderful grounds then perhaps we have minibuses to take us to inspiring places. Either way, I hope our articles on geography and storytelling will inspire you to find ways of applying outdoor teaching to all subject areas.

Matthew Jenkinson's article on Montaigne in our autumn issue clearly struck a chord. At *Prep School* we have been told that the feature has been mentioned in Headteachers' newsletters and blogs as well as in an old boys' newsletter, clearly showing how much *Prep School* intrigues and inspires. Do continue to keep in touch – we love to know what you think.

Michèle Claire Kitto

If you have an idea for an article or viewpoint for the next issue of *Prep School*, or any news from your school, please don't hesitate! Email me at editor@prepschoolmag.co.uk

A thought for the term



The Revd Kim Taplin is an Anglican priest and is the Chaplain of Clifton College, Bristol. He has taught religious studies and games in four independent and maintained schools.

Rediscover the plot

We now live in a culture so choked by regulation, strangled by bureaucratisation and smothered by political correctness that we are in danger of losing sight of what is most important in life. Are we beginning to lose the plot?

For good or ill, significant change in society rarely happens in a single movement. It usually occurs in small, seemingly inconsequential, barely noticeable increments. We climb a staircase one step at a time. Each action appears reasonable and easily-reversible. However, before long, we find ourselves at the top of the staircase of social change,

in a place that we do not want to be in. We turn around, look back down and wonder how on earth we allowed ourselves to travel in such a direction. We feel frustrated and powerless to recover what we have lost.

Many professionals are wringing their hands about how arbitrary workplace policies and procedures, in the name of 'health and safety' and avoiding litigation, are squeezing all of the creativity and spontaneity out of the careers and lifestyles they once enjoyed.

However, it is because so many people share this concern, that our faith in human nature should lead us to believe that the current situation will not last for ever. History teaches us that, at some point in the future, the pendulum of social change will swing back in a more life-affirming, constructive direction.

We cannot turn the clock back to a mythical golden age. Instead, we must move forward to simpler times. We must rediscover the plot.

Clifton College's Chaplain, Kim Taplin

Cracking the Alphabet Code

Marion Scott-Baker, Head of Pre-Prep, Cheam School, takes a look at how children learn to read and start to decipher early language development. She strengthens the case for high quality early years education and a unified approach to phonics



'The government is keen to promote high quality teaching of synthetic phonics in primary schools.'

For the layman that word 'synthetic' is skimmed over in this context - surely 'phonics' is nothing new; we have always 'sounded out' the letters of the alphabet and they haven't changed. But if you think that 'a is for ape' and 'i is for ice cream' then you are in the phonic equivalent of the Stone Age. To the layman, the Rose report heralded a full circle in the teaching of reading, but those of us in the infant classroom know that the concept of 'synthetic' phonics is a very different one from the 'analytic' phonics of yesteryear.

So what is the difference? Well firstly let us look at the alphabet. Many a proud parent of a four-year old will boast to me on 'show rounds' that their child can recite the alphabet. From my perspective they have done little more than teach the child a line of doggerel which will only be useful in the future for dictionaries and telephone directories, causing frustration and confusion when trying to decode a favourite storybook. This is because letter names give no clue to the sound of most letters. For example:

B, D, T, V, P and Z have their letter sound at the beginning of their letter name, but end with a long E sound.

F, L, M, N, S, and X have a short E sound at the beginning of the pronunciation of their letter and only make the sound of their letter name at the end.

C begins with the sound of S.

G begins with the sound of J.

Letter E only has its own long vowel sound *ie* 'E' for eel but not 'E' for egg.

J and K end with the sound of long A, while A and H both begin with the sound of long A.

And H ends with 'ch'.

While W begins with the word 'double' and ends with the letter name U. And so on!

The sounds that we generally attribute to these letters and most parents teach their children are equally useless. 'Pig', 'wig' and 'jig' present few problems but what about 'dead', 'bead' and 'great', which rhyme with 'suite', 'straight' and 'debt'? There are copious examples of anomalies in English, which follow spelling rules but defy decoding using basic alphabet sounds. In the past, activities in reception would include learning to link the simple graphemes (letters) of the alphabet with their phonemes (sounds) as heard at the onset of a word, *ie* a for apple, b for ball, along with a few blends such as 'sh', 'ch' and 'th', but beyond this there was little support in learning to deconstruct words. Now defined as 'Analytic Phonics' the approach did not encourage the teaching of sounds in isolation but would present children with words that shared a phoneme and grapheme such as 'pat', 'mat' and 'rat' in the hope that they would identify and match the two, recognising that the phoneme repetition of *æ* was represented by the grapheme 'a' in the same way as the phoneme *eɪ* is represented by a in 'cake', 'make' and 'cape'. It was hoped that children would internalise these patterns through repetition of words in reading books with a very controlled vocabulary and then would progress to applying this knowledge to identify the same phoneme/grapheme correspondences in new words. Easy for some but for a larger proportion of children this was not an effortless progression and learning to read and spell became a frustrating and demotivating experience rather than the key to the magical world of books.

It is easy to decode in pure languages such as Spanish, which has only 24 speech sounds tidily represented by 29 letters; analysing and decoding is simple, because sounds are constant. Incidentally the diagnosis of dyslexia rarely occurs in these countries.

Languages such as Finnish and Swedish are equally transparent because these countries have rarely

absorbed foreign vocabulary. On the contrary, Britain absorbed words from myriad invaders over the centuries to create a vast and varied language bank. Surprisingly 82 percent of these words follow regular patterns but these spelling rules are dependent on the source language and often conflict with other rules, creating spelling anomalies.

Although we share the 26 letter alphabet, we have 44 sounds and 150-plus regular ways of spelling them. The remaining 17 percent of our words are completely irregular and their spellings need to be learnt. Need I say that these 'tricky words' tend to be the ones that appear most often *eg* 'said', 'was', 'what', 'walk', 'water'.

If you are querying this, consider the challenge once presented by George Bernard Shaw who insisted that the word 'ghoti' should be pronounced as 'fish', citing that 'gh' sounds like 'f' in cough, 'o' makes the sound **i** in women and the 'sh' phoneme is represented by 'ti' in station!

Applying the basic alphabet phonemes CVC (consonant, vowel, consonant) words such as pig, log, and tap can easily be decoded but even many simple words defy alphabetic logic, for example 'she', 'ate', 'me' and 'said' are problematic and there is no hope of analysing a word like 'beautiful'. As soon as we stray from the simple CVC pattern, letters within words letters work differently.

'Cub', 'pin' and 'tap' change by the addition of an 'e' to 'cube', 'pine' and 'tape', short vowel to long vowel. Put an 'a' inside pin and we have pain, 'a' saying its long sound and 'i' now silent.

Few rules in English work consistently and those of us who are fluent readers usually follow the rules unconsciously. While about 25 percent of us seem to have a predisposition to absorb these rules unconsciously in the same way as we learn to talk, many otherwise bright children for some reason require a considerable input to crack the code. Many in adulthood still carry the bruises to self esteem of being a 'slow reader' in adulthood, despite later academic success.

A lucky few children will see a word once and remember it, most need approximately ten sightings of a new word before it enters the orthographic store leading us to cry 'but you saw that word on the last page, why can't you remember it?' Frustratingly, some people with different learning styles may take up to 90 percent exposures to embed a word shape for automatic recall. 25 percent of children are likely to require so much support that unless schools are prepared to offer continuous, systematic and ongoing support, they will leave school with low self esteem, a low reading age and few employment opportunities.

So what is the 'Synthetic Phonics' approach and why is different?



Instead of starting 'top down' with whole words, teachers begin by teaching children to recognise isolated sounds (phonemes) and their corresponding graphemes and then go on to blend these sounds into words when the children have some sounds under their belts.

Alongside this explicit phonic teaching, the human capacity to recall about 2000 'sight' words is not wasted on regular words: instead the children are taught to recognise and spell the 'tricky words' that do not fall into any recognisable spelling pattern.

We also teach pure sounds rather than the phonic onset sounds traditionally taught. In the past the letters of 'plan' would sound like 'puh-leh-aah-naa' and sounding to the child far more like the word 'Pollyanna'.

We call the 'uh' sound that we traditionally add to a phoneme a 'schwar'. 'Pure' sounds require that we say the sound exactly as it is said within a word. Because we are constantly changing mouth shape and expelling air as we pronounce a word the individual letters are only slightly voiced. For

example, the sound 'p' is a puff of air emitted through pursed lips. If the child is taught to say pure sounds it is but a small step to hear the sounds merge and blend into the correct word p-l-a-n.

So how is this happening in schools? The government put together a curriculum document called *Letters and Sounds* that gives teachers guidelines and suggested teaching activities. Importantly it also recommends that by the end of Key Stage 1 the child has been explicitly taught all 150-plus ways of writing the 42 sounds. This means that children will learn to link, for example, the phoneme eɪ to the alternate three graphemes 'play', 'pail' and 'pale' and or to the four alternate graphemes in 'poor', 'pore', 'paw' and 'autumn'.

Of course, it does not provide a comprehensive curriculum or materials so the commercial market has produced a number of phonic reading schemes. These vary in quality and scope, and the most comprehensive and probably widely used of these is Read Write Inc by OUP. This is the scheme used in eight of the 12 schools featured in the

white paper *Reading by Six, How the Best Schools Do It*.

To conclude, the 'synthetic phonic' approach makes the complex code of English explicit to pupils, enabling them to decode and encode new words confidently. It does not hinder the lucky children who are predisposed to learn to read easily, enabling them to articulate the logic of language that was previously implicit. For the rest of our pupils, and in particular those who would have joined the junior department as Special Needs pupils, there is no question in my mind that this approach unlocks the complex code from the start so that they can tackle new words confidently, so giving them enjoyable independent access to the magical world of books instead of asking, 'what does this say?'

The skill of reading underpins the curriculum in every subject and we should not stop teaching reading until *every* child can read well. By helping children to unpick the structure of our language, we give every chance to progress confidently into the prep school as a 'good reader'.

The skill of reading underpins every subject



Battery farming is frowned upon. So why apply its principles to education?

A view by Dr Stephen Winkley, Headmaster of Rossall School, Fleetwood, Lancashire

The talents of its children are a nation's greatest resource. These talents have, to a large extent, been squandered over the past two generations, due to a form of battery farm education that force-feeds our children a one-dimensional, one-size-fits-all curriculum. It's an easy problem to identify, and it's easy to see what should be done to put things right. But the solution requires such a huge reversal of current practice that it isn't easy for this grandparent to be optimistic.

The disappearance of the grammar schools, the failure of proper parenting, the lack of acceptable role models and the league table culture are all factors in the failure of education. The unwitting victims of the failure have been three generations of boys (especially) and girls and we are all the poorer for it.

An underlying cause of all these failures is a loss of authority and confidence, a huge expansion of moral relativism, and the acceptance by opinion-formers of loony, politically correct ideologies. Add in the fact that forty per cent of British university students achieved entry to those universities with fewer than two E grades at A level and you can see that we have a problem.

I wouldn't be telling all this reactionary and utterly sound stuff if I

didn't believe that independent schools had a part to play.

I had lots of friends who went to grammar schools when I was growing up in Essex in the 1950s. At grammar schools they met a number of other children who were delighted to discover that it was all right to enjoy reading and maths and books and history. By the same token, when I ran the scholars' house at Winchester in the 1980s I was delighted to welcome young men who had been regarded as freakishly clever at their (mostly) prep schools and now discovered it was all right to read for six hours a day and to discuss Plato with their exhausted housemaster (me) at breakfast. They were often talented musicians and talented games players: God doesn't always seem to hand out his blessings evenly. The struggle now, particularly for boys, to achieve academically in the face of widespread peer hostility and societal indifference is too much for most. It isn't cool to work, and it isn't cool to want to do well. Some kids, miraculously, find a way through, but they tend to be the children of parents who care about education (therefore middle class, therefore vilified for caring). The role models they are offered by the media are intellectually stunted reality TV 'stars' and half-witted (although undeniably wealthy) footballers. Girls don't get offered

much better role models, although Michelle Obama struck a blow for female education when she visited a girls' school in London and told them: "I am here because of education. I loved going to school. I loved getting As. Doing well at school was the coolest thing." We listen in vain for any prominent figure in this country to make a similar sound: and even if one did, he or she would be denounced for espousing elitism and privilege. There's no sign that the tide is turning.

Independent schools have the capacity, and some would say the duty, to make space available for children who otherwise would be crushed by the oppressive regime of enforced yobbery and systematic anti-intellectualism. It's wonderful to do it and grim and tight-lipped refugees blossom in a very short time and realise that their gifts are appreciated. I've seen it at Rossall, and all our schools should look forward to seeing it where they are.

As a nation we tend to show moral outrage at the treatment of battery farm animals, and rightly so, but why do we not demonstrate such vociferous condemnation of our children's treatment by an education system that is equally determined to put them in a compartment and stifle their prospects?

headmaster@rossall.org.uk



Get your teaching job

The spring term is one characterised by the re-growth and renewal that we often see around our schools. Daffodils and snowdrops, whether in the flowerbeds, painted in the art room or written about in pieces of poetry, are abundant. The term, though, begins in the depths of winter when perhaps you are dreading another year of heavy snow whilst writing your resolutions for the New Year.

You may be one of those teachers for whom feelings of renewal will combine with new resolutions as you ponder whether this is the year to move schools, perhaps take a step up the career ladder or try living in a different area of the country.

Many prep schools will have to be given a term's notice of your decision to leave, so if you are looking for a new job you will have to have it all signed and sealed by the end of this term.

I have conducted a huge number of interviews in the last three years as my school has expanded by 50%. I have advertised for jobs and received in excess of 60 applications and for others as few as half a dozen. Every time I look for a new teacher I am surprised by the poor quality of some of the applications that I read. In parallel, I have received requests for help from a number of teachers seeking to work either in prep schools or state primary schools, but who have become despondent due to the competition that they are facing.

When I first became a teacher I had the same opinion of interviews, which as a pupil I had of maths exams; they were impossible to revise for. As a

maths teacher, though, I was only too aware that whether preparing for an 11+ exam or an A level module, a student could always prepare for the exam, even if there were fewer items to learn by rote in comparison to a Latin or history examination. During my teaching career I have learnt many lessons about the job search; and there have been three individuals in particular, who have had a huge impact on the way that I apply for jobs. I am hugely grateful for their help and I endeavour to pass on their advice to my colleagues.

Military preparation: assistance from an RAF officer

After a year of teaching I decided to join the Royal Air Force following the encouragement of a high ranking RAF officer in my cricket. He used to slap me on the shoulder and tell me I was just the type of fellow the RAF needed. When I told him that I had been to the forces careers office to begin enquiring about a role as a training officer in the RAF, he began to plan my application as though he was tackling a military campaign in a far off land. I began a rigorous physical training routine, devoured back issues of the *Economist* – as though mugging up on an appearance for *Question Time* – and even played arcade games on a computer in my classroom to improve my reactions. Prior to the officer selection day I spent a Sunday at his house where he interviewed me for hours. I arrived at RAF Cranwell for the three days of tests and actually found the experience far easier than completing a teaching practice in a tough school

in a Nottinghamshire pit village. However much preparation I had done it did not change the feeling in my heart that I wanted to teach children and I returned to education to spend three idyllic years in two independent schools.

The experience came to the fore when I applied for my first middle leadership as a Head of mathematics. I prepared for the interview with the same military precision as before. I had to teach a lesson on interview and taught it four times the day before to four of my classes. I knew everything any child could possibly ask about bearings! Rather than just planning the lesson, I constructed a module of work differentiated at three different levels and found an unopened copy of the *National Numeracy Strategy* in my director of studies' classroom, which I studied as though it was a textbook. I was delighted, if exhausted, when I was offered the job.

Advice from those you trust: a far from retiring Principal

The next stage in my job quest occurred when I started to look for a senior leadership post in an independent school. At first I was not offered any interviews so I consulted the retired Head from my school and he then spent an afternoon going through my letter of application. His first key-thought was that a letter should read as though it was a story explaining your journey towards to this current position. The second, that if you are applying for senior leadership highlight the strategic tasks you have undertaken on your journey. Why were they important to your school? Whilst this advice gave my

confidence a boost it only helped me reach one interview at a leading girls' independent school in Oxfordshire. I spent days before attempting questions from a generic guide to interviews. I felt confident at the interview but was unsuccessful. It was probably too much to expect to gain the first senior leadership post I was interviewed for.

Networking: above and beyond the call from a recruitment consultant

I continued to apply for roles but was not offered any interviews until I saw an advertisement for a northern prep school for which you had to apply to a recruitment consultant. I fired off my A* letter, but again no joy. This time I emailed the recruitment consultant to ask if she would be prepared to give me any advice on my ambition to become a senior leader in a prep school. I was amazed when she began an email conversation that concluded with her showing me how to reconstruct my letter of application. She shortened my letter, ensuring that each paragraph focused on a key leadership point which would be of interest to a prep school and removed acronyms that would be obvious to one school but might be ambiguous to another.

Over the next two terms I was offered a number of interviews, eventually gaining a director of studies post in an independent school. Frustratingly, as soon as I accepted the post I received two more approaches from prep schools and one from a grammar school in reply to earlier applications. The irony is that I suspect any of those three posts would have been far better suited to me.

Key Thoughts

During my job search I learnt a number of key points:

- Seek advice on how to construct your letter
- Develop your contacts in and out of school
- Plan and prepare properly for any interview process

From little acorns

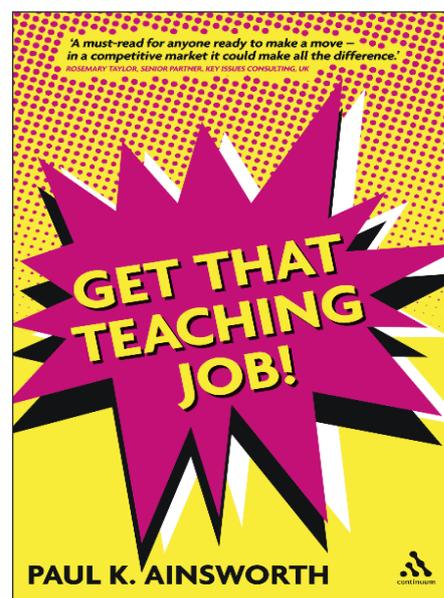
There is one element of my job search that I have not mentioned but which I believe made a considerable difference to gaining interviews. One job-search book I read, *Killer CVs and Hidden Approaches*, suggested a key part of job hunting was to raise your profile so that employers had a link to you beyond your written application. One of their suggestions was to try writing an article for a magazine or publication.

As I was looking for a prep school role I decided that I would try writing an article for *Prep School Magazine*. As a maths teacher the thought of writing an article was terrifying, but during a summer holiday I wrote an article and in the New Year it was published. I do not know how useful the article was in gaining me interviews but at three different schools I noticed the Headteacher had a copy of the article in their hands with my letter of application.

After gaining the confidence of having that article published, I contacted another publication and was surprised by how eager the editor was for me to write for her. I began by reviewing a couple of books before writing monthly articles. It was not long before other newsletters in the same group asked me to write for them. These were read by conference organisers and in turn I was asked to speak at national conferences. Since then I have written for over a dozen publications and had a 10,000 word piece of research published by the NCSL. I decided that if I could write 10,000 words of research why not a book? *Developing a Self-Evaluating School* was published last year, by Continuum. Now in 2012, seven years later, I complete the circle as my first article detailed my experiences as an interviewer and interviewee and now I have a second article on job search in *Prep School Magazine*. At the same time also, my third book is published, *Get That Teaching Job*, which aims to share all the lessons that I have learnt on the art of job hunting.

You might not have an ambition to write a book but you never know where your first article for *Prep School Magazine* might lead and I'm sure Michèle is always delighted to receive pieces from teachers who have never been published before!

Paul Ainsworth is the Acting Principal of an outstanding Leicestershire secondary school that regularly receives an intake from local prep schools. His latest book *Get that Teaching Job* has been published by Continuum, which offers specific advice for state, independent, primary, prep and secondary teachers. He is always interested to hear from other educationalists and can be contacted on paul.ainsworth@belvoirhigh.leics.sch.uk or followed on twitter @pkainsworth



Learning through our senses – outside



Have your class ever walked blindfolded and barefoot through a muddy stream and then written a poem about their experience, asks Gyles Morris

Have they ever been out to the local environment, written a *haiku* about what stimulates their senses and then taken photographs to try to illustrate their poems, capturing the essence of that place?

Have they cut a fresh stick from the hedgerow, carved it beautifully, and then set out, map-in-hand, for a real adventure into new territory with the excitement of finding their own way?

An early memory of mine was when we had a meaningful amount of snow at school, which wasn't very often. I must have been in Year 2 and I wanted to find a way of persuading my teacher to let me play for the morning outside in the snow. So I asked her if I could build a snowman and measure how high it was for my maths lesson. Being an enlightened teacher, she let the whole class outside to do maths in the snow. (I remember very few other maths lessons.) Similarly, I was always looking for an excuse to go on an adventure, picnic in hand, with my brother during the holidays, off all day in the woods and hills of Hampshire. I don't want to paint a picture of 'it was so much better when I was young': however, born in the mid-60s, I enjoyed a kind of free, natural play that seems, in the era of child pagers, instant messaging, and Nintendo, like a quaint artefact.

Within the space of a few decades

however, the way children experience and understand nature has changed radically. It seems that children today are becoming more aware of global warming, melting polar ice caps and rainforest destruction. However, their physical experience, their intimacy and immersion in nature is rapidly fading. This is worrying. In schools the Learning Outside the Classroom initiative is desperately trying to encourage outdoor experience. In some areas Forest Schools are underway. But in reality, problems with a lack of curriculum time or an emphasis and attitude towards risk assessment act as a barrier in school. At home, cautious parental attitude to 'stranger danger', busy roads and responses such as 'don't do that, you'll get muddy or wet' are severely limiting children's outdoor play and learning opportunities. We are losing the incentive to enable children to explore and discover their world for themselves through the 'primary experience' – that which we can see, feel, taste, hear, or smell for ourselves. Are we beginning to lose the ability to experience our world directly?

'Nature deficit disorder' is a phrase used by Richard Louv in his book *The Last Child in the Woods* to describe the costs of alienation from nature. It is not a medical term but it does offer a way to think about the problem and the possibilities for children, and for the rest

of us as well. From a sustainability perspective, we need to have a deep appreciation of nature, to experience the awe and wonder of the natural world, to develop a confidence about it and develop a positive relationship with it before we can take on a caring and responsible attitude towards it.

"Our connection to the 'natural world' is critical. We depend upon it to enhance and develop our sense of place, sense of belonging and sense of identity. It is fundamental to our well-being."

Children need a range of experiences in the natural world to develop their senses and gain new understanding and skills. They can be creative. They can be playful. They can be messy. There is magic when young people and those beyond childhood are exposed to even the smallest direct experience of the natural setting. Like walking in the woods at night without a torch or lying in a flower-rich meadow, making faces and shapes from the clouds. After years of delivering approaches in outdoor education, designing and building school grounds and working with students in initial teacher training, just observing teachers engaging children in these opportunities is uplifting. So too is the realisation that 'hands on' experience can act as a catalyst for discussion and, importantly, the development of responses and responsible behaviour towards the environment. Working recently with a delightful group of

PGCE students, feedback comments came in the form of:

“Being out and about is far superior to sitting in the classroom.”

“What went well? Whenever we went outside. I haven't been out in the rain without trying to run to somewhere dry in years!”

“Great, walking through the dark, dark woods at night!”

There's a message in these statements for teachers generally. If you haven't experienced such activities recently why not try to do so? Reconnecting ourselves with nature, the messy, the great outdoors just might shape what we do with our children.

The best hope for learning to live sustainably lies in schooling that is 'smart by nature'. It includes experiencing the natural world; learning how nature sustains life; nurturing healthy communities; recognising the implications of the ways we feed and provision ourselves; and knowing well the places where we live, work and learn. Teachers are in a prime position to weave these basics throughout the curriculum at every grade level.

This led me to establish Naturesbase

Camp, an environmental education camping centre situated on our small farm in west Wales: a resource that develops a whole new approach to the valuable tradition of the school journey. This is where the children are immersed in the environment, living through their senses. Children might taste leaves picked directly from the salad garden, listen to the kites and buzzards cry overhead or the bleat and grunt of the sheep and pigs. They can feel the water between their toes and make shrieks of joy as they go on a blindfold barefoot walk through the small, shallow stream. They squeeze mud between their fingers as they build cob bricks for our latest sustainable building and smell the thick odour of rotting vegetation as they empty the compost bucket every morning. And finally they are drawn towards the comforting smell of a campfire when they know it's time for hot chocolate, marshmallows, creative stories and the last look at the bats in the starry sky before resting their heads snuggled against the curves of the earth to the distant sounds of owls calling.

When we record the important events of the day in their Naturesbase passports, creativity flows. Teachers



often comment on the children who struggle to find words in the formal setting, who are now bursting to express their feelings as a result of a day of 'hands on' experiences. Sensory experiences link the child's exterior world with their interior, hidden, affective world. We also see how engagement in natural spaces and contact with natural materials stimulate children's limitless imaginations and serve as the medium of inventiveness and creativity.

Since the natural environment is the principle source of sensory stimulation, opportunities to explore, learn and play with the outdoor environment through their senses is essential for healthy development of the interior life. A stimulating range of direct experiences with the natural world is vitally important in developing future citizens with knowledge and skills to make informed choices in, for and about the environment. A rich, open environment will continuously present alternative choices for engagement. A rigid, bland environment will limit healthy growth and development of the individual or group. At Naturesbase we also believe that diverse and stimulating school grounds can replicate some of the experiences we can provide in the outdoors. Remember that if you total



The best hope for learning to live sustainably lies in schooling that is 'smart by nature'.



'Hands on' experience can act as a catalyst for discussion

the hours spent in the average school at play and at lunch times during a 4-16 education they come to approximately three years. That is potentially three years of engaging deeply with their natural world. If we give the opportunity, they will.

Gyles Morris is director of Naturesbase (www.naturesbase.co.uk), a consultant on outdoor learning and lectures on the primary geography MA PGCE course at the Institute of Education, London University



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www.ecoliteracy.org/teach

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The new GA CPD 'My Place, Your Place, Our Place' is a wonderful resource focused on how we can better understand how quality geography can contribute to excellence and enjoyment, the wider curriculum and whole school ethos.

A yin for every yang

SEN, previously a 'dirty word', but as Mary Bankes, Head of Learning Support at Hazelwood School observes, schools are fast cleaning up their acts

SEN – the words that most parents don't want to hear: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS. If we are honest we all want our children to be 'normal' – whatever that means; in fact more than that we actually want our children to be gifted and talented. We want them to excel in all areas: to be able academically, great sportspeople, brilliant musicians, talented artists, confident orators. The reality is that most of us have to be satisfied with 'good enough' or 'a good all rounder'. Probably one of the hardest things to hear when bringing up children is the news that your child is having some difficulty with learning and achievement in school. The challenge of SEN is to not let the packaging put you off buying into the product that is wrapped up inside – an opportunity for every child to realise his or her potential; a chance for each child to be happy at school, to feel valued and in turn to shine.

Sometimes it is the class teachers who are in denial seeing a child with special educational needs as a sign of their own weakness. Sometimes it can be the school, fearful of a tarnished reputation for scholastic excellence. Sometimes it is the parents, worried that high expectations are under threat. More often than not it can be a combination of all three.

There should be no sharp intake of breath, no raised eyebrows, no sinking feeling. Instead the mere mention of the word SEN should instil in each parent hope for a brighter, more fulfilled future for their child and their family. That is if their child is in a school that is geared up to understand the problem, to get to know the child fully and to work, in partnership with parents and outside organisations, to

devise an approach to teaching that dovetails perfectly with every child's individual approach to learning and unique teaching needs.

On that basis, every child learning in a school today has special educational needs. For each pupil is an individual responding to different styles and stimulus. As a shared concept therefore, the stigma of SEN is also shared and indeed, is neutralised.

What is often true is that children with special educational needs are often the children who are also gifted and talented. A yin for every yang. Children with autism often excel when it comes to spatial awareness. Dyslexia can go hand in hand with innate creativity (as so beautifully demonstrated by the book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night*). Sometimes a child's difficulty in expressing themselves, and certainly in getting thoughts down on paper, is as a result of an over-fertile imagination. They are in a hurry to get onto the next thought before fully capturing the first.

A left hand brain brimming over with too many fabulous ideas for the right hand brain to order and process.

Th hmn brn s mznng, wth mr pssbl cncctns thn strn n th nwr. esrevinu eht ni srats naht snoitcennoc elbissop erom htiw, gnizama si niarb namuh ehT

The brain is a fabulous organ, excellent at adapting and adjusting to different challenges, learning to overcome obstacles with each and every challenge it faces. The speed and dexterity with which it does this, paves the way for some of the better known success stories, modern and historic, of famous people who despite special learning needs at school have gone on to achieve great things. It contributes to the foundation of eternal optimism and



confidence with which teachers in school learning support teams approach their working day.

How much do we, and modern engineering practice, owe to Einstein. Without his $E=MC^2$ observation would we be as far forward with some of modern day technological advances as we are? Jamie Oliver is not only a household name as a chef and TV presenter, but has become an eloquent and persuasive campaigner seeking to improve the lives and diets of the nation's school children. And who cannot fail but to respond to the wit, and more recently the physical prowess, of Eddie Izzard, talents that were hidden at school by the comedian's dyslexia and society's attitude towards them.

To blog or not to blog

David Noble, head of ICT at Bilton Grange, explains how ICT and recent developments in social media helped transform a school sports tour, making the most of the resources that are available and often free

After 18 months of planning, July 2011 saw 33 staff and children from Bilton Grange School in Dunchurch, take off for a ten day sports tour of Barbados. Some parents had decided to join the tour, but many remained in a particularly gloomy British summer. Aside from the usual logistics challenges that come with arranging a prep school sports tour, one key challenge was how effectively to keep everyone, both home and abroad, updated on the trip.

Bilton Grange has been developing its use of social media to support visits and trips for nearly seven years now. Back in 2004, we took the chapel choir to New York and posted a daily photo collage and report on our website; in recent years, with the advent of Smartphones and services such as Twitter or a blogging service (eg Posterous), we have been able, with relative ease, to keep parents up-to-date with what their children are doing on residential visits, such as when our Years 4 and 5 pupils visit Devon, or when Year 7 visits France. They have much appreciated these updates, which both reassure and also act as immediate ePostcards. We have found that Posterous (www.posterous.com), which is a simple blogging platform that started in 2008, offers the best service for our needs, allowing updates by simply sending an email or even a text message, and supporting integrated and automatic posting to other social media tools such as Flickr, Twitter and Facebook, all of which we use both as an educational and communication tool. Importantly, for a school, privacy controls on Posterous are effective and easy to use, so it is a

straightforward exercise to set who can and cannot see blogging updates. A new service, Posterous Spaces, has been launched recently, and promises to offer even more collaborative features and group participation.

However, the sports tour to Barbados was perhaps our most ambitious project to date since the dawn of social media, but provided a good opportunity to test how effective our current social media tools are. Using our school Twitter feed and a Posterous blog, I was able to produce a regular stream of reports and photographs, even video and audio, to parents back in the UK, but also those who were our loyal 'Barmy Army' of travelling supporters in the Caribbean. In some cases, Twitter was also used

for very practical purposes, such as giving details of changes in the schedule or timings of our fixtures, or for directions to a venue. It was lovely to get feedback and comments from the UK, as many parents were clearly following the updates avidly, and thanks to a helpful wifi service in the hotel, I was able to edit and upload lots of photos (often last thing at night!), using nothing more than an iPad, so that there was a fresh blog post and photo-gallery every morning. I was also very grateful to many of the travelling parents for sending me their photos as the trip progressed so that I could add these to the group pool.

Back in the UK, a separate section had been created on the school website, with a link that could be clicked on to



"Our most ambitious project to date..."



"A very memorable tour"

reach the Barbados blog. Whilst stories and match reports could easily be uploaded to the website in the usual way, the effectiveness of having almost 'real time' blogging and audio immediately accessible, cannot be underestimated. Google analytics embedded in the Bilton Grange website demonstrated that the Barbados section saw a significant amount of traffic to the blog, throughout the tour and subsequently, so we have a good sense of how popular this approach has been.

In the run up to this much anticipated tour, within the section devoted to it on the school website, we were able to embed a video of Graham Bell, former UK Olympic skier, wishing the tour squad luck through the Bilton Grange YouTube channel. Together with the brochure, which was also online, this contributed to the excitement surrounding this tour, the first major overseas tour we had undertaken for several years.

A particularly successful element of this project was the involvement of the children, who were very keen to do snippets of video and audio for uploading. Reviewing breakfast at the

Amaryllis Hotel, delivering a match report – all helped give the children on tour a sense of ownership in the blog, as well as highlighting new broadcast skills as food critics or sports commentators! After we returned, a Facebook group was created to enable photo sharing from parents and staff who had been on the tour. To preserve the security over access to this, it is a 'closed' group to which requests to join have to be approved by the administrator, who is a member of Bilton Grange staff. As in all schools these days, our older children are completely confident using appropriate social media, and safe, sensible use of the internet is something that we teach our pupils from an early age. Whilst most of the children were still too young to join Facebook, I replicated some of the content in Edmodo (www.edmodo.com), which is a secure 'walled garden' sharing platform designed for schools with which the children were familiar.

Upon our return, I created a series of photobooks using www.blurb.com, and online previews of these were uploaded to the Facebook and

Edmodo groups, so parents and children could find a secure specific web address, view and then order securely online. However, it's not all blogging and uploading – nothing replaces the look and feel of a photo book, and this has become a popular memento of a fabulous trip!

There is no doubt that our use of social media helped in many aspects of the tour. On a practical level, parents who were with us in Barbados were easily able to keep up-to-date on changing arrangements, simply by following Twitter, where it is possible to inform many people very quickly as arrangements change. This was particularly useful on one day, when a traditional Caribbean downpour meant that the boys' first cricket match had to be cancelled, so when plans changed, parents could be quickly and effectively informed. On a wider level, the simplicity of being easily able to upload photos, videos and audio, enabled us to ensure that those not on the tour could feel part of what was going on. In short, social media helped us share and improve the Caribbean experience, on a very memorable tour.

Secret garden is a history lesson with a difference

When Windlesham House School in Sussex decided to lease land from a neighbouring country estate, little did they know they would be embarking on a major project to restore a Victorian secret garden to its former glory. Headmaster Richard Foster explains how the surprise addition is inspiring the young minds of Windlesham

Since Windlesham was founded in 1837 it has seen many changes and can tell many interesting stories.

However, few can be as compelling as the day we started clearing a patch of newly-acquired land and realised we had uncovered a horticultural gem from the past.

The story begins in the spring of 2011, when we entered into negotiations to lease a one-acre walled plot from the Highden Estate, which borders the school grounds in the Sussex countryside.

At first sight the area was nothing but a wasteland, with the mangled remains of what looked like old outbuildings. However, when work began to clear the site, it soon became evident that this was something far more sophisticated than an overgrown field.

As more of the debris was removed, we were astonished to realise that we were actually looking at what was once a fabulous walled garden, dating back to around the 1870s. The twisted metal frames were, in fact, all that was left of the original Victorian greenhouses.

It was a hugely exciting discovery for the school and was made even more remarkable when we realised it was exactly a century ago that Frances Hodgson Burnett published her literary masterpiece, *The Secret Garden*.

The 1911 classic told the story of an orphaned 10-year-old girl, sent to live in the country after her parents' death.



In the sprawling grounds she discovers a hidden door which leads to an enchanting walled garden.

Feeling that we had something of a moral obligation to bring the garden back to its former glory, we sympathetically cleared the area and have since recruited experienced gardener Andrew Norman to oversee the continuation of the project.

With much of the groundwork now completed – around 75 percent of the plot has been grass seeded – our thoughts have turned to how we make best use of this unexpected new facility.

Andrew has already turned the remaining quarter of the site into our very own market garden, which has awakened the green-fingered spirit in a number of our pupils.

The produce grown in the garden will all be used in the school's kitchens and we have plans to sell any surplus vegetables to parents and local organic outlets.

In addition to the extracurricular benefits of the plot, we are also looking at exciting ways to build our discovery into the curriculum.

Groups of Year 2 science students have already been tasked with a

History

horticultural project to test their skill in statistical sampling.

The group, which is studying ecological techniques as part of a project on 'Living things in the Environment', was set the task of estimating the number of thistle plants in the garden – armed only with quadrants, trundle wheels and a large dose of enthusiasm!

We have also set up a gardening club which will run weekly during term time and is already attracting huge interest.

In an attempt to keep as much of the garden's heritage intact as possible, Andrew has preserved as many of the old fruit trees as he can. He has also managed to reclaim the authentic old apple store.

This building is now being converted into our very own rustic classroom, which we hope will further enthuse the children to get involved in garden-related projects.

Much of the restoration process of the secret garden has been videoed and we intend to keep a visual record over the coming months and years.

We are confident that over time the garden will become a frequently used area of the school that lends itself not only to many curriculum areas, but also as a secret sanctuary that will undoubtedly prove an inspirational place to study, or simply reflect on the environment it contains.

As for the number of thistles – well, you'll have to ask the Year 2 pupils.



Armed with only a large dose of enthusiasm...

The power of sport

Henry Lamb, NQT teacher at Fulham Prep teaching geography and sport, shares his passion and personal experiences of how sport has an amazing role to play in the life of a prep or junior school

‘Sport and physical education play an important role at the individual, community, national and global levels. For the individual sport enhances one’s personal abilities, general health and self-knowledge. On the national level sport and physical education contribute to economic and social growth, improve public health and bring different communities together. On the global level, if used consistently, sport and physical education can have a long-lasting positive impact on development, public health, peace and the environment.’

(The UN website, 2005)

Sport has proved to be a vital part of our lives today and a powerful mechanism in shaping the world we live in. It has certainly been an integral part of my life and in this article I am going to focus on the power of sport at the individual level. An active lifestyle with regular sporting participation improves personal health and fitness. Taking exercise gives

you a ‘feel good factor’ due to the releasing of endorphins; it makes your heart stronger and will allow you to live longer.

The technological revolution of the 21st century has given rise to an ‘obesogenic environment’ in the UK as children are regularly favouring sedentary activities, such as playing on game consoles, over physical activities. I found evidence of exactly this during a Year 7 fieldtrip to France where nearly every boy had some form of iTouch, iPod, iPad or iPhone. The net result of this change in lifestyle choices has led to an advent of obesity in the UK as energy intake is significantly greater than energy expenditure. It is now reported that one in five British children is obese by the age of 11.

Sport and academia are often seen as separate entities; however I believe this not to be the case. I was always a quiet pupil in the classroom who would ‘come alive at games time’ (as my old



prep school Headmaster noted in an end of term report), however through continued sporting success my academic confidence grew exponentially. This connection between sporting success and academic improvement is something that I strongly believe in, having experienced it firsthand during my childhood and now as a teacher of geography and sport. This pattern is evidence of just how powerful sport can be.

The camaraderie induced by team sport is something that cannot be rivalled in any other field at school, particularly secondary. I recently spoke with a parent at Fulham prep who explained that they were not concerned about their son not being too academic, as long as his opportunity to play sport competitively and improve his sporting ability continued at senior school. Their rationale behind this was that they felt this was where you build the strongest





friendships. I know I certainly made my best friends at Sherborne while playing for the 1st XI cricket over two years.

Sport undoubtedly teaches you many valuable lessons. It teaches you to be gracious in both victory and defeat. It teaches you to be polite and it allows you to be social. I believe tennis epitomises the social side of sport as it is a game that offers an equal playing field for both boys and girls.

The great thing about sport, particularly tennis, is that hard work allows you to reap rewards. Yes, it is probably fair to say that some children are more naturally talented in terms of hand-eye co-ordination; however I firmly believe informative and experienced coaches can develop the skills of any youngsters regardless of original ability.

As you can probably guess sport is a real passion of mine and what I really

enjoy doing is running my holiday business, which involves tennis and football courses for 7-14 year olds in the south-west of England. The main emphasis is on making sport fun, catering for all abilities. Experienced and enthusiastic coaches are the key, allowing children to work hard in a disciplined environment and consequently progress. This is hugely rewarding for both the coach and the learner. www.menacesports.co.uk



Teaching children to think!

More schools are adding debating and public speaking to their ever growing list of subjects and activities. Richard Mace, head of history at S. Anselm's Preparatory, explains how it is about time too!



'Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.'

On a warm June day last year I was lucky enough to be taking a group of S. Anselm's preparatory pupils (six of our brightest and the best) down to Malvern College to take part in their Prep School's Debating Competition. Henry, Charlie, Georgie, Annie, Nick and Isaac were excited not least because they were missing a day of school, getting a slap-up meal in one of the boarding houses at Malvern and had been allowed to bring their iPods and PSPs for the two hour journey down south. The children were also excited that they would be engaging in a fiercely competitive bout of debates against The Elms and The Downs preparatory schools whilst also having the opportunity to involve

themselves in a lively public speaking workshop given by Malvern College sixth formers and some of their fabulous teachers.

Early that morning I had happened to look down at my teacher's diary whilst hurriedly scribbling down the day's cover onto the Whiteboard. In small print at the bottom of the page it said:

'Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.'

(B F Skinner 1904-1990)

B F Skinner, it turns out, was an American psychologist who lectured at Harvard and I think he had a point. The most precious gifts a teacher can give a child are academic *skills* and the independence of thought to make up

their own minds about what they discover. In short we must teach them to think for themselves and to be able to deliver their ideas in an articulate manner. Skinner's pearl of wisdom kept me occupied as I negotiated my way around Birmingham.

What happened at Malvern in June was not highly polished, it was not a great collision of finely tuned minds. In fact, if I am brutally honest, I was not bowled over by what I saw as the 11 and 12 year-old children clashed over motions such as, 'This house believes parents should be punished for the actions of their children' and 'This house believes that the Royal Wedding was a waste of money'.

Rather like a child's first dance lesson



or the first rehearsal of a school choir, the children frequently fumbled and made errors as they struggled to find the right words to articulate their opinions. Some were unprepared and others were glued to their notes. Some were lost for words and others went off on irrelevant tangents. But ... it was a start. The workshops were magnificent and great fun as the Malvern staff and pupils loosened the kids up and encouraged them to speak out and express their views in a fun way. The pupils were allowed to speak their minds and think quickly and spontaneously on their toes. It all took time but it was *hugely* worthwhile.

As a teacher at a prep school I see the pupils excel in a myriad of disciplines. The children at S. Anselm's can sing, act, dance, play sport and pass exams at a high level despite their tender years. I have no doubt that the high calibre of our children academically, socially and behaviourally is without question. However, like most children across the country, one could easily suggest that their weakest area is that of independent thought. "Do we have games today, sir?"; "Should I underline the title, sir?"; and "Do I need my book?" are frequently asked questions. As I teach my history lessons they are

dying for me to, 'give them the answer'. I really do try as hard as possible to let them work things out or offer their own views ... but it is tough.

Don't get me wrong, the kids I teach are bright, willing, capable and very well taught by the teaching staff at the school. They are a great pleasure to educate and I am fortunate. Nonetheless, like the vast majority of children across the country at school, in lessons (unless steered very carefully) they want to be told what to say and what to write. Dare I say that they also want to be told what to think!

Having taught previously at Brighton College senior school, which like S. Anselm's, is an exceptional school with exceptional pupils, I know that this reluctance to think independently can afflict pupils of all abilities and all ages and that it can continue throughout their lives. Therefore, it is a grave concern that when some of these young people grow up and enter the world beyond the school gates, they are far more likely to need to stand up in front of others and articulate their thoughts and deliver persuasive arguments than they are to make money from kicking a football, dancing or singing, though these skills are worthy. All schools should be vigorously preparing our children for

public speaking and debating as these are working skills that could make a difference to their job prospects, if not their whole lives. Bankers, lawyers, doctors, accountants as well as hairdressers, gardeners and market stall owners do better in the workplace if they can articulate their thoughts, express their ideas and speak to people persuasively. In fact, they also become more rounded, confident and reflective people, which may make them better parents, spouses or friends. Equally as important, the children will grow into young adults who are keen to engage in politics and keen to influence decisions and get involved in community decisions that influence us all – the price of democracy is eternal vigilance.

These facts have not been lost on Malvern College who have delivered compulsory debating classes for Year 9 pupils for many years and, now fully established, it is having a marked impact on the success and self-belief of their own children. At S. Anselm's we have stepped up the provision of debating and public speaking recently, creating a debating society and encouraging debating and public speaking in class and during assemblies. The results are already becoming apparent as the children are getting better at it. What's more, many of the children really do love it.

Chatting to the Malvern teachers on that June day, there is no doubt that debating is not an easy class to take. It is time consuming and sometimes awkward as young minds struggle to verbalise their opinions and resort to limited vocabulary such as 'silly' to describe their opponent's arguments in the midst of the cauldron of a swirling dispute. However, unlike us oldies, the kids learn fast and their vocabulary and mental agility broadens at a rapid rate if guided properly. In fact, most children are already experienced debaters who have argued with parents and siblings regularly. They can get passionate about issues and, when enthused and

engaged by a topic, they can work relentlessly at their research and presentation. When I take rugby teams I can physically see their obvious improvement over the season as they have lots of games practice and matches – you can see the skills getting hard-wired into their nervous systems. The same can be said for the art of public speaking. The more practice they get and the more time and space they have to make mistakes and to have a go, the better they get. The results can be impressive and the skills they gain stay with them and are priceless. They may forget the date of the Dunkirk evacuations but they won't forget the skills they learnt debating the significance of the event – these skills are hard-wired.

At Malvern, the S. Anselm's team did well, winning two of their debates,

and I am happy to say that it had little to do with me. I had presented the kids with the motions and given them ten days to brainstorm and prepare together, independent of the teacher. They did really very well indeed and by the end of the day they had learned so much. I must thank the teachers and sixth formers at Malvern who did a marvellous job kick-starting the pupils' enthusiasm and giving them key skills. As we trundled back down the A6, I reflected on the day as Henry, Charlie, Georgie, Annie, Nick and Isaac donned their iPods and played on their PSPs in the back of the minibus. Despite our success, throughout the day our pupils had stumbled and made mistakes, got embarrassed and were at times out of their depth and uncertain ... 'Good,' I thought, 'we must do that again!'



A reluctance to think independently can afflict pupils of all abilities and all ages

The ISA Grid for Learning – what’s it all about?

James Wilding, Head of Claires Court, leader of the ISAnet and chair of the ISA ICT committee, shares the developments that have given his school a silver lining to all their clouds

It’s almost three years since ISA Headteachers gathered at their autumn study conference at Oxford, when it became evident from a number of presentations, most notably Ian Yorston’s *The Fourth Screen*, that our independent schools were in danger of being left behind by the rapidly developing use of digital technologies in the state sector. Encouraged by the Association, most notably by the incoming Chairman, John Gibson, I set to work with colleagues within the Association, and with great support from Ian Nairn of T-Learning, to provide a lead for our schools in the development of digital strategies. First born in the project was the ISA network for teachers, a web-based private service site on the Ning platform, offering a mix of advice and opportunity for teachers and school leaders to learn how to blog, network and question colleagues on school matters. The ISA ICT committee was then set up to steward our various developments, adding digital training courses, visits to schools to provide first hand advice *in situ* and encouraging me to produce a weekly newsletter to highlight ICT and other developments within ISA schools.

Over the last year, we have consulted with a variety of industry specialists, to see how schools could make the most of the phenomenon known as cloud computing, which is sweeping the industry. The great advantage of this approach is that it provides computation, software, data access,

and storage services that do not require end-user knowledge of the physical location and configuration of the system that delivers the service.

The most important factor that I was seeking the ISA solution to provide was either low or no cost. I’d spotted that during 2010 Microsoft had already provided web-based office tools for their Hotmail account users, had implemented a pay-for Live@edu service for education and they were moving to provide Office 365 as an integrated cloud-based offer for businesses. However, American schools and colleges were moving from a paid-for provision by FirstClass (amongst other pay-for providers) to Google Apps for Education in their droves, and when it turned out that the Google option provided a whole

sophisticated service at no cost for schools, advert-free too, then it seemed we had found the solution we needed. The ISA Grid for Schools (ISAG4S) could be built!

Schools wishing to participate in ISAG4S are required to register their school for an *Apps for Education* account. Each user of a school gets 30GB of email storage, 1 GB for documents, 10GB for video and 100GB for their sites; registration is free, but it ensures that the *Apps for Education* are joined together to allow management and moderation. The clever core part of the service is built upon a specific design for a school site, developed by Mark Allen of ‘Ed in the Clouds’, making great use of iPad type icons to link the six main apps to a school interface, linking to pages





beyond the front page that each school is able to develop to service its subjects, classes, events and the libraries of data it chooses to make available in the cloud. In short, a school 'hub' provides a website, a virtual learning environment (VLE), mail and messaging for all of its members, with a hefty degree of granularity built in so different contacts and groups can be given different privileges. What most of the pioneer schools have found most useful is the 'walled garden' nature of its 'hub' – what comes in and out can be completely controlled.

So here's some detail on the six main apps in the suite:

Gmail – provides communication and the backbone for sharing documents and files within your school community. The email facility is completely controllable, from being an advanced service suitable for all business communications down to a simple messaging service that allows your pupils to talk to their teacher.

Contacts and groups – by grouping your contacts into classes, teachers, departments *etc*, you don't have to remember everybody's email and you can switch on and off services to different groups.

Docs – click on the 'create' button in Google Docs, and you can write using

a word processor; produce a presentation with slides and drawings too; create a spreadsheet or, even better, a form that fills in that spreadsheet and gives feedback to its users; and create collections of different files to fill a course. You can share your documents with individuals and groups, and allow them just to view, make comment or grant them full-blown editing rights. You can have collections within collections too, providing good layering for the variety of resources you are keeping. Docs provides the very latest in digital assessment for learning.

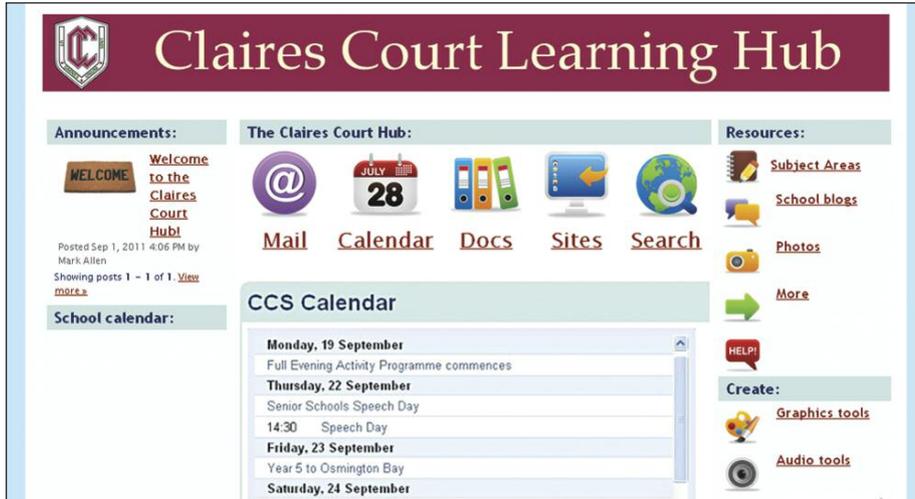
Calendar – probably the most useful in schools for a variety of reasons; you can set up lots of different calendars, share them and populate your school website with them, *etc*. Calendar entries can include docs, so an ideal digital teacher planner is but a few clicks away; it's more powerful than Outlook's calendar because you can attach files and other links. Google are improving functionality all the time, and the recent arrival of an

appointments category allows you to develop a resources calendar for booking laptops, rooms, minibuses *etc* and it is also very suitable for scheduling parents' appointments at parent evenings.

Sites – an amazingly easy to use website creation tool. This is the core app we have used to design our 'front end' for the school's hub. When pupils start using Google Apps, it is not really obvious how to navigate around them, so creating a school hub to give shape and substance to the tools seemed to be the most obvious thing to do. The best bit is the ability to create file stores at class and subject level, announcement pages and bulletin boards. Join your site up with internal messaging and you have created a very powerful way of communicating with your pupils even when school is shut for snow or similar.

Secondary schools with departments using Facebook or WordPress to keep their students engaged will find Google 'sites' much more user friendly, allowing you to load resources of all

The most important factor that I was seeking the ISA solution to provide was either low or no cost.



Screenshot of the Claires Court Learning Hub

kinds, and produce pages for particular years and interest groups.

Google's support for our project has been immense, helping from the outset to keep us moving forward rapidly. At the time of writing we have seven schools who have created their hub within the ISAG4S, plus another half-dozen who are using Google Apps, though as yet without a hub interface. Three people, in particular, from the Google community who have been assisting us in our work are Ross Mahon from Dublin; Google's own evangelist for Apps, Zoe Ross; and one of the very few certified Google trainers in the UK and Google certified teacher, Ian Addison.

To ensure schools use Google Apps to the very best, we have developed two different training day courses, and Google has provided 30 of their innovative Chromebooks on which the delegates learn. The first 'Learn & Practice' course is what it says, an introduction to the world of Apps for Education. The second is for more advanced users of apps, those perhaps some three months (at least) down the line, for teachers and support staff seeking to gain the prestigious Google Certified Individual (GCI) certificate. In addition to learning about the more advanced features of the apps, plus their management and control, delegates' learning is further supported with weekly webinars that cover in detail one of the apps in the exam. The

first GCI graduate is Paul Robson from Claires Court and I feel sure many more will follow in the future.

I have been particularly interested in Google's development of Chromebooks for the education market. Be aware that these are not the same as those available from Amazon or PC World; the school edition allows the network technicians to use one Chromebook to access all of their school's Chromebooks, ensuring they are fettle and updated, and Google are developing a low cost trolley to match. Chromebooks boot up in under ten seconds and within one minute pupils will be working on web-based services such as Kerboodle or Taecanet Springboard within a further minute or so. As a laptop built to support cloud-based learning, it must be said that little

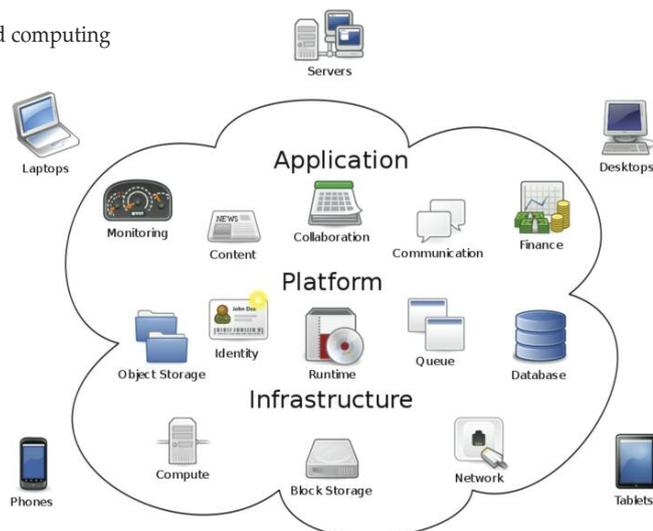
in the way of offline functionality is built in. Expect this to improve over future iterations, but schools can buy into the Chromebook services for £15 a month per laptop. Given the cost of providing computer workstations and furniture may cost about £50k for a classroom, here's a 24-station solution for under £5k! The ISAG4S collection of 30 Chromebooks can be booked by schools to trial their use for a week and it can't be long before schools consider adding a Chromebook to their uniform list as required equipment!

And finally...

The ISAG4S continues to attract interest and support from schools within ISA and further afield. Our newsletter, ISAG4S service and Chromebook trials will feature at the industry showcase for the best in UK and international educational technology products, resources and best practice, BETT, taking place on 11-14 January 2012 at Olympia in London. We'll be holding our ISANet visit on the 14 January, providing ISANet friends the opportunity to meet up and celebrate with Google the first six months of our collaborative project. If you want to join us, then email me at jtw@clairescourt.com and I'll keep you posted.

To learn more about ISANet please contact Ian Nairn
Email: ian.nairn@t-learning.net
Phone: 07590 226 807

Cloud computing



Artistic creations and musical high notes in Venice

Nicky Brookes, head of art, and Catherine Hutchings, director of music, at Prior Park Prep School help inspire anyone thinking of organising a culture themed tour



Prior Park Preparatory School recently embarked on an inspirational tour to Venice. Organising and designing a package that encompassed a rich cultural theme was paramount. Prior Park Prep has a strong ethos in promoting and enriching their pupils' education through the arts and this tour has been no exception. The opportunities a tour can offer our pupils are plentiful and exceptionally memorable. Pupils gain a greater sense of self-confidence and assurance in their ability, developing social skills, especially mixing with different age groups and being independent. Delivering a cultural tour is without doubt a rewarding and enjoyable experience for our pupils, as well as

for the staff involved.

Our Venice tour consisted of pupils across three age groups, from Year 6 to 8 and in particular, pupils from our senior Extra Art Club and chapel choir.

A number of initiatives were put in place involving detailed planning leading up to our departure. During the previous term, our music director recorded a CD of the choir singing, which was sent to the most prestigious of locations in Venice, St Mark's Basilica in St Mark's Square. Approval was granted from St Mark's and we were thrilled to have been given the opportunity to sing in this most outstanding and impressive of churches. We were delighted to find out that our chapel choir was

scheduled to perform during Sunday Mass in front the central altar of the church. Our 42 pupil-strong chapel choir prepared with dedication and commitment leading up to the tour by rehearsing and practising their pieces. They sang at our local Catholic church in Swindon, Holy Rood, in order to help prepare for performing in an unfamiliar environment and to a very large audience. For the St Mark's Mass service, the pupils were required to sing unaccompanied. A beautiful Latin plainsong was chosen, which on the day, sounded very effective in the acoustics of St Marks Basilica.

Artistically, our Extra Art Club pupils, 33 in total, developed their observational drawing skills

Enrichment

throughout the term leading up to our tour. This proved to be very beneficial because a number of the scenes observed were complicated and required a better understanding of perspective and depth in their drawings. They looked at how artists use sketchbooks to record what they see and experience. Some of the artists' journals we looked at, including Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso and Andy Goldsworthy, had a fluid drawing style and the ability to annotate their sketches. In addition, and of great inspiration to our pupils in the development of these skills, were the work journals from a local A level student, Anne Larkins. The ability to think of their sketchbooks as a visual diary was paramount, as well as having the skills required to quickly draw what they see through the use of different media. Their work journals became an extension of their hands and I was delighted to see pupils using them almost constantly throughout the tour. From the drawings of luggage cases in the airport, to the Swiss Alps as seen from the plane window, from crumbling Venetian walls, to their hotel key! It was important that reasonably quiet



locations were identified off the Grand Canal for sketching. Our large group of pupils needed space in order to sit and work in their journals. Our hotel was situated about a 20-minute *vaporetto* ride from St Mark's Square. This we found very beneficial from an artistic perspective. The streets and alleyways surrounding St Mark's Square were very narrow and busy. Although beautiful this was too challenging an environment to

position such a large group of pupils. We found that our hotel area (not too far from the main bus and railway station) still had the splendour and magnificence of all that Venice offers, but with the ability to manoeuvre a large group of people. There were plenty of opportunities to position ourselves by canals, bridges, churches and stunning squares. The unique environment that Venice offers us artistically is totally incomparable to any other city in Europe. I found that it was also appropriate to all levels of creative ability. Pupils would zoom in on areas of a building or perhaps the reflections of the many boats in the rich green tones of the canal waters. Others would observe the bigger vistas, looking down narrow canal ways at the odd shaped buildings and gondolas. All were inspiring scenes that captured the pupils' attention. We also had opportunities to pop into charming and quite atmospheric churches, 'ten to the dozen' in Venice, and a great opportunity to escape from a rainy shower. In fact, one of our best photographs of the tour was taken inside a small church next to a square. Using a long-distance lens I captured one of our pupils (totally unaware of my observation) lighting a candle and saying a prayer; a very special and spiritual moment within the softly lit interior of the church.





Our head of religious education, who also accompanied our tour, was delighted. This picture amongst others has been enlarged on a canvas and is on display in the main school hall as a memento of the tour.

Our school priest very kindly gave some money for our pupils to have an ice cream each. However, the pupils decided that the money would be better spent on purchasing a plain white Venetian style mask. The Italian ice cream had already been frequently consumed using the pupils' pocket money, a highlight to the culinary aspect of the tour for many. Back home in the UK our pupils decorated their mask using a wide variety of media. This proved to be a very special memento for the pupils to keep.

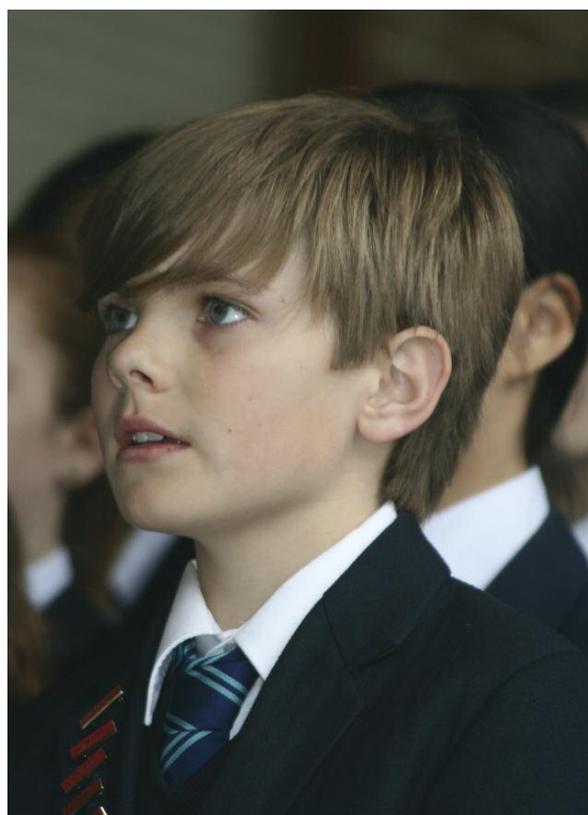
We also combined our love for all things musical and artistic on a trip to Liceo Artistico. This was a state school for teenagers with what we would call in the UK, 'arts college' status. The chapel choir performed a concert in the college courtyard. Our programme was very varied and included music from traditional choral repertoire such as *Lead me Lord* by Samuel Wesley, to the gospel song *Sing unto the Lord* and the beautiful *Lake of Inisfree* by Eleanor Daley. We were also given a tour of their art studios and had a rare insight into how art is taught in Venice. The

standard of work was outstanding to say the least. Students showed us their portfolios and there was a strong emphasis on classical still life drawing, portraiture and figurative clay modelling and sculpture. Talking to the art teacher was a very interesting discussion. I was amazed that the pupils had six hours a week of art!

The highlight of the tour would have to be our performance in St Mark's Basilica. The church was full of congregation and our chapel choir sang so beautifully. It was a very special moment in Prior Park history. I would also recommend a visit to the Accademia, allowing plenty of time in this special place. The paintings are vast and give a real insight into the history of Venice. In order to focus on particular artworks in detail we had a tour guide, something that I would highly recommend. We also had a glass-blowing demonstration at the Morano Island glass workshops, which was superb, and the pupils gained a good

understanding into the specialist skills required in creating distinctive glass works of art. Sketching in the Santa Maria della Salute was very special. Singing *Sing to the Lord* at 30,000 feet up in the air was also one of my most memorable experiences. The pilot made a request for our choir to sing a piece from their repertoire. It was quite amazing to see our pupils and accompanying adults, making up almost half the plane, standing and singing: we really took over the plane for a few minutes.

On returning to the UK we completed the tour by having an art exhibition and music concert, entitled 'Venice Revisited'. This was a great opportunity for parents and family members who did not accompany the trip to listen to the music that our chapel choir sang and for all our artists to exhibit their work. The pupils decorated their Venetian masks, which were a colourful and fantastic addition to the exhibition; more than 40 masks in total. There were also more than 30 canvas paintings, depicting favourite Venetian scenes. Indeed, a successful end to our cultural tour.



Royal Wedding fever

Holy Cross Prep School finds natural cross-curricular links to make learning more purposeful

Located in a beautiful, leafy suburb of Kingston upon Thames, Holy Cross Prep School is a thriving Catholic independent school for girls that welcomes pupils of all faiths. Set in eight acres of breathtaking grounds, the school is located on a site with a fascinating history. Within the grounds are the remains of Coombe Conduit, which was built in 1515 by Cardinal Wolsey to carry water to nearby Hampton Court Palace during the reign of Henry VIII. More recently, the author John Galsworthy spent his childhood here and described Coombe Ridge House – the main part of our school building – in at least one of his writings, *The Forsyte Saga*.

After an outstanding ISI inspection in June 2010, the staff at Holy Cross Prep School had no intention of resting on their laurels. In true Holy Cross spirit, they looked for ways to further enhance the learning experience for the pupils at the school. This in itself was a challenge as the school was already providing a vibrant and highly successful broad-based curriculum. However, inspiration came from two sources. In spring 2010, Bruce Potts led an inset day on creativity, which convinced us that this was the way forward. Later in the year, two teachers were further inspired at a training day by Ros Wilson entitled 'Developing the Creative Curriculum'. The senior leadership team was convinced that adapting our curriculum to include a more creative approach, was another way forward.

Why is creativity important?

The education system that has been used in UK schools for decades now has loosely followed a Victorian



model. However, professions since that time have changed drastically. Companies today require employees with more diverse skills. They must have the ability to work collaboratively with their peers, use thinking skills and problem-solving techniques. They need to work independently using their intuition and initiative, thinking 'outside the box'. It is essential that schools prepare their pupils for the 21st century workplace and teach them the skills they will need to succeed in such an environment. A creative approach provides the pupils of today with the skills they will require in tomorrow's world.

A whole school taster topic

Two staff members planted the seed of an idea to their colleagues on the January INSET day and, in the main, teachers were keen to take on the creative challenge. We decided that we could kick-start the creative process by

working on a whole school taster topic that would excite pupils and staff alike, but which topic would we choose? At a staff meeting, groups worked on brainstorming three different topic titles. They then presented their ideas to the whole staff, who voted for their chosen topic. When the votes were counted, the date was set for our whole school taster topic in March 2011. The theme was to be 'The Royal Wedding'.

During the weeks that followed, staff worked on a variety of ideas and, approaches and the excitement built up until March arrived. The result was a vibrant whole school topic with a truly creative approach.

The Royal Wedding theme

The following gives an idea of the variety of approaches that were taken across the school.

Reception pupils planned parties and worked on maths investigations involving how many items of cutlery would be needed if the wedding breakfast were arranged in tables of five guests. They also designed and made 'thank you' cards to send to the host after a wedding or party.

In Year 1 the pupils used Google Maps to follow the routes that Prince William and Kate Middleton would take to Westminster Abbey, and they identified London landmarks that the bride and groom would pass *en route*. In addition, they used their creative skills to design wedding outfits for dolls, linking this with the properties of the materials in science.

In Year 2 the challenge was to use 2Simple to create information booklets about the Royal Family, using

the class notebooks. This involved research and writing skills. In maths, pupils worked in pairs to investigate possible seating arrangements for specific numbers of guests at different sized tables. They created alternative happy endings for Disney movies.

The Year 3 challenge involved creating TV programmes in the style of *Blue Peter*, using the royal wedding theme. Pupils watched *Blue Peter* and established the need for a signature tune and a logo, so competitions were organised to decide on those. The classrooms became TV studios ('Pink Patsy' and 'Lollipop') where pupils designed wedding dresses and wrote detailed descriptions. With the help of parent volunteers, they made and decorated celebration cakes and wrote scripts for, and recorded, cookery demonstrations for the programme. Some pupils wrote commentaries for previous royal weddings, creating voiceovers for footage they had found, and there were ample opportunities for volunteers to try their hands at presenting the programme. Great fun was had by all and we celebrated our achievements by inviting parents and siblings to the 'official launch'.

Year 4 created a magazine, *Wedding Weekly*, and pupils rose to the challenge of writing articles for inclusion. They investigated a range of sources of information; newspapers, magazines, video clips and images and had a very informative presentation on Jewish wedding ceremonies by a parent volunteer. This gave them the opportunity to compare and contrast Jewish and Christian weddings for their articles in *Wedding Weekly*. Other articles included 'Tudor Wedding Entertainment' and 'Royal Weddings through the Ages'.

The Year 5 girls extended their work on narrative poetry by writing a wedding ballad based on the poem of *The Raggle Taggle Gypsies*. Wedding traditions of the Hindu faith were investigated and pupils presented their findings in various formats: PowerPoint presentations, leaflets and booklets were created using the class

notebooks. They wrote wedding menus in French and attempted to calculate the carbon footprints of some of the guests who might attend the wedding.

Using Publisher, the Year 6 pupils created formal wedding invitations and investigated possible menus for a wedding celebration. They calculated the ingredients required, and the approximate cost for a specific number of guests. Their annual fundraiser, the Bin Bag Fashion Show, had a wedding theme this year. A variety of weird and wonderful garments were created using only bin bags, tape and ribbon, and a great deal of imagination! Our Head was also decked in plastic as the Queen of Hearts!

In ICT the whole school studied family trees, either their own or those of Prince William and Kate Middleton using 2Simple and websites such as www.britroyals.com. The music department looked at music used in wedding ceremonies and the shrill recorder playing of *The Wedding March*



could be heard resounding around the school halls for at least a week.

What next?

The Royal Wedding theme was obviously a one-off topic that was relevant for 2011 only. However it provided staff with the opportunity to work collaboratively on a common theme, planning and providing creative challenges for pupils. We all recognised that this approach created opportunities for higher-level skills in ICT to be used with real purpose. There was a buzz of excited learning in every classroom and pupils were keen to share their learning with parents and visitors to the school.

As the new academic year approaches, Holy Cross Prep School has set itself the challenge to adapt its current curriculum by finding natural links across the subject areas to make learning more purposeful. We will retain the pace of learning and the depth of study that we already provide, but aim to provide creative challenges for our pupils that will encourage independent learning in an atmosphere of excitement and enjoyment. Watch this space!

Marie Hadgianni is head of English and creative curriculum co-ordinator for KS2 at Holy Cross Prep School in Kingston upon Thames, Surrey.



A 'through school'

Alastair Reid, Headmaster at Ballard School, New Milton, Hampshire, tells how running a school that goes from 18 months to 16 years can have the best of both the prep and senior worlds in one

At a recent Speech Day we commended six of our pupils who had arrived at Ballard in the nursery aged 18 months and were now leaving at the top of the school aged 16 years in Year 11. These pupils and their parents were very sad to be moving on and most were sorry that we didn't offer a sixth form. Herein lies part of the conundrum of a 'through school': should we be encouraging pupils to stay with us for 14 or so years or are we simply cocooning them from the 'real world'?

In a school that emphasises the importance of family, pastoral care and continuity there are strong arguments in favour of offering a 'one-stop shop' from early years through to GCSE. Siblings can be educated together with all the advantages for parents of knowing one school, having some fee concession (sibling discount is common in most independent schools) and being able to track their children's progress knowing that they are well known within the same setting. The children also have the security of an established campus, teachers who know them well and friends who remain together over many years. It's not surprising that come Year 11 many prefer the environment with which they are most familiar. This in itself, however, is a good argument not to offer a sixth form as the time has arrived for the 'chicks' to fly the nest and prepare more fully for university and the world of work – and we are fortunate in the variety and scope of 16+ providers locally which cater for A levels, the International Baccalaureate, vocational training, grammar schools, boarding and college environments.

A concern that we have sought to rectify lately is the argument that without an 11+ or 13+ (Common Entrance) hurdle, the academic rigour will only come up to the mark as the GCSE years approach. Children know that they can stay in the one school for both the primary and early secondary phases of their education and thus there is little incentive to aspire to high academic achievement. This notion, of course, pre-supposes that we need external exams to achieve this rigour. Our approach has been to

ensure our own assessments are thorough and challenging, that we offer significant rewards, that teaching standards are carefully monitored and classroom approaches frequently refreshed. We don't have to 'teach to the test' and thus our educational programme can truly be the National Curriculum 'plus'. Cross-curricular themes are common place and include, for example, the STEM approach – looking for links across science, technology, engineering and maths – whilst not having to worry overmuch about 'is this in the syllabus?'

A 'through school' on the same site and with a relatively small pupil roll (we have 500 on roll from 18 months to 16 years) means a complicated timetable, not least where some teachers will 'cross over' from the prep (Years 3-8) to the senior (Years 9-11) parts of the school. We might prefer to shorten the lesson length for the younger pupils but can't easily have a different 'shape' to the day. We have got around this in part by enabling Years 3-5 to operate as a unit (with their own teachers in the main) and to have a split lunch time and an extra afternoon break. We have also emphasised the positive about having specialist senior teachers able to teach younger classes (our head of modern foreign languages, for example, teaches French down to the junior prep) and also ensuring that the youngest have access to the super facilities in science, technology and art, which would not normally be available in a primary or prep school setting.

The family emphasis allows us to enable older pupils to mentor the younger ones (such as Year 7s coming into Year 3 form times and prefects at Year 8 and at Year 11 being able to take some junior activities). There are some distinct parts of the school only for particular age groups but there is also a necessary and a positive 'blurring' (with careful behavioural expectations and boundaries), which allows for the mixing of age groups in a friendly, nurturing, atmosphere. The younger children really enjoy having the older ones help with their activities and watch their performances, whilst many of the older pupils relish the opportunity to take responsibility for the younger ones. Having always been in a secondary school with sixth formers until my current post, I have been thrilled to see the way in which Year 11s as prefects have risen to the challenge of leadership roles at an age (15-16 year-olds) when in a setting with 17-18 year-olds they can be regarded as being rather silly and immature.

Ballard has grown into its present structure over a 15-year period (since the mid-1990s when a prep school and a senior school amalgamated) and thus has had time to evolve and develop as a 'through' school. There are peculiar challenges but, in the main, we see the opportunities such a wide age range presents and seize them enthusiastically.

Prep/Junior Community

Tell us what makes your school unique – we want to celebrate the diversity of the junior/prep school community.

Wild storytelling

Fiona Danks and Jo Scofield, outdoor education authors, share the art of wild storytelling from an extract from their latest book *Run Wild*

Stories are all around us – in newspapers, books, on TV and on the internet – but storytelling only happens when the story is passed directly from person to person, without the use of print or technology. We all have stories within us, and storytelling is a way for young people to invent their own non-electronic virtual worlds and develop open-ended tales. It's also an opportunity to imagine the world from another perspective – that of an animal, perhaps, or a tree or even a rock. For ancient peoples one of the purposes of storytelling was to pass information on to the next generation about how to survive and live with nature. Today it is still a wonderful and enjoyable way to teach young people about the natural world and their place within it. Outdoor stories need a few vital ingredients to flourish and grow: an inspiring setting, a receptive audience and a few props to release the imagination. Here are some ideas.

The setting

- What mood do you wish to create? Choose somewhere atmospheric – perhaps a woodland clearing, a hidden valley, an open hilltop or a place beneath the spreading branches of a large tree. If telling stories after dark, find somewhere away from bright lights.
- Be inspired by miniature landscapes, such as a gnarled old tree stump where fairies might live, or by giant landscapes where giants might roam.
- A fire can be a wonderful focus, whether a bonfire out in the wilderness or a small pit fire or a barbecue in the back garden on a summer's night.

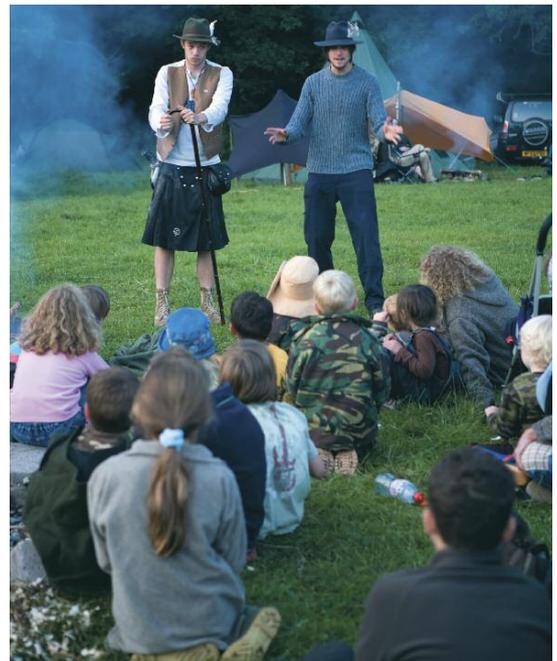
A storytelling throne

A decorated throne brings a sense of occasion to any gathering, including one for storytelling. Create one by adorning a tree stump with branches and greenery or weaving grasses and leaves through an outdoor chair.

Setting a story rolling

To stimulate storytelling, provide a few props, beat a rhythm, dress up in costumes, do something different. Here are a few ideas to break the ice and get a story started:

- To engage your audience, consider who they are and what kind of tale might entice them in. Storytelling is as much about the art of listening as telling, and of course the listeners' role is then to pass the story on to others. Perhaps one person could tell a story of their own or seek details from the audience. Or perhaps a whole group could be involved in a shared story that passes on from one person to the next.
- Seek inspiration from nature, perhaps viewing it from different and unusual perspectives. Visit wild places at night or as the sun is rising; go out in a wild wind or the swirling fog. Try melting into a place to search for its stories by sitting quietly on your own: what can you see, hear and feel?
- Don't try to be formulaic or guide anyone too much; people are more likely to be creative if left to their own devices. Just provide a starting point and see where it takes them. The best stories are often the simplest ones.
- Remember the power of scary stories: everyone loves a bit of spine-tingling excitement.
- Use characters from a favourite storybook as a starting point, but take them off on some completely new adventures.
- Try to see the world from another point of view. Who lives out there in the woods, for instance? How do they see the world? How do they see us?
- Ask everyone to sit in a circle, facing outwards with their eyes shut. What is the first thing they see when they open their eyes? Can you use this in a story?
- Pretend to be reporters and make a story from your interviews with natural characters you find. What is it like to live in a burrow? What did the crabby hawthorn tree have to say? What did he think of the cheeky robin who lived in his branches?





Telling the tale

The best storytellers use voice and movement to bring their characters alive.

- Don't be tempted to shout; a soft voice draws an audience gently into a tale. Let the voice ebb and flow, vary the pitch and tone, and give each character a distinctive sound.
- Be prepared to be silly and act the clown, or to make your voice sinister and haunting – whatever your tale requires.
- Use rhythm and repetition to strengthen a story. After a while the audience will probably join in.

A storyteller's charm

A sea-sculpted stone, a special shell or a beautiful feather can make a storyteller's charm. Choose something tactile, unusual and intriguing. Pass the charm around the circle until the leader says stop; whoever is holding the charm becomes the storyteller.

A story bag

Fill a bag or basket with natural materials or objects made from natural resources, such as shells, arrowheads, a chewed fir cone or nut, a feather, a wooden figure, a painted egg or perhaps a little bottle for potions or spells.

Story collections

Before the storytelling begins, invite

everyone to collect a few loose natural materials from the surrounding area. Challenge each person to weave his or her natural collection into a story. Or do a sensory scavenger hunt to discover wet grass, slimy mud, cool wind, soft moss, prickly thorns, bringing out vivid descriptive words to use in the storytelling.

Masks, puppets and teddy bears

Even the shyest storyteller might get involved through using puppets or natural masks. Or how about taking a favourite teddy or soft toy to the woods for an adventure and photographing it in different places to inspire a story, either outdoors or back in the classroom?

Mystery creatures

A wonderful way to get the story juices flowing is to make little people or creatures from lumps of clay, twigs and seeds or whatever you can find. Where might these characters live? What do they eat? Who are their enemies? What adventures might they have?

Sound effects and musical instruments

Storyteller Chris Holland in telling a tale about an animal going off on a quest through the rainforest uses movements and different voices to bring the characters alive, but it is his use of simple percussion instruments that really engaged the audience.

Try making natural sound effects with stones, sticks or crackling leaves, or make your own percussion instruments. Or how about asking each child to be a character with their own distinct sound?

Magic eyes

To inspire a story make cardboard eyes of different colours and shapes and, using doublesided sticky tape, stick them on to logs, twigs, trees or any other natural features to make all sorts of imaginary creatures. Alternatively, use chalk or charcoal to draw eyes on natural features. Are your creatures happy or sad? Why might they be

feeling that way? Remember to take the card eyes home with you and to wipe off any chalk or charcoal marks.

Magnifying glasses

Encourage children to investigate small places with a magnifying glass and imagine what adventures might happen in the complex miniature worlds they discover. Perhaps they might crawl through the grass following an ant. Where does it go? Who does it meet? Afterwards gather everyone together to share the adventures they have imagined.

Word and picture pools

The most sparkling stories are full of vivid words that draw pictures in your mind. A word or picture pool is another great way to encourage descriptive language.

- Go out into the local park or woodland and find interesting natural materials to look at and touch, and collect them in a goody bag. Or take everyone on a blindfold walk to explore through touch. Or encourage each person to sit alone somewhere, become immersed in the natural world and jot down words and feelings, or think about the animals that might live there.
- Bring everyone together and, using watersoluble pens, chalk or charcoal, write words or draw pictures on fallen leaves or smooth pebbles. Put all the words and images together in a 'pool'.
- As the story is told, each person pulls a leaf or stone from the pool, incorporating the word or picture into the story everyone to take an object out of the bag and incorporate it into his or her own story or a shared tale.

Edited extract from: *Run Wild! Outdoor Games and Adventures* by Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield. Frances Lincoln. £16.99, ISBN 0711231729

If you are interested in their books or want them to run a workshop for groups of children or staff training, please see their website www.goingwild.net or email them at info@goingwild.net

Innovative orchestral opportunities

Director of music Will Bersey tells of wide and far-reaching benefits at St Edmund's School, Canterbury



Music is woven into the fabric of St Edmund's School and we enjoy an excellent reputation for the range and quality of our music, both in performance and academic areas. The junior school is the proud home of the choristers of Canterbury Cathedral and the East Kent Children's Orchestra, whilst the senior school is renowned for its strong choral tradition, as well as its fine symphony orchestra and big band. St Edmund's is a community of three schools, the pre-prep, junior school and senior school, all sharing one site.

Collaboration across the schools is a major advantage of this architecture and the sharing of music staff and facilities brings great opportunity to pupils as young as three years old, right up to our sixth form music scholars, preparing for A levels and university.

Over the last two years we have implemented significant developments to our orchestral provision and have been delighted by the quick growth and success of our initiatives. As a school of modest size, yet noted for its musical excellence, a

project was devised that would bring opportunity to our very gifted musicians that isn't often available in school set-ups, whilst also offering significant opportunity to members of the community. The East Kent Children's Orchestra was launched in January 2010 and brings together pupils from St Edmund's junior school, many of whom are Cathedral choristers, and instrumentalists from outside the school. There are currently 14 state primary and secondary schools represented and the result is a

symphony orchestra on a scale rarely encountered in prep school environments. This ensemble forms the backbone of our instrumental initiatives and is a group that we are justly proud of. A year later, the equivalent ensemble in the senior school underwent the same development, creating the St Edmund's Symphony Orchestra, a 60-strong

ensemble for instrumentalists of approximately grade 5 and above, tackling mainstream orchestral repertoire and providing opportunity not previously accessible to our pupils, or those in the community.

At the same time, talks with the outreach department of the English Chamber Orchestra culminated in the launch of a

unique relationship with this internationally renowned ensemble in March 2011. *Creative Connections* completes a pyramid style architecture of orchestral coaching and workshops that builds upon our own outreach, already established via the East Kent Children's Orchestra, yet adding first class coaching from the very best instrumentalists in

The benefit to the pupils is wide and far reaching





the country. The benefit to our pupils is wide and far reaching, from playing alongside top professionals in one of our orchestras (across junior and senior schools), to hearing their own compositions realised in workshops or listening to the ECO perform in one of our trips to London. The inaugural session in March saw three members of the orchestra join us for a morning of full and sectional rehearsals, before a concert was given for parents and friends. Subsequent collaborations have included a day of violin master-classes with ECO co-principal John Mills and a concert trip for our sixth form music scholars to hear the English Chamber Orchestra at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, during which we were treated to a tour of the venue and the chance to chat with members of the orchestra.

Once established, these three strains of development promise to provide a musical journey unparalleled in non-specialist schools. Already, our re-energised orchestras are able to confidently learn repertoire that

stretches the participants, both instrumentally and musically, and both ensembles proudly accommodate the full complement of orchestral instruments, fully existing as orchestras in their own right. The St Edmund's Symphony Orchestra no longer plays arrangements, instead exposing pupils to mainstream orchestral repertoire, and the East Kent Children's Orchestra has briskly moved from the generic 'one part fits all' repertoire to music that already teaches children about instrumental timbre and colour. Whilst we remain committed to county and national youth orchestras, to be able to offer such an enhanced orchestral experience to all of our pupils on a weekly basis brings huge satisfaction.

Our new friendship with the English Chamber Orchestra will also stretch beyond the coaching and master-class elements, offering senior pupils with a particular interest in teaching or music therapy the option to assist the professionals as they visit the primary schools for storytelling and creative workshops. Such activities will serve as

further preparation for university and work experience for a number of professions, including teaching, music and music therapy. It is also immensely useful to encourage pupils to pursue a deeper understanding of the music they have been playing, by bringing them out of the comfort zone of their routine orchestral rehearsal and into a constantly changing environment.

As we look ahead, our small school, recognised for its warm and friendly atmosphere and an ethos that centres around individuality and the nurturing of talent, looks to be on the brink of hugely exciting times for both our pupils and our friends. The school on the hill has its doors wide open and warmly welcomes spectators and participants.

Will Bersey is director of music at St Edmund's School, Canterbury

Communication – back to basics in a texting world

Susan Heaton Wright delivers training and workshops for teachers on the voice and non-verbal communication skills. Here she explains how communication should be at the heart of all we do

Communication styles have changed beyond recognition since teachers were at school. Now younger and younger students have mobile phones that they text their friends on, email addresses and Skype accounts. Of course, keeping up-to-date with modern technology and communication styles is really important for students. However, pupils at prep or junior school pupils will at some point need to move on to their next school and this usually involves an interview: texting would not be the best way to impress a new school.

Students learn from experiences, their peers and role models. As adults in a school, this provides you with many opportunities to show pupils how to be effective communicators, be it how you speak to colleagues, parents and pupils; how you speak in assemblies; or how you listen to other people speaking in the dining room and other day to day situations. Putting up a mirror to one's own communication skills is good, since it is an opportunity to become more aware of the impact you are making in school, but also to challenge yourself to improve your skills if necessary.

I have identified a number of skill areas to become aware of, which all play a role in creating good communication or interpersonal skills.

Speaking

It is important to make it as easy as possible for another person to listen to you.

- **Speaking clearly, including diction:** missing sounds from the end of words and blurring consonants in the middle of words makes it more difficult to understand what someone is saying.
- **Speaking slowly:** speaking as though you are commentating a steeplechase race only works on the TV. In real life, people find it difficult to listen to fast speakers. Make it easy for them by slowing down.
- **Speaking audibly:** speaking too quietly or mumbling is infuriating for many listeners. They also have to work *much* harder to hear what you have to say. Learn to project your voice so that it will be heard.
- **Speaking not shouting:** the opposite of the above, which is equally infuriating for listeners, is a speaker that constantly shouts. This is the chap that still thinks he's on the rugby field, even though he's addressing one pupil next to his desk. Unfortunately speakers like this are ridiculed and what they say is not taken seriously. Learn to modify the volume of your voice for different situations.
- **Speaking at an audible pitch:** my son has just started senior school and is in awe of the games master who has 'the voice of a god'. He has a low-pitched, clear voice and hero status with the boys. Higher pitched voices are more difficult for many people to listen to. For people that speak with pitched voices – ladies and children – being aware of when your voice

becomes higher pitched is beneficial. Ladies' voices tend to go higher when they project their voices, so consciously modifying the pitch when you do this, is useful. For children, a high-pitched whiny voice does not impress in interviews, so supporting a child with this type of voice (or personality) is a positive move.

Posture

This plays a huge role in your effectiveness as a speaker; it affects the quality of your voice, whether you are standing or sitting.

- **Standing or sitting:** it is important for your upper body to be relaxed and open. So dropping shoulders and opening your chest area assists in good vocal production; preventing vocal strain but also helping produce a good vocal sound that people will wish to listen to.
- **Holding your head up:** this assists in vocal production, keeping the neck area relaxed and also in vocal production.

Non-verbal communication

Our body language plays a significant role in our effectiveness as a communicator.

- **Keeping our body 'open':** how often have you spoken to someone that has their arms crossed or who has moved their shoulders away from you. These two body positions give the impression the speaker is uninterested – or worse.

- **Engaging people with your face:** at university, one of the professors always looked at the ceiling when he delivered a lecture. I neither remember any of his subject matter nor his name. Although he was speaking to students, he had no connection with us. Remember to engage listeners with your face and body – by looking towards your audience!
- **Eye contact:** this is similar to the above, particularly when you are speaking to one person or a small group. Eye contact is a powerful way of engaging a small audience.

Listening skills

Listening is often perceived as being a passive activity, yet communication is a two-way activity.

- **Focusing on the listener:** concentrate on what they are saying.
- **Eye contact:** this indicates to the speaker that you are listening.
- **Not being distracted:** not fiddling with phones, pencils and other 'toys' makes it easier for the speaker to speak and believe they are being listened to.
- **Turn your body to face the speaker** and subtly mirror their pose.
- **Encourage the speaker** by nodding gently whilst they speak.

At school, we need to provide opportunities for pupils to practise these skills within a variety of situations, whether it be reading in assembly, presenting a topic to the class or engaging with a small group at lunch. As well as focusing on the voice and speaking – and concentrating on the points above, it is important to emphasise the active listening skills. By giving pupils opportunities to develop their communication skills, it will not only prepare them for interviews for their next school but provide them with invaluable life skills.

www.executivevoice.co.uk

National satips Schools' Handwriting Competition 2011

Over 50 schools took part with a total of over 5000 entries to be involved next year find out more at: www.handwritingcompetition.co.uk

Class 'E' Staff

First Prize: Elizabeth Judge
Runner-up: Ian Croft
Third Place: Beckie Spittle

Shaftoe Trust 1st School, Hexham
St. Anthony's Catholic Primary, East Dulwich
Higbury Fields, Islington

Highly Commended:

James Attenborough
Simon Detre
Nicholas Allen
Jo Toogood

Rokeby, Kingston upon Thames
Westminster Abbey Choir School
Newton Prep, Battersea
The Downs, Wrexall

Class 'A' Overall Winner

Ellie-May Gibson (age 6)

The Firs, Newton, Chester

Age 4

First Prize: Darshan Vijayaraj

Hallfield, Edgbaston

Age 5

First Prize: Emily Maxwell

St. Catherine's Prep, Bramley

Age 6

First Prize: Mark Zangwill

Devonshire House, Hampstead

Highly commended:

Gurneet Jheeta & Anusha Salhan (age 3)
Anushka Chopra (age 5)
Rajdeep Palit (age 6)

Hallfield, Edgbaston
Twickenham Prep, Hamton
The Gleddings Prep, Halifax

Class 'B' Overall Winner

Dominic Ross (age 8)

Kingshott, Hitchin

Age 7

First Prize: Alessia Lowcock

Putney High School JS

Age 8

First Prize: Kai Jessop

Kingshott, Hitchin

Highly commended:

Lara Hammond (age 7)
Emma Macro (age 7)
Guy Johns (age 8)
Maya Walter (age 8)

Cross-in-Hand C.E.P., Heathfield
Headington Prep, Oxford
Kingshott, Hitchin
Rowan Prep, Esher

Class 'C' Overall Winner

Jamil Haque (age 10)

Woodford Green Prep

Age 9

First Prize: Samuel Fursman

Cargilfield, Edinburgh

Age 10

First Prize: Morgan Homer

Preston Hedges Primary, Northampton

Highly commended:

Aisha Austin (age 10)
Olivia Lacey (age 9)
Lucy Shaw (age 9)
Lara Wright (age 9)
Jessica Zarbafi (age 9)

Marist Prep, Sunninghill
St. Catherine's Prep, Bramley
Newton Prep, Battersea
St. Catherine's School for Girls, Twickenham
Devonshire House, Hampstead

Class 'D' Overall Winner

Lily Hill (age 11)

Cargilfield, Edinburgh

Age 11

First Prize: Sophie Hebden

Ashdell Prep, Sheffield

Age 12

First Prize: Sophie Cooper

Cargilfield, Edinburgh

Age 13

First Prize: Sophie Hazel

Cumnor House, Haywards Heath

Age 14

First Prize: Olivia Kershaw

Home Educated

Highly commended:

Dylan Cox (age 12)
Emma Harris (age 13)
Chao-wen Tsai (age 14)

Kingshott, Hitchin
St. Faith's, Cambridge
Tockington Manor, Bristol

Special Mention for an amusing choice of poem, which made the judges laugh:

My penmanship is pretty bad, by Ken Nesbit: Cara Howard (age 11), Liverpool College Prep

Winning school: Cargilfield, Edinburgh

Runner-up school: Kingshott, Hitchin



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satips Songfest

Dr June Keyte reflects on the *satips* Songfest that she founded ten years ago as it goes from strength to strength

A Churchill Fellowship in 1990 was the catalyst for our highly successful annual Songfests. Spending many weeks that year in Finland learning about choir training, meeting new conductors, being amazed by the wonderful country, its people, architecture, designer clothing, shoes, china, glass, jewellery, and so many more designs by artists, made me think about the amazing opportunities for music and inspiration on the part of musicians in Finland.

It would take an article by itself just to give you a glimpse of the highly regarded subject of music in that country. I have thought on so many occasions about the many facets that singing together brings to young people and this was the most evident in Finnish children's choir organisations. Songfests have a long history there and they spend many weeks or weekends gathering from either local schools or some, which are much further away, to have a residential time together. The aim is to share good music practice in singing, to learn music of their country, to learn new music by one or more of the many compositions written by modern composers (of which there are also many), to have social time together and to present music by eminent Finnish conductors. Everyone learns something in these happenings, meeting new friends, new music and new conductors and I thought it would be a good idea to do a similar event here in the UK.

Fortunately, my approach to the *satips* organisation was successful and nine years ago our first *satips* Songfest began. We went to Leighton Park School near Reading where the

Headmaster, Mr John Dunston, had also been given a Churchill Fellowship in the same year, but to look at choir training and exchanges in China. Interestingly, his school, a Quaker school, had their hall in the Round, which was absolutely perfect for us. Hundreds of children from a wide area attended a happy and successful day presented by the composer, teacher and workshop leader Douglas Coombes and his vocal soloist wife and teacher Carol Lindsey-Douglas, who have been with us on many occasions since.

We have special aims for each Songfest and after a hugely appreciated day with our composer John Rutter, where we could have repeated the day several times, such was the take-up of places, we have now had annual Songfests on two consecutive days. We like to have one within a wide area of London and on the other days we are very happy to go to any part of the country. We have already been to Oakham, St. Paul's School, Barnes, Rugby, and this year Bromsgrove in the Midlands.

Our composers/tutors have included Alan Simmonds, Peter Hunt, Lin Marsh, John Rutter and Douglas Coombes and Alexander L'Estrange. Thousands of children and staff have had wonderful INSET days with these very special musicians.

This week we had children and staff from Bromley, Reading, Kingston, Slough, Northwood, Potters Bar, Winchester, Rickmansworth, Gerrards Cross, Kew, Solihull, Birmingham, Bromsgrove, Moreton-in-Marsh, Oxford, Milton Keynes, Grantham, Chaddesley Corbett, Latymer and

London. Now we are looking forward to mid-October 2012 for our 10th Anniversary Songfest. Many of you may remember that we had a commissioned work from Alan Simmonds a few years ago and we are thinking of some more exciting ideas for next year!

satips has been wonderfully supportive throughout our Songfest ideas and we are always delighted to greet members of the council including Moira Laffey, Pat Harrison and Peter Gibbons. Their enthusiasm and that of the schools has inspired us to continue. I would also like to mention the help and guidance from our Hon Secretary E Andrew Davies, with whom I have had many kind chats over the years. Now there is a very important person missing, Tim Frost, the new director of music of The Junior King's School, Canterbury. Without Tim I would be totally lost; he began when we founded the organisation and a few years ago took over its administration. I am incredibly proud, grateful and thrilled to have Tim working so hard on behalf of the *satips* Songfest organisation and of course you know him now as our music editor.

If you would like to hold a Songfest in your area and know staff from other prep schools who would like to join us please email Tim or call me on 0793 114 2501 and we will try to arrange one in the autumn. I look forward to hearing from you. It is such a wonderful day and we really appreciate those schools who offer a solo during the concert, which we have at the end of the afternoon. Many thanks to everyone who has been involved in any way into making our Songfests so special.

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- Source and recruit relevant expertise to run training courses
- Develop implement and manage a sales and marketing system
- Create a quality management system, implement and maintain
- Research and recommend overseas plan for expansion to SE Asia (long term)
- Coordinate and maintain satips website areas relevant to training
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- Reach and commission e-based training platforms and sales for the satips website
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Donald Sewell

Following the death in November 2011 of Donald Sewell, a former prep school Headmaster, IAPS chairman and reader for this magazine, his son Mike looks back on the remarkable response to double disaster that helped shape his father's life

In a late 1950s edition of the forerunner to this magazine, an anonymous contributor recounted the story of a prep school that had suffered not one but two fires at its premises, yet still survived and thrived.

That article, entitled *Phoenix from the Ashes*, did not name the establishment, although most readers would have known the author was talking about Old Buckenham Hall School. The then headmaster's son who played a key part in safeguarding the school's future was my father, Donald.

In December 1952 Donald returned to Old Buckenham in Norfolk at the end of his university term to find fire had struck at the school (which was also his family home) the previous evening. Thankfully, no-one was hurt but the building was largely destroyed and Donald was immediately pitched into a major crisis management situation – how to ensure the continuity of the school his father had built up over the previous 30 or so years.

Remarkably, by the start of the following term in January 1953 a temporary home had been found at nearby Merton Hall. It was hoped Merton might eventually become a permanent base for the school but it, too, was hit by fire in early 1956.

After two major fires in three years, Donald (newly married to Sheila), his father Elliott and the rest of the family

must have been tempted to throw in the towel. But overwhelming support from loyal parents gave them confidence that the school could still continue – if the right premises could be found. Sure enough, later that year, they unearthed a new home some 50 miles south, at Brettenham in Suffolk.

Hardly any parents withdrew their children and Old Buckenham Hall (or OBH as it is known across East Anglia and beyond) developed and grew from there. With the support of his architect brother, classrooms and a gym were built, and Donald spent hours on the tractor turning the land at Brettenham Park into some of the best sports fields in the region. As the school's current groundsman recalls, getting on the tractor was a habit Donald never tired of. Perhaps it was a much-needed haven from the demands of staff members, parents and schoolboys!

Elliott and Donald were joint heads for many years before Donald took on the mantle in the late 1960s, around the same time that the school became a charitable trust, independent from the Sewell family.

Donald was elected chairman of IAPS in 1972, aged 44, at a time when the government Opposition was formulating policies to abolish independent education. His conference speech that year saw him fighting the corner of the private

education sector, as he did throughout his life. He was also heavily involved in creating the Independent Schools Information Service (ISIS) in East Anglia and was treasurer for the IAPS Orchestra Trust.

Since Donald's death, countless former OBH colleagues, pupils and friends have paid tribute to the way he and Sheila shaped so many lives – and ensured the school was at the heart of the community. They also recalled tales from OBH folklore, not least Donald's inspired decision to flood the front lawn during a particularly cold winter in the early 1960s so the boys could skate on it (for weeks on end as it turned out).

Donald and Sheila retired to Southwold, Suffolk in 1991 where they threw themselves into community life – while Donald remained involved with IAPS and, for many years, was a proofreader for this magazine. Meanwhile, his son David is a governor at OBH, ensuring the family links with the school continue.

He died peacefully at home aged 83, leaving Sheila, four children and nine grandchildren.

Mike Sewell is managing director of CPL, a publishing and communications agency in Cambridge.

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Deadline for entries is May 16. Full details and rules can be found at www.handwritingcompetition.com

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- 13 Mar **Planning an educational trip in Europe** Prior Park Prep, Cricklade
- 21 Mar **Mixed media painting and art history** TBC
- 6 April **Printmaking** Abingdon Prep, Oxford

English

- 13 March **A writer's workshop** The *satips* Bookshop, Sutton
- 27 Mar **'Tap into Taplow' - using the environment, its history and people to inspire in the classroom** Taplow Court, Berks
- 1 May **Here comes the poetry man** Kitebrook House, Glos

ISA course and events

- 6 Mar **0-5 EYFS Development: How to prepare for change** Greenbank Prep School, Cheadle
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- 26 Apr **Learning outside the classroom for your EYFS and Junior pupils** Wilmslow Prep School
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Other courses and events

- 26 Jan **Inaugural National Conference: Able, Gifted and Talented in Prep Schools** Copthorne Hotel, Slough
This inaugural conference will draw on research, leading experts and developments from prep schools to inform, discuss and offer practical strategies for the independent school context. Offering 3 keynote sessions led by Professor Joan Freeman, Graham Gorton, and CJ Simister.
- 29 Feb-1 Mar **SIMS Independent Schools Conference** Hinkley Island Hotel, Leicestershire
Contact sharon@hmc.org.uk for more details
- 12-13 Mar **University Advanced Diploma in Teaching Children with Specific Learning Difficulties** Uplands Conference Centre, High Wycombe
The Advanced Diploma is accredited by the University of Worcester and is comprised of two modules which may be completed in any order. This very practical course will provide a secure understanding of SpLD and introduce you to the latest research and insights into current best practice.
- 15-16 Mar **Cross-Association Junior Heads Conference** Holiday Inn, Stratford-upon-Avon
Contact sharon@hmc.org.uk for more details
- 8 Mar **Key Stage 2 English refresher: English in the NC and the novel** Port Regis Prep School, Dorset
Led by Teresa Cremin (previously known professionally as Grainger), Professor of Education at The Open University
- 11-12 May **5th Annual Residential SEN Conference for Independent Schools** The Bull Hotel, Gerard's Cross
Offering two major themes: SEN issues and Speech, Language and Communication, led respectively by Dr Fiona Duff York University and Jean Gross former communication champion for children.
- 20 June **What Heads of Department in Prep Schools should do for inspection** Port Regis Prep School, Dorset
Speaker: Graham Nunn, RI and education consultant



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