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Steering Group

satips

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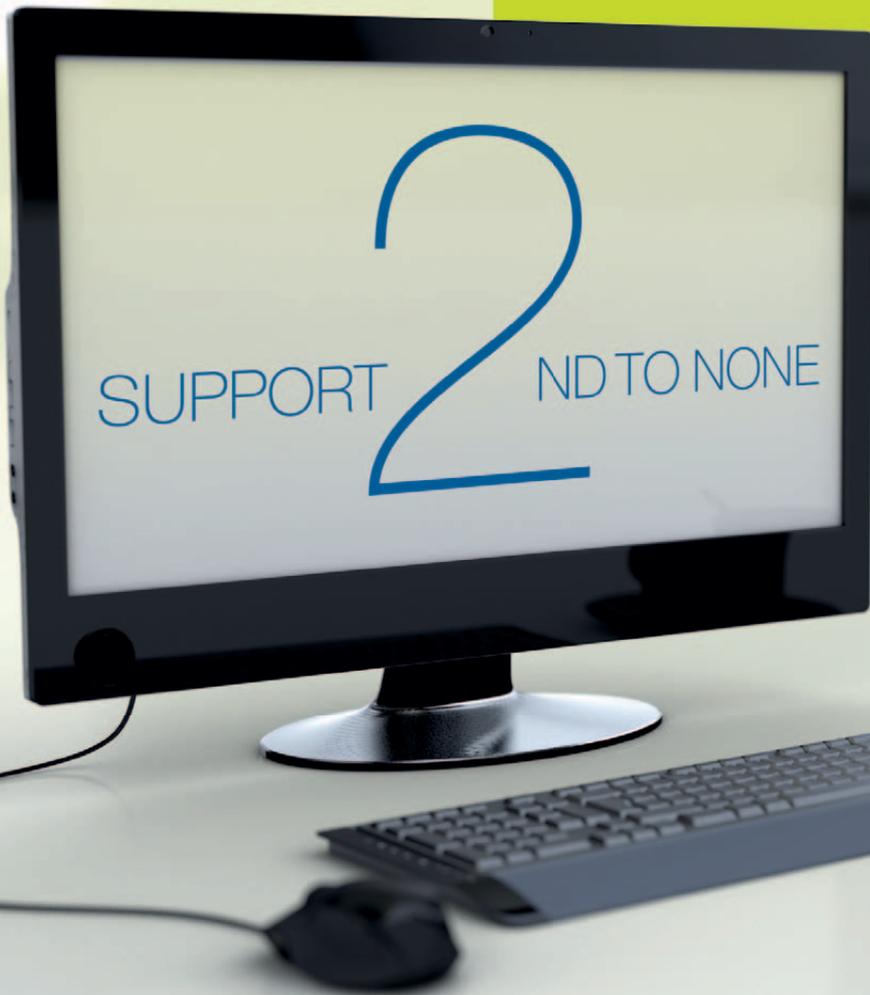
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From the editor



Welcome back to a new term! I hope that during the summer you managed to escape far, far away to completely recharge your batteries.

For many of you the autumn term brings a change of class, a change of role, or a new school. I have moved house myself over the summer, relocating my family

to Devon in order to take up the position of Deputy Head Pastoral at Exeter Cathedral School. I am excited that my career has taken this new route and I am looking forward to moving into leadership.

Even if you are not returning to a new job, you will be facing a very different set of challenges this year to those you faced last year. Each new class brings with it a different combination of needs and abilities. To give your pupils the very best learning experiences I urge you to look afresh at your teaching practice and to make teaching and learning the heart of all your big decisions this year. This issue of Prep School should certainly help you approach the classroom with energy and fresh enthusiasm. It is full of ideas and inspiration to whet your appetite for innovation.

The start of a new academic year is always a good time to review your curriculum but even more so this year with the

introduction of the new national curriculum. Some schools in our sector will be following the new directives to the letter but perhaps a greater number will do no more than test the air, step back, watch, consider, reflect ...

This freedom to pick and choose, to consider and evaluate is the envy of our state sector colleagues and I certainly endorse a properly independent approach to the changes being outlined in the new national curriculum. But the 'pick and mix' approach also comes with a strong health warning. Are we picking the bits that feel familiar, those features we already know and love? Are we slow to change because we are carefully evaluating the worth of such change, or is our practice complacent and stale?

The independence that we enjoy protects us from having to shift with every new government directive and this must surely be a good thing. Equally, though, we shouldn't still be teaching as though it was 1974. Today's pupils face a rapidly changing world and our job is to help them succeed in that world. For this reason each of us needs to understand the detail of the new curriculum in our own area. This is the only way we can make sure that the amazing educational experience we offer continues to match and exceed expectations.

If you have an idea for an article or the next issue, please email me at editor@prepschoolmag.co.uk

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New history

Matthew Jenkinson, Director of Studies at New College School, Oxford, shares his reflections

The first cohort have sat the new Common Entrance History paper. The results are in, eyes have been narrowed, brows furrowed, heads scratched, there have been attempts to make some sense of the grades. Now is a good time, then, to reflect on this new paper and see where its strengths and weaknesses reside. Or, as the old-style paper would have put it, 'assess the usefulness of this paper for telling us whether someone is a decent historian or not'.

The old paper, indeed, had some curious features that were not really fit for that purpose. Some of the sources were so short and easy that it made a mockery of setting them at all. The annual question asking candidates to compare the three sources for consistency was, in theory, a not totally useless form of assessment. In reality, candidates spent so much time obsessively comparing A to B, A to C, B to C, to show the marker they were covering all the bases, that often fatuous consistencies or inconsistencies were pointed out, especially if two of the sources came from the same book. Real historians go through a similar mental process to see if sources corroborate or challenge one another,

but they don't need to put down all of that process on paper.

CE candidates were so scared that their methodical analysis would go unnoticed that they felt compelled to put it all down on paper. I felt compelled to compel them to put it all down on paper, because I was scared their methodical analysis would go unnoticed. Also, while some schools liked such methodical comparisons, others thought it was too ploddy and resembled a framework which was designed to get weaker candidates full marks on that question. Which it kind of was. One pupil of mine got an A*, even though he answered the source paper on medieval women, a topic we had never covered from a period we had not looked at for over a year, and certainly never revised. Good for him - he showed real analytical capability and could apply his skills to an unseen topic, but it kind of made a mockery of covering so many other topics in depth.

The new source paper, which poses one overall question and requires candidates to use their own knowledge, is undoubtedly more demanding, and will mitigate against too many ploddy comparisons or

pupils answering on topics they have never covered. I hope. The fact that it is a lot more demanding, with less scope for methodical frameworks for individual questions, will allow better candidates to shine, but weaker candidates will definitely be identified. This was part of the point of the redesign of the paper: to allow better differentiation between members of the cohort, with a wider spread of grades, instead of lots of candidates getting 'A's because they could memorise and regurgitate, or go through the motions of thinking through a question in a way they had been taught, but they had not themselves thought about. Indeed, it is good that the bipartite 'Describe/ Explain' has gone, because so little time was given - and relatively few marks awarded - for the 'Explain' section that was meatier, more difficult, more interesting, and a better way of distinguishing between candidates than whether they could revise and recite.

That said, the new-style questions are not without their problems. I am still unsure as to why we ask candidates to assess the usefulness/reliability or whatnot of illustrations from twentieth-century History books. This

is not something I have encountered in the process of historical research, nor have any historians ever come to me agonising over whether they should use or trust a picture from a Ladybird book. Contemporary illustrations: sure. But why not use that space for something with some content worth discussing? More importantly, the essay on sources remains difficult to structure. We are told that looking at Sources A, B and C in turn is too juvenile, and a more thematic approach is required. But there is as much chance of Sources A and B being consistent in theme or content, as Sources A and C. So candidates could be marked down for looking like they are plodding unimaginatively through A, B and C, when actually they are approaching the sources thematically, and that is just the way the cookie has crumbled.

Strong candidates will structure their answers elegantly, remember to use the information from the sources, address the reliability and usefulness of the authors, check for corroboration, and interweave their own knowledge, while remaining focused on the question at hand. But that is a lot to ask in 20-25 minutes, and many candidates will be penalised for falling short on one or more of those crucial yet challenging elements. We need to steel ourselves for fewer 'A's and a much longer tail of lower grades, unless markers in senior schools are to exercise rational benevolence in seeing just how tough the source task now is.

The longer essay question is not without its problems either. Instead of being asked to 'describe' and 'explain'

separately, candidates now need to do both at the same time. Quite right too: we do not learn much about someone's skills as an historian based on how much they can remember and then spit out in the same order. Nonetheless, the revised mark scheme - and the new approach of the question - does not allow for much credit to be given when candidates employ detailed historical knowledge in the course of their analysis. Any decent historian navigates their analysis through factual detail. That is, partly, how they prove their arguments and demonstrate their credibility. They can make cogent judgements because they know their stuff. Otherwise they are just making it up.

My fear is that markers of the CE essays will see detailed historical facts and too hastily interpret this approach as evidence that the candidate can only 'describe' something, instead of looking for the analysis interwoven through those facts. I can especially see this being the case when the markers are ploughing through a huge number of scripts in a very short time (on top of their own teaching and marking load) and looking for stand-out features against which they can apply the rather anaemic mark scheme: 'Right, this kid's blathering on about Cranmer's education, there's no analysis here'. Instead of: 'Right, this kid's blathering on about Cranmer's education, but - hang on - that's pretty important because that's how we come to understand his approach to the Great Matter, changes to the Church in Edward VI's reign, etc.'

This is not a manifesto to change the style of the questioning. Quite the

opposite: the questions are admirably challenging, they are much closer to the real 'craft' of the historian, they challenge us all much more than the previous style of paper, and they shake us out of our complacency that we can get weaker candidates good grades by showing them a couple of easy techniques which suggest they are more analytical than they really are. The challenges come with the assessment of the new paper: making sure that markers realise that these questions are difficult, that the mark scheme is not going to be a huge amount of help, and that they need to apply their own historical talents to assess the quality of the paper. Of course, a huge number of markers do that.

The problem with unstandardised subjective assessment, giving one mark to a large chunk of prose, applying vague mark schemes at the speed of light, with very little right to appeal, is that the marks will not always reflect the quality of the candidate who has written the paper. Sometimes the marks will reflect whether the marker thinks the candidate is their kind of historian and, of course, only they will know what their kind of historian is. The rest of us will never know or have the opportunity to challenge their approach to the subject. So, I guess, we will continue to furrow our brows, try to make sense of some of the grades, then shrug and be thankful we do not have to compare A to B, A to C, B to C, anymore.

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Go on, tell us what you're thinking!

Author and trainer Andrew Hammond considers how to manage talk in the classroom

Blackadder: Do try to have a thought of your own, Baldrick. Thinking is so important. What do you think?

Baldrick: I think thinking is so important, my Lord.

It's a familiar scenario isn't it, trying to wrinkle out a personal view from a student during a class discussion or debate. We want to know that our pupils are thinking for themselves and engaging with the world in their own way; we want to know that they are learning to develop opinions and positions in response to the issues of the day; and we often expect those opinions to be aired within the contexts of a discussion – through talk. We know that it is through talk that children are able to relate past experiences to current ones and in so doing to make sense of them. Talk builds brains. And being able to present your thoughts coherently in front of others is an important life skill.

An equally familiar scenario is the conversation had at parents evening when we gently tell Mr and Mrs Smith how their son, Ben, is rather quiet in class and would do well to participate more in class discussions, only to be told 'Really? He never stops yacking at home, you know!'

Armed with this information, we encourage Ben to join in a class discussion in circle time the following day by asking him what he thinks of a particular issue being discussed. At first he seems characteristically reticent and then, with some gentle coaxing and confidence building, we eventually benefit from Ben's wise

words of wisdom: Well, it's like, you know... wait, no... I mean, it's like, sortalike... you know, I don't really know how to say it.'

Now, there's lots to discuss here. The use of the word 'like' is irritating to anyone over the age of forty but we must all get over that neurosis. The inflection placed on the end of his sentence can grate too. The imperative use of the word 'wait' is especially frustrating and all too easily interpreted as rude, though we know it is merely the latest in a long line of harmless substitutes for 'erm'. The word 'sortalike' is common parlance these days and if you didn't know that, like where have you been, man?

But this short article must not descend into the usual rant against the way children speak these days; like, just get over it.

What concerns me more is how a child who is known to be talkative at other times, feels so hamstrung in class. Is it because he genuinely thinks in 'likes' 'waits' and 'sortalikes'? I don't believe so. I believe this child is as able to think as lucidly and coherently as anyone else. But there is a disconnect between those thoughts and the articulation of them within a class discussion.

Before we rush to diagnose a disorder, which of course in some cases is right and proper to do, I suggest

we consider the arena itself – the class discussion. As Philip Jackson says in his wonderful chapter *Life in Classrooms*, featured in *Teaching and Learning in the Primary School* (1995): 'Learning to live in a classroom is like learning to live in a crowd.'

There are inherent risks involved in joining the steady line of talk traffic that flows, with luck, two ways, through the dialogic classroom. There are questions that will buzz around Ben's head from the moment he is invited to speak and they must be answered before any words are uttered: Am I saying the right thing? Will anyone laugh at the way I say it? Is it my role in the group to say such a thing? Will I remember my point or will I run out of words? Will the teacher be assessing what I say? Wouldn't it be easier to let someone else say it? What was I going to say again?

Of course we don't hear these questions, we just hear 'Wait, like, sortalike, I dunno' and we think that is the measure of what Ben is thinking. Far from it.

Labov (1988) said 'the way in which children talk and what they do or do not say to each other is fundamentally affected by the social and institutional context in which they are observed.' It's tricky. Just as the new breed of quantum scientists discovered that particles actually behave differently when they are being observed from

when they are not, so we must accept the falsehood of the classroom context and its ability to affect the quality and quantity of the children's contributions to discussions held within it, compared with those without. The question, 'Tell us what you think, Ben,' cannot really be divorced from the setting in which it is asked. Of course Ben is thinking, he's human after all, but the degree to which he will share those thoughts is dependent upon whether he judges it is safe to do so or not.

The dynamics of the classroom is a fascinating science and one of the best texts I've found for this is Dornyei and Murphy's, *Group Dynamics of the Language Classroom* (2003), in which they suggest:

'In the early stages of a group's inception, pupils observe each other suspiciously, sizing up one another and trying to find a place in an unestablished and unstable hierarchy. They are on their guard, carefully monitoring their behaviour to avoid any lapses of social poise.'

What a marvelous way of putting it. But before this article becomes solely an academic piece (I often chuckle at the way 'academic' is used in discussions to describe an argument or view that has no practical value – and yet so much of school is 'academic', isn't it) can I suggest six tips for winking out those precious opinions from children.

1. Some years ago I wrote a book entitled *Tolerance and Empathy in Today's Classroom* and in it I suggested restructuring the classroom dynamic through drama. Imagined situations can be extremely useful because they afford children new roles in the group, helping to realign the usual

power sharing of the common classroom. Giving each child their own role in the fiction allows them to step outside themselves, and the group dynamic – to suspend their disbelief, as Dorothy Heathcote would say – and perform not quite so self-consciously, as the normal rules of who is confident, who is witty, who is quiet and who is dreamy in the group no longer apply. In the book, I suggest fifteen different role-playing scenarios that will



appeal to the children and provide a range of individual roles and character profiles for each scenario. I've always felt that drama can really help to reestablish group dynamics, redistribute power and equalize roles again.

2. Be mindful of the children's personal interests and talents. If Ben has a penchant for radio-controlled helicopters he is unlikely to remain silent during a debate on whether they should be banned from public parks. That's not to say each debate must be specifically designed to appeal to one pupil, but if one needs to choose a variety of discussion topics that

will appeal to children of a particular age, a good place to begin is their individual interests. It will allow the children to talk from personal experience, and this should help the words flow.

3. Whet the children's anticipation about the discussion a day or two before it takes place, to give them all a chance to find out about it and, dare I say, form an opinion on it, or at least a little nugget of information they can share.
4. From time to time, choose philosophical topics in which there can be more than one 'right answer'. This removes the fear of 'getting it wrong'. Ian Gilbert's *Little Book of Thunks* is a gem for this, and Martin Cohen's *Philosophy Problems* too. I've had many an engaging discussion with children over Gilbert's discussion prompt: 'If I walked into WH Smiths, picked up a magazine, read it, put it down and then walked out, is that theft?'

5. Once the discussion is under way, give the children thinking time – 'I'll just let you think about that for a couple of minutes before we begin talking.' And then try to allow some waiting time when someone is daring to answer. There is so often a perceived sense of urgency when

speaking in class – the teacher is waiting and so is everyone else – and this can be deadly to the nervous talker. Without the thinking and waiting time, answers will be more sound-bite than erudite, more one-liner than considered view.

6. Play quiet music during the thinking and talking times. I favour music of the Baroque period and I know there is much research to suggest that this is the optimum genre to get the little grey cells whirring. I also use instrumental guitar or piano music – Andy McKee is brilliant for this, or the cool jazz piano of the Bramwell Tovey Trio. Such music gives the feel of a café bar or restaurant in which talk is very much the norm, when there are plenty of families dining out together, and no one is judging you on what you say (apart from your father-in-law).

A quick story to close: A few years ago I heard Ewan McGregor interviewed on radio about his singing role in the film, *Moulin Rouge*. He was not known for his singing ability and the interviewer was keen to know how long he had spent in training. His answer was interesting: he said his singing coach told him quite simply to remove the perceived obstacles that were preventing him from singing and 'just sing'.

English is very much about removing perceived obstacles and letting the children's natural voices come through, whether it is in creative writing or class discussions. They have a voice and, if the environment is right, they'll soon tell you what they think.

Andrew Hammond is an author and trainer. He regularly delivers thinking and writing workshops to pupils and INSET training to teachers in prep schools across the UK.
www.andrewhammond.org



The importance of G

Brian Hays, Director of Co-Curriculum at Felsted Prep School, suggests why 'G' matters?

"Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of (our) possible mental resources...(people) the world over possess amounts of resource, which only exceptional individuals push to their extremes of use" (William James 1907). ...or in the words of the motto of the Round Square movement, Plus Est En Vous (More Is In You).

So, why do some people accomplish more than others? By what means do some people unleash all that is within them, whilst others don't? What can we do as educators to nurture the qualities that will help our pupils to succeed? The best documented predictor of achievement is general intelligence (g). Its influence can be used to predict school and university grades as well as future income. The correlation between IQ and these outcomes can be as high as $r = .6$, meaning that IQ may account for up to one third of the variance in some measures of success (Neisser et al, 1996).

Modern intelligence tests have been designed with Binet's original purpose in mind: to predict how well individual students are likely to perform in the classroom and similar situations. Studies repeatedly show that performance on intelligence tests is correlated with school achievement (N. Brody, 1997; Gustafsson & Undheim, 1996; Sattler, 2001). On average, children with higher IQ scores do better on standardised achievement tests, have higher school grades, and complete more years of

education. In other words, IQ scores often do predict school achievement, albeit imprecisely.

However, the life stories of Darwin, Einstein and other geniuses has led some people to dispute the assumption that high achievement derives directly from exceptional mental ability... "perseverance is at least as critical as intelligence...the most crucial inherent differences may be ones of temperament rather than of intellect as such" (Howe, 1999).

'Too stupid to learn anything'

Thomas Edison's teachers said he was "too stupid to learn anything." He was fired from his first two jobs for being "non-productive." As an inventor, Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. When a reporter asked, "How did it feel to fail 1,000 times?" Edison replied, "I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps." As a young man, Abraham Lincoln went to war a captain and returned a private. Afterwards, he was a failure as a businessman. As a lawyer in Springfield, he was too impractical and temperamental to be a success. He turned to politics and was defeated in his first try for the legislature, again defeated in his first attempt to be nominated for congress, defeated in his application to be commissioner of the General Land Office, defeated in the senatorial election of 1854, defeated in his efforts for the vice-presidency in 1856, and defeated in the senatorial election of 1858.

Winston Churchill repeated a grade during prep school and, when he entered Harrow, was placed in the lowest division of the lowest class. Later, he twice failed the entrance exam to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. He was defeated in his first effort to serve in Parliament. He became Prime Minister at the age of 62. He later wrote, "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never - in nothing, great or small, large or petty - never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never, Never, Never, Never give up."

This attitude is echoed by the 10,000-



The best documented predictor of achievement is general intelligence (g). Its influence can be used to predict school and university grades as well as future income

hours concept, somewhat disputed but familiar to many now. It can be traced back to a 1993 paper written by Anders Ericsson, a Professor at the University of Colorado, called *The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance*. This highlighted the work of a group of psychologists in Berlin, who had studied the practice habits of violin students in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. All had begun playing at roughly five years of age with similar practice times. However, at age eight, practice times began to diverge. By age 20, the elite performers had averaged more than 10,000 hours of practice each, while

the less able performers had only done 4,000 hours of practice. Malcolm Gladwell coined and popularised the term ‘the 10,000 hours rule’ in his best-selling book *Outliers*. Gladwell and Matthew Syed in his book *Bounce* have disputed what they call the talent myth, and highlighted the absolute importance of purposeful practice in pursuit of a long-term goal and the acceptance of failures as necessary to growth.

Perseverance and passion

What is it that differentiates children who give up and those who carry on practising, despite failure? A long-term, growth mindset is vital to creating an environment where they can thrive and stay driven. They need perseverance and passion, qualities that we now know as grit (for the purposes of this article, G). The foremost researcher in this field is Angela Duckworth, and her Ted Talks are well worth watching. She has found that G is at least as good an indicator of future achievement as intelligence, or ‘natural talent’. This quote from Duckworth summarises her research findings, and the significance of G, very well:

“One of the first studies that we did was at West Point Military Academy, which graduates about 25 percent of the officers in the U.S. Army. Admission to West Point depends heavily on the Whole Candidate Score, which includes SAT scores, class rank, demonstrated leadership ability, and physical aptitude. Even with such a rigorous admissions process, about

1 in 20 cadets drops out during the summer of training before their first academic year.

“We were interested in how well grit would predict who would stay. So we had cadets take a very short grit questionnaire in the first two or three days of the summer, along with all the other psychological tests that West Point gives them. And then we waited around until the end of the summer.

“Of all the variables measured, grit was the best predictor of which cadets would stick around through that first difficult summer. In fact, it was a much better predictor than the Whole Candidate Score, which West Point at that time thought was their best predictor of success. The Whole Candidate Score actually had no predictive relationship with whether you would drop out that summer (although it was the best predictor of later grades, military performance, and physical performance).

“Woody Allen once quipped that 80 percent of success in life is just showing up. Well, it looks like grit is one thing that determines who shows up.

“We’ve seen echoes of our West Point findings in studies of many other groups, such as National Spelling Bee contestants and first-year teachers in tough schools. Grit predicts success over and beyond talent. When you consider individuals of equal talent, the grittier ones do better”.

Singapore, often held up as an exemplary educational system, believes so strongly in the development of character that it





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So, what can we do in our schools to develop G? It seems as if we are already doing this very well within the independent sector

has just published a comprehensive syllabus for character and citizenship education, stating that “our education system must nurture Singapore citizens of good character so that everyone has the moral reserve to withstand an uncertain future...”

So, what can we do in our schools to develop G? It seems as if we are already doing this very well within the independent sector. The 2014 Character and Resilience Manifesto is the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility, and has been produced in collaboration with the CentreForum think-tank. It describes how character is developed within independent schools through exposure to a broad range of extracurricular activities, aided by access to significant resources such as playing fields.

The APPG argues that a belief in one’s ability to succeed, the perseverance to stick to a task and the ability to bounce back from life’s set-backs are qualities that have a major impact on life chances, both during education and, later, in the labour market. It calls for extracurricular activities to be made a formal aspect of teachers’ contracts of employment and for private schools to share with state schools their professional expertise and facilities that promote character and resilience.

Soft skills, hard results

Speaking on behalf of the parliamentary group, Baroness Claire Tyler said they had seen “clear evidence that what are often misleadingly called ‘soft skills’ actually lead to hard results. However many GCSEs you have, where you are on the character scale will have a big impact on what you achieve in life.”

Damian Hinds, the chairman of the APPG on Social Mobility said self-belief,

drive and perseverance were “key to achievement at school and at work. But they are not just inherent traits,” he has said, “they can be developed in young people”. Numerous research projects have found a clear correlation between playing sport and participating in extra-curricular activities and achievement at and beyond school, so the APPG have called upon the government to ask Ofsted to factor extra-curricular activities more explicitly into their inspection framework. In their recent report, *Going The Extra Mile*, Ofsted have acknowledged that “independent schools produce proportionally more elite athletes” and that “these schools are more effective at recognising, supporting and nurturing sporting talent than maintained schools and academies”. As all of us working in the independent sector will know, much of this happens in extra or co-curricular time. It seems ironic then that the DfE have called for ISI to follow the Ofsted inspection model, which takes no account of the co-curriculum when judging achievement!

At Felsted Prep School we offer a wide variety of extracurricular activities to our younger children, as many preparatory schools do. Our choices range from karate and judo to golf and chess and our children love their time in these activities. However, we may be a little different to some schools in that we encourage choice amongst our 9-11 year olds by offering a number of activities at the end of our extended school day, with the aim of developing a commitment in chosen activities. By the time our children are 12 and 13 we hope that many of them will be working hard at their chosen activities. We have more than our fair share of fun activity time with plenty of choice, but in Years 7 and 8 we are also able to organise a ‘Directed Activities’ session once a week, when we place children into activities that we know that they

already have a commitment to, and where there is no formal choice of activities by them or parents.

We have just started a research project, as part of the Cambridge University CAMStar research group, to measure Grit amongst our pupils and to gauge, over time, the effects of the Children’s University, a new initiative. It won’t be a surprise to hear that a small group of high-performing children selected for a case study displayed high levels of G on the Duckworth Grit Scale. As many other prep school children do, ours certainly Go The Extra Mile and the grit that they develop surely prepares them well for life’s challenges. A motto that we live by is Work Hard, Play Hard! and as a Round Square school we seek to carry out one of Kurt Hahn’s Seven Laws of Salem:

Give children opportunities for self-discovery. Every girl and boy has a “grande passion”, often hidden and unrealised to the end of life. The Educator cannot hope and may not try to find it out by psychoanalytical methods. It can and will be revealed by the child coming into close touch with a number of different activities.

But these activities must not be added as a superstructure to an exhausting programme of lessons. They will have no chance of absorbing and bringing out the child unless they form a vital part of the day’s work.

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Why do some children show a great talent and then go on to underachieve?

Paul Berry discusses the importance of psychological abilities in developing talent in children

Has competition within academic learning ever been more intense? In their quest to gain entry into top senior schools, children are subjected to ever more demanding exams and interviews, and it goes without saying that parents want the best for their children and will go to great lengths to optimize their potential. Media stories abound of tutoring companies furtively employed to this end. Yet the collateral damage of such competition and expectation is that anxiety and stress are pervasive in children.

A myopic focus on exam results, and academic performance in the present, is to attend disproportionately on the outcome rather than the process. This article discusses academic findings as to which factors distinguish those who 'make it' in various fields, from those who don't. Why do some children show great talent at an early age, yet go on to underachieve in life?

Talent development

As a society, we are fascinated by the concept of 'talent.' We talk about

those who are 'naturally clever' or 'gifted.' We admire, or at least envy, people who 'get things' quickly. Have you ever heard such admiration for a child who works hard? Working hard is a pejorative, patronising term. Ironically, to the extent that anyone is a natural, they are winners of the genetic lottery. Their giftedness is luck, outside of their control, so what is there to admire? Moreover, discussions of giftedness belie a misunderstanding of genetic development.

Genetics

When we argue children are naturally talented, either in academia, sports or the performing arts, we are implying that their talent is innate. They are born with it. This is based on a false premise. We are not born with a fixed genetic map. Rather, genes change as we age. This genetic expression is influenced by all aspects of our environment, especially our interaction with caregivers. Additionally, some genes lay dormant for many years, only to be 'turned on'

later in life. From the perspective of talent development, we may never know the limits of our true potential. The central point is how do we encourage the optimal expression of genes? A useful clue is examining how people achieve exceptional performance.

Exceptional performance

For many years, academics have sought to understand how people achieve exceptional performance. A seminal piece of research was a four-year study of Olympic swimmers, world-class tennis players, concert pianists, research mathematicians and neurologists. The aim was to understand how children developed from novices to elite status.

The study found a consistency across disciplines in how expertise was developed. The authors concluded; *"No matter what the initial characteristics of the individuals, unless there is a long and intensive process of encouragement, nurturance, education, and training the individuals will not*

attain extreme levels of capability in these particular fields.”

Along with other studies, it was found that children passed through distinct developmental phases during their maturation, from playful initiation in childhood to increased practice time and the perfection of skills as an adult. When young, children participated in activities purely for the joy and excitement. They enjoy instant gratification and are intrinsically motivated. As teenagers, they adopted a more serious achievement orientation, increasing their commitment. Individuals taking complete responsibility for their learning and development depicted the final stage.

Role of significant others

Families played a significant role throughout this multi-stage process. Initially, parents were supporting, offering positive reinforcement of their children, helping to stimulate their interest. The second stage involved parents making large sacrifices, as well as providing emotional and financial support. The last stage saw the influence of the family diminish, as their child matured and became more independent. More generally, studies have found that parents of committed individuals tend to espouse values related to achievement, hard work, success and being persistent.

Parental involvement can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand is the importance of parental modeling of positive values, attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, parental support is highly correlated to a child's enthusiasm and perceived levels of competence. Our self-belief is greatly influenced by the beliefs of significant adults. However, parental expectations can be a source of pressure and stress, interfering with a child's participation in an activity and reducing intrinsic motivation.

Displaying one's true potential requires the ability to transition successfully between different stages of development. Children who show potential when young are more likely

to optimize their talent if they can develop certain psychological abilities that help this transitional process.

These findings have been supported by a large amount of research in sport psychology exploring how to develop talent in young people. Performance levels at any given time are poor predictors of future achievement. More relevant is that those who achieve the most success seem to think and learn differently compared to others.

It is important therefore to distinguish between a child's performance and their capacity to develop. The latter is influenced by psychological factors that refer to both attitudes and effective learning strategies. Acquiring the ability to take control of one's learning, in addition to curiosity, persistence, confidence, and self-regulation are essential for high achievement.

How do psychological factors influence talent development?

As previously mentioned, once children pass through the 'playful' stage they enter a period characterized by intense, deliberate practice. This is a form of practice where a child is stressed to the edges of their abilities. It is relentless, and can be extremely tedious.

Committing to such practice requires a great deal of motivation. It is not surprising therefore, that high achieving individuals have been found to exhibit higher achievement motivation and more persistence than less successful people.

Furthermore, practicing at the edge of your ability often results in failure. There is nothing undesirable about failure. Indeed, it is a prerequisite for effective learning. However, failure can significantly reduce motivation. Consequently, resilience, or the ability to cope with setbacks, is another important factor in determining if children optimally develop their talent. In the words of Calvin Coolidge; *“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is*

more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

Finally, and critically, is the concept of metacognition. This is 'thinking about what one is thinking.' Within the context of a child's learning strategies, it refers to the ability to plan, monitor and reflect on how one is studying. Expert learners are skilled at adjusting their learning strategies when they are ineffective, serving to sustain motivation and increase their self-belief.

Conclusion

The danger in measuring an individual's academic performance is that we conflate performance with talent. The two are not synonymous, and the priority should be in helping children develop their potential.

For children to reach their potential they must develop specific psychological abilities such as commitment, motivation and resilience, which when combined with effective learning strategies, allow them to take advantage of opportunities afforded to them.

Perhaps most important is the application of these psychological abilities in other areas of life. Reaching one's potential is not just about achieving the highest academic grades and becoming an Investment banker, surgeon or barrister. It is about living a fulfilling life, enjoying rich and meaningful relationships and pursuing challenges without fear of failure and confident in our ability to cope whatever the outcome.

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A trip to france with real learning outcomes

Jane Garfield, Head of MFL at The Prebendal School, shares how overseas trips can be great teaching and learning.

This year I took our Year 7s to a French Language immersion centre for a week. It was fantastic. We stayed in a beautiful Château surrounded by rolling hills in the region of La Manche in Normandy. It is 90 minutes from Cherbourg and Caen, 15

minutes from Avranches, Villedieu-les-Poêles, the local beaches and the fishing port of Granville. Within the grounds of the Château are an orchard and cider-press, boule pitch, farmyard, a lake, a river, volleyball court, stables and a floodlit hard court sports area.

Having led several school trips to France to various places, this is by far the best place for many reasons.

The Château is all about French language immersion. The concept of a place where British pupils could go to experience French life,



and most importantly to really use their French, was thought up by Mr Lewis, Headteacher of Riverston School in England, who bought it in 1991. Prior to this, the Château had enjoyed a fascinating and dramatic history, from attempted murders and German occupation (you can still see red paint on some of the buildings) to its current transformation. He changed the stable blocks into one of the dormitory buildings, L'Ecurie, and completed many more works and renovations to the Château and the surrounding outbuildings, before setting it up as a language immersion centre in 1992. Twenty-two years later, it is now so successful, that schools book the same week year after year and new schools are lucky to get a slot.

The Château is all about French language immersion. Everything involves using practical spoken French to convey meaning, and the children are encouraged to speak French as much as possible. If they run out of bread or squash at mealtimes, it is

the children who have to go to the kitchen and ask for more in French. To do any of the activities, they must participate in French. The animateurs never utter a word of English and the friendly and supportive environment encourages pupils to have a go. This makes language learning very real for the pupils, and they realise it has a purpose. The classroom situation is always artificial to a certain extent. As a French teacher, 'language for purpose' is my philosophy and the Château more than lives up to this ideal.

There are many activities on offer both at the Château and off-site in the local towns and villages and to a certain extent, whilst activities and day trips are suggested, the trip leader is able to choose what their group does during the week – a bespoke programme! Each pupil also receives a workbook which they make good use of during the week. Each activity has a designated section and pupils are encouraged to complete the pages under the watchful eye of

the animateur before starting each activity. In this way, they have already met the key words and phrases required for the activity they are about to undertake. Our pupils took part in many daytime activities including bread-making, climbing, fencing, aeroball, circus skills, a very muddy assault course (a definite highlight), and fun French lessons, to name but a few. A full evening programme keeps the pupils entertained until 9pm each night. Activities range from campfires to team games, treasure hunts and a French themed evening where the children dress in French outfits and can even try 'escargots'.

All activities are run by fully-trained animateurs who have an excellent manner with the children and know how to get the best out of them. We chose to visit the D-Day landing beaches and the 360 degree cinema followed by a visit to Coleville-sur-mer where the American war cemetery is situated. Our animateur who led this trip was fantastic and extremely knowledgeable. We also visited a

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local market on the Friday morning where the pupils were able to try out not only their French but also their haggling skills!

At the end of the week, our pupils left having had an amazing time in a fun yet educational environment. They even asked if they could stay a second week! I have seen a dramatic improvement in their ability, confidence and willingness to speak French. They realised for themselves the practical benefits of learning a language and have been more motivated in lessons.

I put on a French Cheese & Wine Evening for the parents a couple of weeks after returning. The pupils led the evening, saying a few lines each from memory in French about the activities, with a backdrop of photos of the trip on a big screen. The parents commented on the willingness and confidence of their children to get up on the stage and speak French to a room full of people. The parents were also pleased to see photos of the trip, as often the most



they tend to get on asking, 'How was the trip?' is 'Fine'! Having paid over four hundred pounds, I thought they deserved some decent feedback with a glass of wine thrown in! They were very appreciative of our efforts.

I would definitely recommend Le Château de la Baudonnière in Normandy to any school considering

sending their pupils on a worthwhile and memorable trip to France. Year 7 pupils are perhaps too young to do the typical French exchange and yet this environment provides them with a real flavour of French daily life and culture. Alors, pourquoi pas?

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Collaboration for the iPad generation

Kate Pellereau, Head of Religious Studies at Swanbourne House School, explains how IT has influenced her teaching and her pupils' learning

In the 1940s, if someone had labelled me as someone who encouraged collaboration, it would have been an enormous insult. At that time, the only use of the term would have been to suggest assistance with the enemy during the last war. How things have changed! Within the Technology community this is one of the current buzzwords. On a recent Google in Education conference this was a big theme. I have lost track of the amount of articles I have read where new ways to collaborate within education are explained. If we take a moment to think about our teaching, I am sure we would realize that collaboration has become important. Perhaps we encourage it though group work, paired work or by setting homework where pupils are working together on a presentation for the rest of the class. A new way in which collaboration is becoming more possible is through our use of ICT.

Technology within education is an emerging market that even traditional private schools are starting to embrace. At my school we have iPads, laptops and two ICT rooms. We have not gone along the 1:1 route, preferring instead to educate staff in what they could be using in their classrooms, believing they are able to make the decision about what is relevant and useful for them. I am involved in this training, providing one to one sessions focused on the particular needs a teacher has. I have begun regularly attending lessons

with a few staff assisting them as they try to integrate ICT in their lessons, as well as running INSET sessions for staff. For me this has been a fascinating journey that began only in September, when 20 iPads appeared in my building. I picked one up, did some research, found some good apps and began using them. I teach Religious Studies, not a traditional subject to be linked with Tech. I found that as my understanding and knowledge of what was available grew, I was able to bring in easier ways to do things, and started having some wow lessons where pupils were engaged, excited and interested in what we were learning.

My experiences this year have led to some reflections on the role that Technology can have in a Prep School. I am not a teacher who believes that the lesson changes to fit the technology; instead my lessons are enhanced by what I am able to do. Using the technology is not the lesson, but is a part of the lesson that allows us to do more. We are able to collaborate; we are able to share, to question, to explore. Dare I say it; sometimes I am able to save time too!

What I like most is the fact that my pupils are able to learn from one another. In my view, the time where the only way to teach was to stand up at the front and recite information are gone. While didactic teaching can have its place, this is not the only way to learn. For myself, lessons are

a time when we come together to discuss a topic. Everyone can learn from everyone and often I find myself leaning on the table and saying 'gosh, I had not thought of that!' We do research together on iPads as we begin a topic, and then pull our ideas together. Or, I might set them a competition and they have to quickly find the answer to a question from the Internet. I am fortunate to have Apple TV in my classroom, which is invaluable for this. With older children if we are trying to work out how to answer a particular Common Entrance question I might set up a Padlet wall and they log onto it and offer a response. After everyone has contributed we can look through and together decide which are the strongest. Being able to learn from one another encourages a positive working environment, and setting internet challenges teaches research skills. Those who might not have the confidence to put their hand up during a question and answer session might gain the confidence they need to speak from the knowledge their answer comes from the Internet.

The second reason I think the use of Technology is important is because it engages the pupils. Everyone in our school loves a lesson when they are using iPads. My year 7s have just completed a piece of coursework using Google Drive where they have shared their work with me and I have been able to make live comments on it; highlighting different sections that



I was not happy with and making suggestions for improvements. They've been able to research easily, import pictures easily and even cite their sources easily. Another class enjoyed making presentations after visiting different places of cultural significance from around the world using the Google Cultural Institute. Our year 3s have made Popplet mind maps about what they think Jesus is like after choosing and importing a picture they liked from the internet. For these children, technology is normal. Many of those I teach are fortunate enough to own a tablet and they will sit at home doing all kinds of cool things on them. What I want to do is bring that sense of wow into the lessons. I try to teach how the children want to learn; for a tech savvy generation that means bringing in use of ICT. A nine-year-old boy was claiming recently that our lesson had been too fun for him to learn anything; all I had done was to create a tour builder using Google earth, which took you through the various stages of Hajj for a Muslim. I

love bringing the sense of WOW to my lessons. My year 5s had really enjoyed being able to experience this journey from the sky and they had a really good understanding of the amount of distance covered.

My final benefit for the use of ICT is the time saving it can offer staff. This I had not fully anticipated, but have very much been reaping the benefits of. The coursework already mentioned usually fills the entire Summer term, with some pupils catching up during the holidays. This has not happened this year. All of them are finished and the reason for this is the swift responses I have been able to make to their work through our use of Google Apps. Other time saving comes through simple apps that we use to make posters for our display boards. Or a member of staff might set up a quiz online which self marks and then the results are emailed to the teacher for them to input in their mark book.

Something I have recently been trying out has been personalized work for lower ability pupils. Using iPads I am

able to set them a worksheet that has been changed to suit their learning needs. If they struggle to write, sometimes completing this on an iPad is extremely profitable as their typing speed might be quicker than their writing speed. On the whole they enjoy this, and it boosts their confidence to not always be the last to finish a task. The proficiency they have with ICT means that for once they might be the ones able to help a neighbour, rather than always having to ask for assistance themselves.

It is clear to me that technology is not going to go away. Companies constantly bring new software into the market for schools to use and it is the role of a teacher to find what works for them. But I hope this short explanation of some of the benefits I have found will go some way to encourage exploration if you are beginning to think about it, or give you some good ideas if you are already embracing it.

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More and more adults and children are left feeling overwhelmed and strung out, it's a modern day illness which is hitting the developed world

OK, so I've been teaching for a while now, I'm not close to retirement or anything like that, but in 15 years I've seen a lot of initiatives come and go. But how many of these things, which seemed so urgent for our schools to implement at the time, are still in place? How many have proved themselves necessary to every child's development? It seems to me that there are a lot of 'band aid' type fixes going on, but nothing sufficiently radical enough to get us off onto a new foot to deal with the crazy ass world that our children are going to be part of when they leave our sanctum. So, let's look at the facts. Our current educational model was established in the late 1800s and early 1900s to feed factories with a skilled labour force. Schools were modelled largely on the factory production line system; a one-mould-fits-all approach in which the students were rigorously checked and tested until they were either employable in a useful trade or fit for further education. I firmly believe that education for every child is the bedrock of society, but has pedagogy really developed radically enough since the inception of our system to match the changes in society? We have moved from steam to mega-bytes, from analogue to digital and into a world of prolific information overload. The strains and stresses that were felt by young students in the early 1900s, and even from those just twenty years ago, are so far removed from those of today that it's justifiable to say that we are teaching in an entirely different world.

Statistics from the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) last December reported that modern childhoods are becoming increasingly stressful, blaming factors such as cyber-bullying, social media, a rise in family break-ups and overzealous school-

testing. Sadly, they reported that in the UK 80,000 children are estimated to suffer from severe depression, and of these a staggering 8,000 are below 10 years old. So where are we going wrong? As Matthew Jenkinson eloquently outlined in issue 79 of *Prep School Magazine*, what we are going through is a 'crisis of purpose'. He cited Alexander Astin's cross-sectional research, which suggests that in the 1960s there was more of a desire to find fulfillment and purpose in life compared with the late 1990s, where being financially well off was seen as "essential". And this was 14 years ago! The world still had 7 years to wait until the release of the first iPhone and the explosion of mobile technology. Now, more people in the UK access the web via their mobile devices than they do via a computer, spending an average of 42 hours a month on the internet from mobile devices (source: Nielsen). This might not sound too bad but when you factor in the 130 hours of TV and the other 29 hours on the internet from a PC, it's easy to see why the average person in Britain feels more pushed for time and more stressed than they ever have. This was supported in Ofcom's recent headline-grabbing study, which revealed that people are spending more time online and using multi-media devices than they are sleeping. If the statistics are correct, people are spending over a week every month looking at a screen. And how long until the devices upon which we are so dependent for our daily information fix become obsolete? Looks like you might have to forgo that holiday that you desperately need if you're going to get the kids that latest console this Christmas.

More and more adults and children are left feeling overwhelmed and strung out, it's a modern day illness which is hitting the developed world; in fact

that's exactly the point Oliver James makes in his excellent book *Affluenza*. The sad fact is that our education system is in the perfect place to stop all this madness, but it has yet to step up and take some responsibility. Through this passivity we are as much to blame for the poor standards in our youth's mental health as the merchandise pushers, the reality TV show role models, the social media and the gadget and the app stores that keep pumping out the information deluge in which we are all floundering for head space. How can children possibly pay attention in class when modern society forces their attention to be constantly fractured? We should be prioritising the teaching of the life skills needed to swim above the strong current of mass distraction and engineered consumer dissatisfaction in order to give our children the opportunity to make their own decisions from a place of centeredness and well-being.

If you're still reading, thank you, because this is the crux of what I'm trying to say: our current system teaches the pursuit of perfection, but to benefit our children and society as a whole we need to teach the pursuit of presence.

A mindful solution?

Dr. Daniel Siegel, is a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and an expert on the topic of mindfulness. For over a decade he has campaigned for educational reform in order to include the three 'R's of: Reflection, Relationships and Resilience. As a leading biological neuro-scientist, his research has extrapolated that our brain is comprised of two very different circuits: one deals with the physical world (this is the side that education feeds into), and the other side deals

with the mind (the mind in this sense means our sense of consciousness, our sense of self, our attention, and our relationships to others). Dr. Siegel believes that schools are “imprisoning the brain” by not teaching children the skills of reflection and attentional control. His research has shown that the way in which we use our attention can effect the physical structure of the brain. Moreover, the more integrated these different neurological structures become, the more resilient and more emotionally intelligent the child will become. To achieve this we need to teach the mind, through the training of attention, with as much vigour and emphasis as we give to the more ‘concrete’ skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. His research shows that children who have had some form of mindfulness training before adolescence have more resilience and a better sense of well-being during adolescence than those who did not. A secondary effect of this improved resilience is, not too surprisingly, an improvement in academic performance and social development. In other words, after mindfulness training, kids do better at school, are happier in themselves, are kinder to one another at school and go on to be kinder and more productive members of society. Not a bad thing to look at including in mainstream education, if you ask me.

So why aren't we taking mindfulness more seriously in education? Perhaps it's the perceived airy-fairyness of it all; no self-respecting academic institution has got time for such new age-hippie, sandal wearing nonsense, has it? Or is it just that we don't know how to quantify it? What sub-level do I give

good focus and discipline of attention? The fact is, while we're trying to make excuses for paying no heed to the research and the obvious benefits, we are being left behind. At the start of last year the NHS began to prescribe Mindfulness-Cognitive Based therapy (MCBT) for a range of mental health conditions, due to its low cost and high success rate (it's worth noting that mental disorders and depression in particular are the single most expensive cost in the NHS). And we can prevent this by teaching children the resilience they need through simple mindfulness practices. But it's not just about alleviating disease and illness. The improvements in productivity and well-being of mindfulness practitioners make it something that businesses are taking seriously. So much so that Google, Apple, Ebay, IBM, General Mills and KPMG, to name but a few, have all invested in mindfulness training programmes for their staff because of the noticeable benefits: increased productivity, improved health and well-being and the observation that staff were noticeably kinder to each other after starting the programme. And so I ask again, why aren't we taking mindfulness more seriously in education? Everyone else is. New findings in the field of biological neuroscience are telling us that we should take these apparently simplistic practises very seriously.

The brainy bits

It's an established fact in neuroscience that the repetitive and prolonged practice of skills generates new neural pathways and connections. The plasticity of the brain is evident in the hippocampus of London taxi drivers

(the area responsible for memory and recall), which is much larger than average due to constant use and training. The same development has been shown in the increased number of nerve clusters in the corpus callosum of children who take up a stringed instrument from an early age. So what has all this got to do with mindfulness training? Dr. Siegel's research has shown that mindfulness training develops the neural pathways of the middle-prefrontal cortex, an area responsible for a wide range of higher thinking skills. It's nine main functions are:

1. Body Regulation (heart rate, respiration and digestion)
2. Emotional Balance (able to regulate emotional responses)
3. Response Flexibility (the ability to be able to pause before responding reactively)
4. Empathy (to be able to attune to another's state of mind)
5. Self-knowing (able to relate past and present events of self to predict the future)
6. Awareness
7. Fear Extinction (can suppress fear response of the amygdala, if it's deemed unhelpful)
8. Intuition
9. Morality

With such a clear list of benefits for the classroom, and surely society as a whole, the education system needs to drag itself out of the early 1900s and face the fact that we cannot continue to teach from such a limited model. Yes literacy and numeracy are important, but of equal importance are a child's

So why aren't we taking mindfulness more seriously in education? Perhaps it's the perceived airy-fairyness of it all; no self-respecting academic institution has got time for such new age-hippie, sandal wearing nonsense has it?

sense of well-being, mental health and the ability to contribute positively with patience and acceptance of others in an increasingly overcrowded world.

Why it works

Mindfulness training simply means to train the muscle of our attention. A useful analogy to use with primary aged children is that our attention is like a young puppy that's got a lot of energy and just doesn't know what to do with it. Sometimes the puppy will do as you say, but more often than not you'll catch it chewing at the chair leg or tearing apart your favourite trainers. Children can relate to the need for firm but fair guidance in order to train the hypothetical puppy. The fact is, as adults we have let our puppies grow into stubborn creatures of habit that very rarely do as we'd like. We are no longer doing battle with puppies but with dinosaurs! These beasts make decisions on our behalf while we wander blissfully unaware in our own thoughts, listening to our internal dialogue as it skitters from the sublime to the ridiculous. Our attention needs constant training, whether we are adults or children, and it's the will that drives the attention. It's disciplining the will that is the training.

Some exercises to try

When we practise mindfulness all we are really doing is training the lens of our attention to turn away from our thoughts (our rampaging monkey mind or 'puppy dog') to which we are habitually focused, and instead to focus our attention on the body with a narrow focus of attention. By doing this we leave our head space and enter our body space. Sounds easy right? The following exercises are a mixture of mindfulness based practises that I learnt during my time in Asia. They are slow moving practises that I have found children respond well to. Try the following exercises, yourself first, and then with your class. Each exercise can flow straight into the next one, but I usually start by teaching them all separately first.

1) Sit or stand with legs shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent if standing. Arms should be outstretched but

relaxed with a slight bend at the elbow; palms of the hands facing each other and about 2-3 inches apart. Start the exercise by rapidly rubbing the palms of the hands together until warm, clap hands together and then stop. Keep your hands slightly apart and notice the sensations in the palms of the hands, stay with the sensations (mentally label them if you wish eg. warm, buzzing, pins and needles, fizzing etc). Now you're going to keep your attention fixed between the palm of your hands and very slowly breath in. As you do, raise your hands up. When you reach a full inhalation stay with the sensation in your palms for a moment and then exhale lowering the hands. Upon exhalation, keep focused on the centre of the palms. Repeat this three times (when I'm with a class I ask them to go at their own pace). How long until your mind began to wander? *This is ridiculous... I can't feel anything... my arms ache... what's for dinner?* Gently come back to the practise and observe the body sensations.

2) With attention focused on the centre of your palms (2-3 inches apart from previous exercise) breath in and pull palms away from each other, then breath out and bring palms back together. Notice the sensations. Repeat three times.

3) With attention focused on the centre of your palms (2-3 inches apart from previous exercise) keep the left hand fixed and slowly circle the facing right hand while maintaining the distance. Move the hands as if you're rolling a small ball between them. Repeat several times then stop with hands still and notice the sensations between the palms. Then repeat with the other hand, keeping the right hand fixed and circling the left hand.

4) After any stage of these above mindfulness practises, bring your hands up to your closed eyes and observe the sensations on your face with the palms of your hands just a few inches away.

The exercises above are very good for getting children to focus their attention on the breath and movement in the body. From here I would teach more classic mindfulness practises

such as observing the passage of breath through the nostrils. In this case, remind the children that we are 'puppy training' and our attention will wander off and will not always do as we'd like. We have to gently bring our attention back to the sensations of the air coming into the nostrils and out. Every time it wanders we bring it back. It's important we do this without being judgemental (with an inner smile), we shouldn't get angry at ourselves or at our 'new puppy'. The training takes time. I would start the first session at five minutes for younger children and 10 minutes for KS2, and build up from there. The most important element of all these sessions is the feedback and reflection upon the practise afterwards. You will notice an incredible atmosphere of space in the children's thoughts, it's a new and strange phenomena to most of them. Some mistake it for sleepiness but then realise that their mind is wide awake. I always find it good to invite open discussion about the sensations they might have felt or the thoughts that kept popping up in their head and 'distracting their puppy'.

The exercises are deceptively simple but we must not fall into the trap of thinking that complex problems need ever more complex solutions. Imagine if you could enjoy more day to day moments in your life and work by simply being more present in what you are doing. Imagine if you could teach this skill to your school. The Mindfulness in Schools Project is doing a wonderful job in this regard (www.mindfulnessinschools.org). Well-being and happiness can be learnt, just like any skill, but requires discipline and practise. How much longer are we going to keep doing the same thing over and over again in schools and hope that something different will happen (this is Einstein's definition of insanity). It's time for a radical change with three new 'R's.

"The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently."
Pema Chödrön, When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times

Using checklists to improve teaching and learning

The start of a new year, academic or calendar, is the ideal moment for you to consider the necessary improvements you wish to make in your prep school, says Paul K Ainsworth

I read the following tweet in January: 'I don't make resolutions, I make goals and then I achieve them.'

There is a sense of hyperbola in this statement but at its heart, the concept of targets (goals) rather than wishes (resolutions) is certainly one that is worth considering. Firstly, what are your goals for the new academic year? Secondly, how do you ensure these are tackled consistently by your staff?

Effective teaching and pupil progress

Mine has often been simple: I want the quality of teaching and learning in my school to be as high as possible. I expect to see the pupils going from one good lesson to another good lesson, every day of every week. If this goal is achieved, there will also be excellent lessons delivered. Pupils who receive the most 'Good' lessons make the most progress. I was struck by a sentence in the introduction to the Sutton Trust report, 'Testing teachers: What works best for teacher evaluation and appraisal' which linked teacher quality to learning gains: 'One year under the supervision of an excellent teacher is worth 1.5 years' of learning compared to 0.5 years with poorly performing teachers.' That is an amazing statistic and one that we must place at the heart of our schools.

(www.suttontrust.com/public/documents/teacherevaluationreport.pdf)

'Creating the climate'

In most prep schools there is the expectation of the very best behaviour from pupils, and as a result research on behaviour management is not always looked at. A few years ago there was an excellent piece of work on behaviour by Charlie Taylor, the government's behaviour czar. He proposed using checklists to ensure that teachers work through a set of instructions to improve pupil behaviour. (www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-behaviour-in-schools-checklist-for-teachers)

It was assumed that Charlie Taylor's idea came from the pre-flight checks that airline pilots conduct prior to every flight, an example of professionals being committed to following a checklist. The idea of cockpit checklists did help to inspire this work, but it was a surgeon who brought it to public attention.

Atul Gawande's checklist manifesto

Atul Gawande is an American surgeon and chairman of Lifebox, an international not-for-profit organisation implementing systems and technologies to reduce surgical

deaths globally. He was concerned that too many patients seemed to suffer serious complications in the days after an operation and realised that many of these problems were caused by operating staff failing to follow basic procedures. It seems squeamishly unbelievable to read of surgeons failing to wash their hands and causing an infection, or surgical teams not accounting for all the swabs used during an operation and them being left in a patient's body.

Gawande developed a checklist to be read out before each operation to ensure that all of the simple, but essential, procedures were followed, resulting in a marked decrease in patients becoming seriously ill or dying after surgery. Gawande then collected a range of ideas from spheres as wide as Walmart's response to Hurricane Katrina, and the real reason why David Lee Roth used to demand that there be a bowl of M&M's with all the brown ones removed in his dressing room backstage and used these in his book *The Checklist Manifesto*. (atulgawande.com/book/the-checklist-manifesto)

Charlie Taylor adapted this concept to help schools improve behaviour. He created a menu of ideas for schools and suggested school staff should decide on their priorities for

improving behaviour before creating a bespoke checklist of five to ten essential actions to promote good behaviour. Teachers run through the checklist first thing in the morning and again after lunch to ensure the correct preparations are in place, serving as a reminder of what needs to be done and ensures consistency across the school.

Checklists for teaching and learning

The idea of a checklist may seem too simple, but managing a class, let alone a prep school, is a complex operation involving up to 20 pupils, sometimes two or three adults and a range of resources, probably as many variables as there are in an operating theatre. Hence, it can be easy to forget to get the simple, but essential, things right. After all, who would have believed patients died in hospitals because staff failed to wash their hands properly? In addition, in prep schools, many teachers are the only specialist in their subject, so can be teaching in isolation. Rather than developing a checklist for behaviour, why not create a teaching and learning checklist to develop consistent strong practice. In your school, what would this checklist look like? It needs to be short and concise but cover the basics of what every teacher need to do. Something that can be checked at the start of the day and the start of each lesson. A checklist for 'good' teaching and learning could look like this:

1. Plan lessons that are differentiated, preferably with three levels (less able, core, more able), allowing pupils to show progress
2. Clearly define and share learning objectives, preferably three
3. Meet and greet pupils outside the classroom
4. Look for opportunities to reward and praise pupils
5. Use the school behaviour policy when necessary
6. Ensure homework is set according to the timetable and is recorded in planners



7. Provide pupils with feedback every four lessons

Like Gawande's checklist for surgeons, such a checklist for classroom teaching and learning should not be written in tablets of stone. Indeed the seven points above are not purporting to be perfect but could give a starting point for your teachers to stay on track. Interestingly, one senior leader read this and commented, 'but I do this in every lesson,' my reply was, 'yes and that's why you always deliver good lessons'.

As well as being a Head, Paul is the author of *The Senior Leader's Yearbook: A handbook for developing outstanding school systems*. His other books include *Developing a Self-Evaluating School* and *Get that Teaching Job*.

Top tips to get schoolchildren more active

In an effort to reduce the risk of developing serious illnesses later in life, experts recommend that children aged 5-18 years should be physically active for at least one hour a day. At school, there are endless opportunities to help promote increased activity for children. Jamie Makopa, Sports Science Specialist at Sovereign, shares his advice



“In England, 28% of children under the age of 16 are overweight or obese. This is a high percentage that could be reduced if youngsters engaged in the recommended levels of physical activity. In fact, sixty minutes of exercise on a daily basis could help children to not only maintain a healthy weight, but improve their cardiovascular and bone health, self-confidence and social skills.

While evenings and weekends provide children with the leisure time they need to take part in sports and proactive play; schools can support pupils in keeping active and maintaining healthy lifestyles with the following top tips:

- Encourage children to take part in group exercise during playtime. Games like ‘Stuck in the Mud’ and ‘What’s the time Mr Wolf?’ are ideal activities to help youngsters get active with their peers.
- Promote vigorous activity such as running, jumping and climbing activities, combined with the use of play equipment. Hopscotch and rope skipping are also simple bone-strengthening activities that can be easily encouraged in the playground.
- Influence children to get active with team sports, such as netball and rounders, which influence teamwork and rule adherence.
- Walking to and from school provides moderate aerobic activity. Inform parents of the benefits, particularly as a survey by DfT found that nearly half (44%) of primary school children are driven to school, with only 2% cycling.
- Support cognitive growth, balance and hand-eye coordination by installing adventure trail components like the ‘Tyre Step’ and ‘Shimmy Ropes’, which can also be used for football and netball training sessions and other teacher-led activities.
- Allow break-time activities where children can use equipment such as tennis balls, skipping ropes and Frisbees.
- Encourage concerted exercise by setting up an after-school mini boot camp that uses existing play facilities as a circuit.
- Organise sponsored challenges such as an assault course or activity trail and raise money for school funds. Get parents involved for added fun!
- Praise children when they are exercising and provide achievable challenges to give them the motivation to do it more often.

For more help on getting children active or advice on choosing play equipment for your outdoor environment, visit sovereignplayequipment.co.uk or call 01702 291129 for a free consultation.”



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Inspiring a love of reading

Dan Freedman, author of the Jamie Johnson series, has used his experience as a journalist to create a series of books for kids about football and shares how he is inspired by reluctant readers



My journey has taken me from a schoolboy who, like so many, preferred to play sport – in particular football - rather than read books or write; to someone who quickly learnt the value of using my passion to inspire others to pick up books, enjoy them and even use them as an inspiration for writing themselves.

At about the age of fifteen I realised that, although a decent footballer, I didn't quite have it to turn professional and make a living by playing the sport I love. So, after a lot of work and with a degree in English, I managed to secure myself the next best job

imaginable ... resident journalist for the Football Association. I was with the FA for seven years, working with the England Football Team including on two World Cup Tours and having the privilege of interviewing and getting to know top players such as David Beckham, Rio Ferdinand, Wayne Rooney, Steven Gerrard, to name but a few. During this time, I noticed a lack of good football based children's novels and started to consider how I could change this. I put my knowledge and experience to good use to write the Jamie Johnson series, eight books telling the story of a boy many kids can relate to who has an incredible

dream, a dream he aspires to achieve and with hard work and determination finally does achieve. Whilst writing my first book, *The Kick Off*, I was still working with the FA and travelling with the England team. One evening I left a copy of the manuscript with Rio Ferdinand. The next morning at breakfast, I couldn't help myself, I had to ask him if he had looked at it, and his reply made me realise Jamie Johnson's story could very well be a success: "I wish there had been books like that when I was a kid".

When not writing, I spend my time mostly in schools. My aim is always to use my knowledge and my experiences to inspire our young people, not only to enjoy reading and writing but to also have the determination to fulfil their own personal dreams – just like me and JJ - to know that we may have to make changes along the way, but it is still possible to achieve them!

Reading for Pleasure is something that remains high on the Government's agenda and is a strong focus in schools right now, but isn't this something we should always and quite naturally desire for the children we all live with, work with or teach? Reading is the key to all things, it

I think we would all accept that it is easier to learn something we enjoy, and to also learn *from* things we enjoy and can relate to



enables us to acquire knowledge and learn, whether this is subject specific, out of personal interest or for sheer pleasure. As we know, many remain reluctant and it can sometimes seem an uphill struggle to turn this around.

I think we would all accept that it is easier to learn something we enjoy, and to also learn *from* things we enjoy and can relate to. I am frequently told of the success schools have in inspiring reluctant readers and writers who love football, through the use of my books which are football based ...but also those who have never considered themselves football fans but appreciate and enjoy a real life story. It may seem very obvious, but when you find yourself working with reluctant readers I would suggest investing a little time away from books, talking to them about what they like and enjoy the most, what their passions are, their hopes, dreams and aspirations. Support them to engage with the right type of text ... not just the right 'level' but the right subject ... something of real interest to them that they will truly want to read. Don't feel you always have to use books: whether they read on the computer, magazines *etc*, if it gets them reading, it's working, and will lead into all sorts of reading material eventually. As someone who

used to write football programmes for the FA, I loved to hear the story of a boy who refused to read – hated books - but like me, loved football. His teacher would ask him to occasionally tidy the class reading corner where there was, quite conveniently, a pile of football programmes. He couldn't help himself and would pick them up to flick through, then start to ask questions about the content. The rest, as they say, is history: the programmes hooked him and with the right support from his teacher and class TA his curiosity to learn more lead him to want to read books, fiction and non-fiction. These were initially about the sport he loved but this quickly made him realise he could actually enjoy doing the same for other topics too. The reluctant reader became a quite avid reader.

As an author, hearing of such success stories means so much. I always share with the pupils I meet that I consider them to be my bosses – fact – without them and their enjoyment of my books there would be no point in my writing them. One of my bosses came to me after I had given a talk in his school and simply said, "I don't like reading, but I saw one of your books in the library. I read it and it was alright". Only a few words, but with so much meaning.

By inspiring readers in your school you inspire writer: the two surely go hand in hand. You will, of course, all be aware that the more your pupils read the wider their knowledge of becoming writers themselves becomes. Their interest can be further encouraged and maintained through your libraries, book clubs and visitors to your schools. I have witnessed excellent practice in the many schools I have had the pleasure of visiting over recent years.

Dan Freedman is author of the Jamie Johnson series of football based novels, suitable for 7-14 year olds.

He delivers a range of talks and workshops to pupils in primary schools and secondary schools including Big Talks about his amazing experiences when working with the FA and Jamie Johnson writing workshops; as well as working with GCSE and A level students on journalism and the role of the media in sport.

For details email Dan on dan@danfreedman.co.uk.
www.DanFreedman.co.uk

Reading matters

Margaret White, Director of Studies at St Faith's, Cambridge, considers what it means to teach pupils to 'read well'

'I came to see that Mr Dickens and Mr Wordsworth were thinking of men like me when they wrote their words. But most of all I believe William Shakespeare was. Mind you, I cannot always make sense of what he says, but it will come.' So wrote the character Eben Ramsay in Mary Ann Shaffer's delightful novel *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*. He was explaining how he, a fisherman, who came from a line of 'tombstone cutters and carvers – lamb a speciality' had developed a love of reading through his membership of the ad-hoc society.

Despite the numerous cultural, technological and educational changes of recent decades, the value of reading as part of education would seem to be both unchallenged and unchallengeable, certainly at present, and probably for the foreseeable future. Reading is seen as an absolute essential, an irreplaceable, foundational component of education, while a life-long love of reading remains an aspiration for a cultured, civilised society.

Schools have a duty and responsibility to respond to these rightful aspirations, and it is essential that we have great clarity of thought and purpose when it comes to something as important as the teaching of reading. In a good school, this will take a threefold manifestation: teachers will be absolutely clear on how to teach children to read, because they are absolutely clear on why we teach children to read, which in turn reflects

a clearly articulated vision of what it means to read well, the ultimate goal in our teaching of reading. Such a vision of teaching children to read extends well beyond the pre-prep years and finds rich fruition in the upper years of prep school.

To start at the beginning, of course in the earliest years, the swift and secure acquisition of the foundational skills required to decode the written word into a sound is essential. Naturally, not all children find the acquisition of decoding skills equally easy, for a variety of reasons. Helping every child win this battle is an absolute priority. If a child is struggling to learn to read, additional teaching support must be put in place. This may come from trained classroom assistants or qualified members of a Learning Support Department, both being invaluable in providing additional one-to-one support and specific expertise.

It is clear too that while school will provide the tools for a child to read, the value of home-school partnership in developing and honing their use is inestimable. Encouraging their children as they learn to read is not only a great gift parents can give their children, but it also is one of the greatest pleasures afforded to parents themselves. The minutes spent each day when children and parents share a book together are precious beyond measure, from the first sharing of a picture book or parents reading to children, to the gradual emergence of children being able to read to their

parents, leading to the sharing of story books and, eventually perhaps, to the great joy of comparing notes on a favourite novel.

Only the beginning

The acquisition of decoding skills is merely the start: reading accuracy, with associated fluency and meaningful expression, is essential but only the beginning. The purpose of reading is greater than simple transference of symbol to sound, however accurate, fluent and expressive. Understanding of text – comprehension – is also of key importance to learning, and is therefore an essential part of teaching children to read.

The most simple, but nonetheless essential, purpose of reading is for information retrieval, and this is the first element of comprehension which needs to be taught. Children need to read in order to learn: accessing information through reading is an essential skill for every aspect of academic study as well as for participating fully in daily life. Children therefore need to learn, as rapidly and securely as possible, how to find and use information from a text and to apply this skill with equal confidence and competence across every classroom discipline.

A second equally essential element of comprehension is inference – being able to draw meaning as well as information from a text. Inference includes being able to draw on ideas

Understanding the written word, whether via websites or text books, remains the gateway to learning



expressed in different parts of a text, and make a deduction from their synthesis. Inference also includes accessing ideas which are implicit rather than explicit, such as being able to interpret, extrapolate, and analyse, again, across all disciplines. Inferential reading extends to an understanding of figurative language: being able to make sense of simile, metaphor, irony, caricature, understatement, hyperbole, to understand the authorial intent. And so, just as important as the teaching of decoding, is the teaching of comprehension. Understanding the written word, whether via websites or text books, remains the gateway to learning, and so these comprehension skills must be consciously, regularly, and rigorously taught, using a wealth and variety of age-appropriate texts, with progress being objectively measured term on term and year on year.

Even this, though, suggests a certain sterility, a myopic view of reading, inadequate to be a sufficient expression of what it means to read well. A strong English Department will be passionate about the teaching of reading not just for decoding, information retrieval and understanding of a text, but for

the personal pupil development of both intellect and character. Emily Dickinson famously wrote:

*A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.*

What is it that makes Dickinson's 'dead' words come alive? The answer surely lies in the personal response of the listener or reader. To read well is to go beyond the sound and even the meaning of the words, and to respond to texts intelligently – both intellectually and emotionally – and as a result grow in maturity.

Raging debate

Debate may – and does – rage about exactly what pupils should be reading in school and whether all texts are of equal value. It would seem clear that if the purpose of reading literature is to develop both the intellect and character, mind and soul, then texts to be read in school should be chosen with utmost thought and care for that purpose, since some will inevitably serve that purpose better than others.

In choosing reading material for study, whether novels, plays or poems, teachers must consider closely whether the quality and sophistication of a text are such that it will promote the fullest of intellectual and emotional responses, and maximise opportunity to develop pupils' own use of language.

Literature must also be chosen with the appropriate level of challenge and ambition. A class may read a short story or novel, haiku or epic poetry, a miniature or a masterpiece, but maximum learning takes place when there is just the right amount of stretch for the individual or class. When perfectly judged, the experience of reading material which is just within reach of our fingertips if we stretch to the full, is both exhilarating and hugely enjoyable. This is the aspiration of a strong English Department, as text choices are made which respond most closely to the diverse needs of individual pupils, classes and year groups. As a teacher, witnessing pupils becoming utterly engrossed in a novel, begging for another chapter to be read, or passionate in their exploration of a new-found poem, is a privilege and joy.

October is Read to Feed month

Get your class reading and give a future to hungry kids in Africa

This October to co-incide with **World Food Day**, **Eradication of Poverty Day** and **Children's Book Week** we are asking kids in the UK to get sponsored for every book, chapter or page they read. Read to Feed is a simple, sponsored reading scheme to raise cash for Send a Cow to help kids in Africa have a healthier future.



As pupils read more books, they improve their reading ability and raise money through sponsorship, helping more and more families receive life-changing gifts of livestock, seeds and training.



"It boggles the mind to think children can travel around the globe through books - and actually change the lives of people in Africa by doing it. I can think of no better way to turbo-charge children's motivation to read"

Alastair Humphreys
British Adventurer, Author and Blogger

"I've seen what Send a Cow can do, first hand. It can rewrite the story of people's lives. But even more importantly, it teaches them how to do it for themselves. That takes a truly creative vision"

Rachel Campbell-Johnston
Writer and The Times journalist



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Variety is an essential: pupils can read great literature that spans the centuries and the continents, written in English or read in translation, written by men and written by women; they read humour and nonsense, satire and speeches. In doing so, they will learn to move with enjoyment and increasing confidence from Beowulf to Bradbury via Belloc and Blackman.

Reading well develops intelligence by fostering critical thinking skills. A Year 7 class, for example, reading Macbeth, grapple with ideas of ambition, greed, power, truth and justice. They will question, debate and reason together, drawing on fictional episodes to support their assertions. At the same time, they learn the value of a 'play' – that these great themes can be 'played out' in the sphere of the imagination, rather than in reality.

At a similar age, they may be found reading Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and thus develop insights into responsibility, the consequences of our actions and our relationships with our fellow human beings and the natural world.

Literature is a place of experiment, where great and small actions and events resulting in profound consequences and soaring emotions can be experienced vicariously, safely, but nonetheless vividly.

As a result, reading well also fosters empathy. Denise Levertov's poetry of place such as *Settling* or Fleur Adcock's *Immigrant* encourage pupils to think about rootedness and alienation; Heaney's poetry will similarly encourage pupils to think about the sense of belonging, and develop empathy for those who feel torn between their heritage and their future.

Reading such poetry, pupils develop a sense of awe at the impact of language, and the devastating – or exhilarating – power of the word. Responses to such rich literature seem almost effortlessly to feed the imagination in such a way as to foster a rich creativity. Pupils' own writing is often lifted to an entirely new level: the heart-rending diary of a chimney sweep after reading Blake, glittering description in imagined pages of Watson's notebook while reading *Hound of the Baskervilles* or riotously

witty character studies based on *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Reading good literature undoubtedly feeds the imagination and fosters in the next generation a creative ability to use language with clarity, precision and impact.

Reading needs to be taught purposefully and passionately. We learn to read so that we can read to learn. But reading is also profoundly a gateway to broader intellectual maturity; we learn to read in order to make better sense of ourselves, our neighbours and our world. What children read at school therefore matters enormously as we seek to ensure that children move strongly, confidently and happily forward, intellectually curious, morally and spiritually aware, thoughtfully tolerant, and aesthetically sensitive. Thus we trust that pupils will learn to be of benefit to society in due time, wherever in the global community they find themselves.

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Catching them young

Alex Maher turns the pages on reading for pleasure

Research from the National Literacy Trust (NLT) in 2012 found that literacy is a determining factor in the happiness, health and wealth of individuals and society, but some pupils struggle more with reading than others. Meeting the needs of these pupils is essential to give them the best possible future, but what are the best strategies for building literacy? Can schools engender a love of reading in their pupils? I talked to publisher Dan Nunn, who strives to produce books that will appeal to as many young readers as possible through his work at Raintree Publishing, to identify some practical approaches to boost reading skills amongst readers of all abilities, both in school and at home.

“To really succeed in reading, children need to want to read, to be engaged with the texts that are put in front of them” says Dan. “Variety is the spice of life, as they say, and this goes for reading, too. Providing both fiction and non-fiction resources with a good mix of text and artwork styles, as well as some photographically illustrated non-fiction, means there will be something to engage every single reader.”

A quarter of children and young people do not recognise a link between reading and success, according to research from the NLT’s 2012 research. All too often, reading is viewed by children as a chore; the dull cousin of TV and film which offers them immediate access to narrative in less time and with

less effort required. In an age when entertainment can come from so many avenues, reading doesn’t always make the grade for a lot of children.

It would be unfair, however, to suggest that children have the monopoly on this attitude toward reading for pleasure. Increasingly, more adults admit to reading fewer books, and research by the Booktrust suggests that one in five adults never read books at all.

One anonymous respondent to the survey said, “The fact is, it’s 2013, not 1813. We have electricity now so we can buy DVDs and watch television rather than read books. Books are for an older generation, younger people on the whole do not read books” (Booktrust Reading Habits Survey 2013, page 4). Comments like this highlight the importance of encouraging children to see reading in a positive light, preventing the emergence of a generation of ‘button-pushers’ rather than bookworms. With help from Dan, here are some tips on how to ensure both teachers and parents can give children the best possible start to a lifelong love of literature...

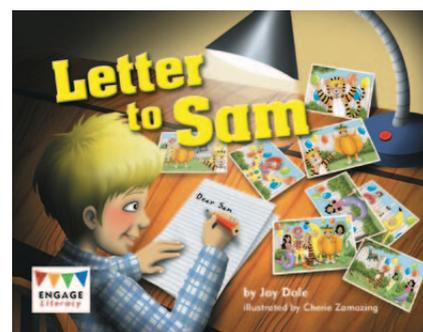
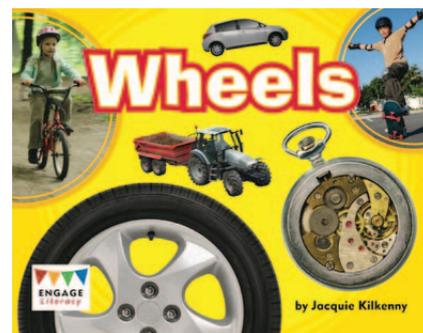
Make reading natural, make natural readers

If reading is simply something children are forced to do for an hour in the morning on Tuesdays because ‘the teacher says so’, or as part of a bland comprehension exercise, reading is never going to strike children as a pleasurable experience.

One of the best ways to get children engaged with reading is by making it a light-hearted and enjoyable experience. Set aside a time to read to the children; even older children enjoy being read to sometimes. Don’t just use books that address parts of the curriculum; choose books that are fun, witty and engaging and get children laughing. Don’t be afraid to put on voices and get animated – it all helps children to see reading as something with depth for amusement, rather than a two-dimensional, solitary experience.

Build bridges

Experiences in the school and in the home are two of the biggest



influences on a child's life and attitudes. Therefore, if a child is to become a bookworm, it is imperative that both teachers and parents work together to ensure reading becomes ingrained into the child's lifestyle. Build bridges between the school and the home, and try to encourage an open dialogue about children's reading habits. Parental engagement is key to promoting a healthy attitude to reading in all children, irrespective of ability.

Reliable resources for learning to read

There is an abundance of resources on offer to schools, each claiming superiority over their competitors. However, when it comes to sourcing tools best suited for learning to read, the approach needs to be very specific. "Resources used in schools need to develop children's literacy skills in a progressive way, building upon what they've learnt earlier", says Dan. "In effective resources and approaches, new vocabulary needs to be introduced systematically at each level, then reinforced in subsequent levels. This ensures a good foundation that can be built on and constantly reinforced."

"Choose publishers whose focus is on supporting teachers and learners

with good literacy solutions that help them to deliver the results they need. Research the company and see if they have case studies on supporting students for whom English is an additional language, or with special educational needs," adds Dan. Some publishers provide resources with better success rates in these areas than others, so looking up testimonials is a good way to identify publishers that are a cut above the rest. Ensuring that any new resource you choose is compatible with other schemes already in use in your school is another way to guarantee you are getting the best possible return on your investment.

However, learning to read is only part of the picture – arguably more important is reading to learn and reading to entertain, which, after all, is why we learn to read in the first place! In an age where multisensory, high-tech entertainment is becoming commonplace, it is easy to let children slip into the routine of simply watching TV when they're bored, or zone out playing 'Angry Birds'. Yet reading is still the best way to get children to tap into their imagination, and get lost in a world of their own creation. But even aside from the benefits of nurturing imagination and creativity, the simple fact is that reading helps with writing skills, then by extension speaking skills, which are key for a successful life. These direct links between reading habits and children's future success are the

reasons why schools and parents are, increasingly, doing their utmost to ensure that children can tap into the joy of the reading experience. We can't let children miss out on the lifelong magic that comes from books: books that have the power to move you, make you laugh out loud, or even fall in love. Because some magic can still be believed in – even when you're a grown-up.

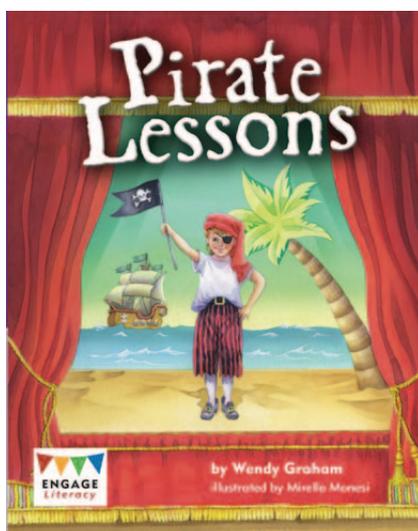
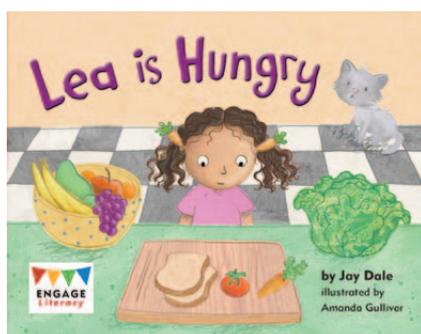
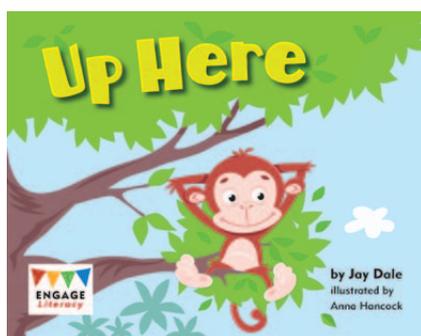
Dan is the educational publisher at Raintree with oversight of a list that includes hundreds of non-fiction and fiction titles for children of all ages and abilities from age three to fourteen, as well as an award-winning guided reading scheme called Engage Literacy.

Raintree caters for the needs of all readers aged three to fourteen, and has established a strong reputation with librarians and teachers.

Raintree conducts research with teachers and learners and this forms the basis of their product development, ensuring they are able to provide a service which is tailored to the needs of all teachers and learners.

Engage Literacy is the new reading scheme from Raintree that introduces engaging and contemporary content to motivate and support early readers while providing a reliable and instructional framework. All titles are precisely levelled, with new vocabulary being introduced and reinforced throughout the levels.

www.raintreepublishers.co.uk/engage



SATIPS National Schools Handwriting Competition 2014

Patricia Lovett reports a high standard of entry and outlines a skill that will serve entrants long after they leave school

Each year schools up and down the country focus on encouraging their pupils to write their best handwriting for the National Schools Handwriting Competition, run by SATIPS and sponsored by the Manuscript Pen Company. The huge advantage of this competition is that everyone in the school (up to the age of 13 for children) can enter for free, and that includes the teachers, caretakers, secretaries, teachers' assistants – there is no selection of only a few entries by schools – and it shows that handwriting is important no matter what your age.

What the four-year-old prize-winners and the five year-olds won't fully appreciate is that, if they continue to write well, then they should not lose marks in exams as highlighted in an article in *The Times* in May. 'Almost two-thirds of teachers said that they had marked down pupils because of illegible answers and three in ten reported a deterioration in children's handwriting in the past five years.' More to the point, children themselves (39%) were more worried about their handwriting in exams than not being able to remember things (37%).

With the increased concerns about how easy it is to cheat using a tablet or computer, it looks likely that examiners will emphasise the importance of handwritten answers more in the future. As educators, we are doing our children a disservice if

we do not equip them with the skills they need to perform at their best in examination conditions. The well-developed cursive style of handwriting of the Overall Winner of Class A (seen on the right here) should have few problems about performing well.

How can teachers and parents help their children to develop good handwriting? I posted Top Ten Tips for Children's Handwriting on my website blog this year. It is not difficult to ensure that children develop from a very early age a grip which will not cause them pain later in life, particularly if and when they go on to sit three-hour examinations.

Nor is it rocket science to help children develop that good grip by placing paper and books in the best position. So for neither should the paper be straight but slanted, and for right-handers, the top right-hand corner should be highest, and for left-handers the top left-hand corner should be highest (it is very easy to remember). This helps left-handers particularly to avoid developing an 'over-the-top' claw-like grip which causes strain on the wrist, forearm, shoulder and spine. If pen-hold is a problem, then triangular grips that slide over pens and pencils can be very helpful.

Ensuring that children do not have to reach up to write, nor hunch their bodies over a table, are also essential. Both avoid pain and poor posture which could cause problems

later. No-one enjoys writing if their experience of it brings back memories of being uncomfortable or hurt. Standard issue chairs and tables are not the best for children of many different heights in a class from quite small to very tall - one having to stretch too much and the other having to bend over too much.

And, of course, writing at a slope is far more preferable to on the flat, but I sense this is a lost cause nowadays! Those old-fashioned wooden desks with a sloping lid were far better for writing, especially at length.

Research has also shown that children who hand-write, rather than type, are better at composition and reading and also have better memories. The same research from Washington University also found that children 'wrote' more quickly when hand-writing their compositions than when 'writing' them on a computer, even for those who had learned to touch type. Many authors, too, find that handwriting allows ideas to flow more easily as the brain keeps up with the speed of the hand-writer. What better proof then to emphasise the importance of everyone learning to handwrite well, and how much it helps children's learning in so many other ways.

This year's competition was as difficult to judge as previous ones, with many examples of excellent handwriting which will surely stand all in good stead in future years. As always,

the judges looked for well-formed letters. It is important when it is time for speeding up that the heights of ascenders are consistent, with the letter 't' usually being smaller than that of other ascenders but higher than the x-height, the body of the letters.

Once letters are joined, the joins should be smooth and natural. Of course, not every letter in a word has to join, but where they do it should not look contrived. There are always some difficult letter combinations, and the 'fl' and 'bl' combinations in this Overall Group C winning entry

is an example of those combinations being well resolved.

There should also be a consistency of slant. For some people, their natural 'ductus' results in letters that slant forwards, or the letters are upright, or backwards. Consistency is more important than the direction, and examples of all three can be seen in these prize-winners.

It has been said in previous Judge's Reports, but placing/position on the page/paper does make a difference. It is not that difficult for a teacher to indicate (or even draw a margin for

younger children) so that the poems are not crammed tightly over on the left-hand side. A beautifully placed piece of writing, as in the winner of the ten year-olds comes as a real joy!

And the style of lettering makes no difference either - italic, round letters, Copperplate-style looped letters are all in evidence here.

And to show that good handwriting does not stop when children leave school, the three prize-winners in the Staff section are all to be praised for a natural, legible and consistent style.

Patricia Lovett MBE (Final Judge)

CLASS A Winner

Ellie Keegan, Age 6,
Orchard House

Age 4

1. Mira Karthikeyan,
Bromley High Junior
2. Amaris Charles,
Beechwood Park
3. Imogen Fowkes,
Dovedale Primary

Highly Commended

Eliska Schwarzova,
Eaton House Girls'
Victoria Brady,
Bromley High Junior

Age 5

1. Ishita Mohapatra,
Wakefield Girls' High Junior
2. Ionie Morris,
St. Helen's College
3. Palak Mohapatra,
Wakefield Girls' High Junior

Highly Commended

Rajan Sidhu-Tung,
St. Bernard's Prep
Martha Borthwick,
Eaton House Girls'

Age 6

1. Sienna Lewis,
High March
2. Isabella Kay,
Prospect House
3. Annabel Wightman,
Beechwood Park

Highly Commended

Amelie Litvin,
St. Helen's College
Ronak Jayswal, *Red House*

CLASS B Winner

Zara Wightman, Age 8,
Beechwood Park

Age 7

1. Inaya Ahmad,
Seaton House
2. Katie Broadhead,
High March
3. Harriet Chapman,
Old Vicarage

Highly Commended

Christina Blanco Woods,
High March
Karina Lad, *Seaton House*

Age 8

1. Emma Pinnington,
Kingshott
2. Morgan Wrigley,
Parkgate House
3. Sophie Hodkins,
St. Helen's College

CLASS C Winner

Asmita Niyogi, Age 10,
St. Bernard's Prep

Age 9

1. Jemma-Jane Wood,
Yarm Prep
2. Chanula Wickramaratna,
St. Bernard's Prep

3. Amy Lenton,
Beechwood Park

Highly Commended

Fiona Cook, *Cargilfield*
Tito Oshewa,
St. Helen's College

Age 10

1. Michaela Levy,
Eaton House Girls'
2. Sarveshi Tripathi,
St. Bernard's Prep
3. Phoebe-Rose Martin,
Seaton House

Highly Commended

Maegan Surendran,
St. Helen's College
Beatrice Paul, *Cargilfield*
Emma Harvey,
Derwent Lodge

CLASS D Winner

Jasmine Macquaker, Age 12,
Cargilfield

Age 11

1. Lorenzo Harvey Allchurch,
Dulwich Prep
2. Matthew Lyons,
St. Bernard's Prep
3. Chann Pnaiser,
Eversfield Prep

Highly Commended

Evie Marrion Roberts,
Truro High Prep
Daisy Penrose,
Truro High Prep

Age 12

1. Flo Attlee, *Sandroyd*
2. Jai Gandhi, *Dulwich Prep*
3. Mick Mckibbin, *Ashfold*

Highly Commended

Alice Thornton-Kemsley,
Cargilfield
Molly Rutherford, *Cargilfield*

Age 13

1. Clara McEwan, *Cargilfield*
2. Edward Beeston,
Boundary Oak Prep
3. Carys Mills, *Ashfold*

Highly Commended

Juliette McAteer, *Cargilfield*
Caitlin Reilly, *St. Faith's*

Staff

1. Jan Pickance, *Walhampton*
2. Helen Beavis,
Beechwood Park
3. Jan Goodwin,
Moulsford Prep

Highly Commended

Hermione Cheal,
Eaton House Girls'
Judy Waters, *St. Faith's*

And for the most impressive collection of entries overall:

Winning School:

St. Bernard's Prep, Slough

Runner-up School:

Beechwood Park, Markyate

The great ART ATTACK!

Karen Stickney, Head of Art Saint Ronan's School, Hawkhurst, shares her experience of hosting the 2014 SATIPS annual prep school art exhibition

It was with some trepidation that we left Malvern last year, having viewed the SATIPS Art Exhibition, and knowing that we had committed Saint Ronan's to host it for the next two years. How could we possibly beat the seamless professionalism displayed and the incredible creativity?...it was going to be a challenge. I would be lying if I didn't say that as the months passed, there was a growing feeling of impending doom (and yes, flutters of excitement too!)

However, we are now putting the final duct tape on pieces to be returned after hosting the 2014 Exhibition. We are tired, but so extremely proud

of what was achieved. This has been a highlight personally for all of us directly involved and also, more widely, for the school and we are so pleased that we were able to host it! What a great honour. Thank you SATIPS! The venue for the exhibition was the 'Great Space', our sprung Edwardian Ballroom. This is a majestic room with painted ceilings, plaster pillars and what seems like a vast amount of space to fill. However, once the display boards had gone up (thank you the maintenance team for the Forth Bridge equivalent of painting whiteboards), it began its transformation into rather a glorious and natural exhibition venue.



Over 70 Schools sent work in to be exhibited and it was such a joy to receive the art through the post and see the creativity and vigour of the whole prep school art world being revealed after peeling away the brown paper! There was an enormously wide





range of artwork, using a delightful spread of media. We saw some inspiring sculptures using unusual materials, such as using tights and wire to create delightful structural forms. We had painted heads, Monet umbrellas, some stunningly clever photographic work on perception of distance. Group projects helped fill large areas of space to provide mini installations. An exciting iPad animation art from a local school both entertained and inspired many.

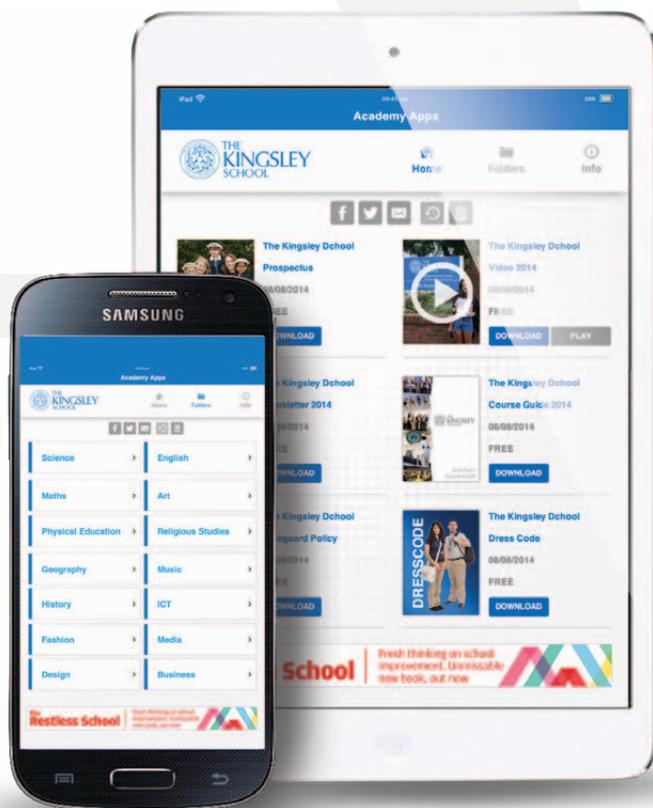
The standard of art was exceptional and it was lovely to see work from children as young as four had their work entered alongside scholarship work.

It was a stroke of good fortune that an ex Saint Ronan's parent, Neil Buchanan, formerly of *Art Attack*, and a great proponent of art for children was prepared to open the exhibition. Over 200 people had gathered to hear him speak both inspirational and emotionally about the artwork and in particular the range of emotions it



Please Sir!

Can I have an app?



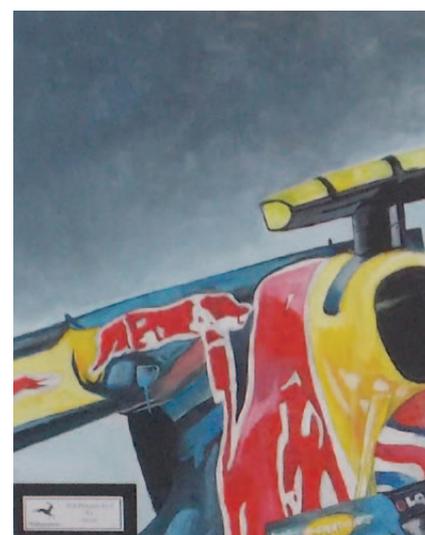
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evoked in him as a viewer; the sadness of the war pictures, the joy of the more humorous pieces. He congratulated the artists and thanked the art teachers for encouraging creativity. It was also a proud moment to see our own Year 3 and Year 4 children dancing and displaying their beautiful needle felted butterfly wing costumes that they had enjoyed making in extra art.

On the Sunday, Saint Ronan's welcomed children who had work in the exhibition and their families to a traditional Saint Ronan's afternoon tea and the opportunity to view the exhibition. A staggering 600 guests arrived. What an occasion.

It is therefore with less trepidation and rather more excitement that we look forward to hosting the exhibition in 2015 and I do hope that I can welcome you personally.

Schools to register by 24th January 2015

Deadline to receive work 13th March 2015

Opening for Heads, Art teachers 25th April 2015

Afternoon tea for children and families 26th April 2015

Contact: Karen Stickney, Head of Art, Saint Ronan's School. 01580 752271.

Karens@saintronans.co.uk

An online catalogue of this year's art exhibition is available to view

www.saintronansgallery.co.uk

Embracing mobile

Exploring mobile technology and how it impacts on the education sector

The facts and figures are conclusive. For every £1 spent on desktop technological advancements, £4 is now being spent on the mobile equivalent. The number of tablets being sold has now overtaken those of desktop and laptop devices combined. Add on the explosive growth of smart phones and it is not difficult to see that the future is mobile.

Business and enterprises are increasingly adopting mobile first strategies incorporating apps, acknowledging that even the best responsive website is not such a great user experience on a mobile device. When you also factor in the potential cost savings, ease of disseminating information via mobile communication apps and the growth in BYOD (where staff, students and stakeholders use their own personal device), it is difficult to see how the future could be anything other than mobile.

However, as we enter the post-PC era, the most compelling reason for adopting a mobile strategy is simply this; personal mobile devices are the hardware of choice for students, staff and stakeholders such as Governors, the very people you need to communicate with.

You could be forgiven for not completely grasping the concept of mobile technology. After all, it is still a relatively new industry, one that has had rapid exponential growth in recent years. However, whether you comprehend it or not, the chances are that you have been part of the movement for some time now, simply through the mobile phone or tablet you engage with on a daily basis.

You are not alone, in fact Ofcom now reports that almost 75% of the UK population has access to a smartphone or tablet device. This figure is rising too as the late adopters are finally seeing the benefits the technology possesses.

Gone are the days where the mobile phone is a simple two-way pager system. Since the introduction of smartphone technology, the consumer landscape has had a dramatic transformation with users now able to browse the Internet, instant message, play games, use GPS navigation; the list goes on.

The rapid adoption rates for these devices are no coincidence either. As mobile device owners have no doubt calculated, the ease and portability trumps the traditional laptop and desktop solutions. Users are able to

do everything they could always do, but now from the comfort of their sofa or perhaps on the early morning commute to work; the technology has seamlessly amalgamated itself into everyday life.

Although this technology has taken no time at all to integrate within a corporate setting, adoption rates have been somewhat labored in the education sector. The question still remains, 'How does mobile technology impact education?'. Well simply, mobile technology is the future. It is something that will inevitably impact the way schools communicate and how students learn and interact; if it doesn't do so already.

If mobile is indeed the future, is it not then worth questioning why schools are determined to invest so heavily on traditional desktop computer suites? With over half a billion pounds reported to be spent by schools on ICT each year, why is such a disproportionate amount spent on declining or antiquated technology?

A report conducted by Nielson showed that over 60% of mobile or tablet owners use their devices for tasks previously undertaken on desktop or laptop computers. So with desktop

usage dropping in favor of mobile devices, should schools still be placing so much emphasis on traditional ICT delivery?

Alun Davies, CEO of Academy Apps, supports the notion that schools must now increase their mobile technology provision, "We've understood for sometime where technology is headed and it is important schools do as well. With almost every parent, student and teacher owning a mobile device, there are huge opportunities for schools to benefit from embracing a mobile first strategy".

By way of example, Davies offers up a scenario where new students download a 'school app' and within seconds they have all the school information and teaching materials they need for the year ahead on their own personal device. Davies adds, "The technology and software is available now, the challenge is how to achieve successful implementation and adoption of these new resources".

In light of the fact that mobile devices are favoured over desktop computers to complete everyday tasks, are schools doing their students a disservice by not catering to this behaviour? Would it be more beneficial for classrooms to implement 'everyday' technology into all stages of a child's learning process, not just within the ICT setting? The answer seems to be, yes.

Davies argues, "If students use their mobile devices more than anything else, why not tap into that communication channel and make all learning resources available on the devices they interact with the most?"

Although mobile technology is increasingly making inroads, the medium is still fighting against a backdrop of technological noise. Recently, there has been a surge in schools producing mobile responsive websites as marketing departments have been keen to find a resolution to the growing necessity of mobile communication. Ashley Adams, Marketing Manager from Mobile First Communications explains, "Responsive websites are part of the



solution but talk to leading technology companies and the response is universal; anyone considering a responsive website is now four years behind where they should be".

It is clear that schools are starting to understand the need for suitable solutions but are they considering the genuine impact of a well-directed mobile strategy? Adams adds, "One thing is acknowledging the need for a mobile solution, another is building that into a well structured and engaging mobile strategy; right now, that has to include native apps".

The popularity of mobile applications is continually on the increase due to the fact they are native to the device in question. This yields obvious benefits when utilising the hardware's functionality. There is no question that websites will always have a place in an organisation's online strategy but are they just a stopgap solution for the rapidly evolving mobile market? Potentially, only time will really tell.

The fact is mobile technology is likely to be already well ingrained into a student's lifestyle. Their daily interaction with mobile devices should surely be something that is harnessed rather than discouraged. By the time a student now reaches secondary school age, they will have been using mobile devices for years, and will already

be well acquainted with touchscreen technology. Is it not then logical to provide resources directly to these devices?

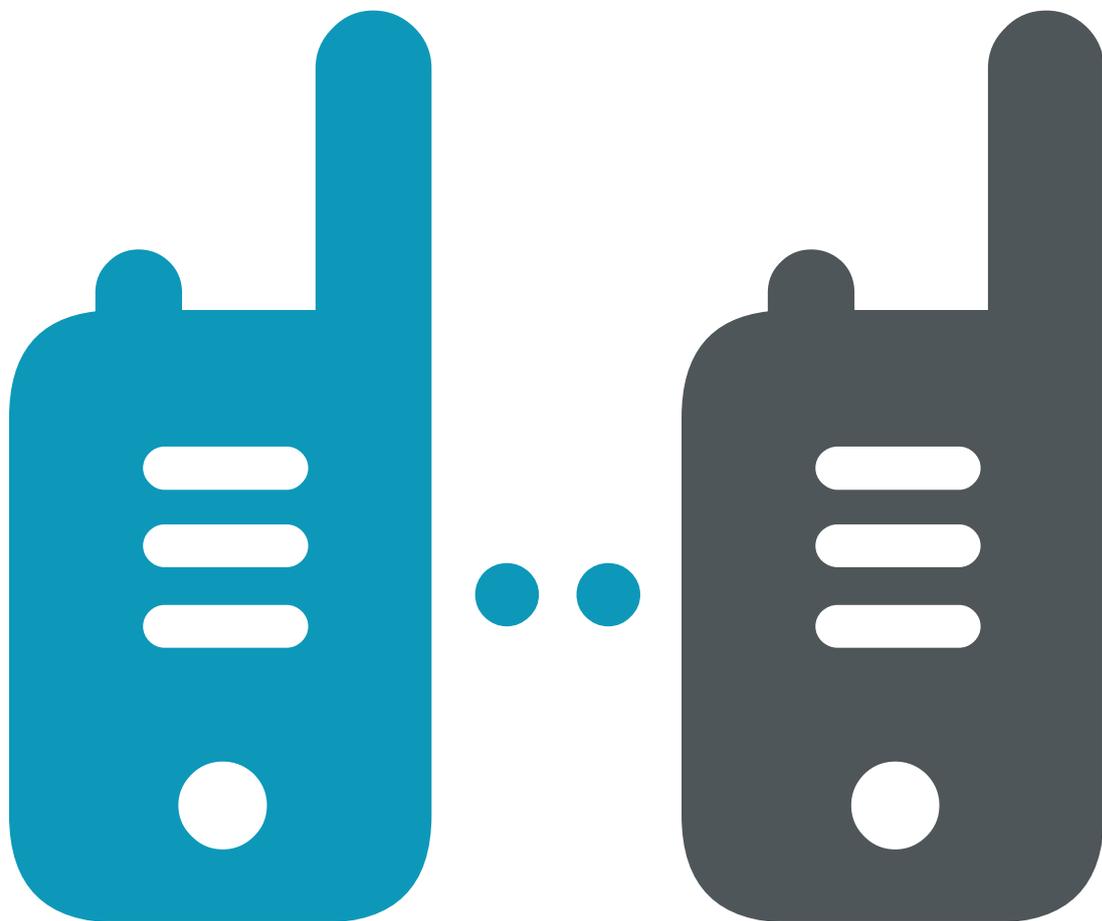
A library of revision notes could be just a touch of a button away or perhaps parents could benefit from having school policies accessible through a school app.

The benefits to schools from mobile technology are somewhat endless at this moment in time and they are set to keep growing. Tech companies are now investing enormous amounts of money into mobile technology with the educational sector in mind. It is obvious that they see the future as mobile, so schools should start to take heed too. It is no longer acceptable for educational establishments to simply provide a one-dimensional approach to mobile communications. A structured strategy incorporating websites and apps is now required to service the ever-growing mobile market.

Alun Davies is the Chief Operating Officer for Academy Apps. Academy Apps provide a mobile first consultancy service and turnkey software systems specifically designed for mobile communication within academies and schools. For more information on Academy Apps visit www.academyapps.co.uk or call 01789 450 000

A helping hand for prep school health and safety

Extolling the benefits of two-way radios



Encouraging the community use of school premises is a key part of the Government's Extended Schools initiative. As a result schools, now more than ever, are opening their doors to the general public - whether it's by hosting out of hours events, holiday activities, hiring out rooms or allowing people to use their facilities.

While this provides many benefits, including improved community cohesion and increased revenue, it also presents a need for added security to keep staff (potentially working alone), pupils and visitors safe.

Security technology has come a long way since the days of the crackly walkie talkie and there is now a

whole host of technology based tools that can be used to support your health, safety and risk management procedures.

Did you know for instance that there is technology out there that can track staff, call the police at the touch of a button, identify the location of a fire on the premises and enable you to

group call, text and email staff – all through a small handheld device??

And what is this small hand-held device I hear you cry! It is a two-way radio.

And, before you stop reading this as your eyes glaze to your mobile phone, two way radios offer a whole host of security benefits a mobile phone can't - operating even when there is no phone signal!

Surprising security features that come with a two-way radio:

1) Lone worker feature

This is ideal for caretakers, security staff or teachers working late. According to the Office of National Statistics there are four million lone workers in the UK, and about 160 lone workers get attacked every day!

The lone worker feature requires the radio user to press a button (on the side of the radio) at pre-determined intervals. If the worker does not check in at the expected time - an emergency procedure is set in motion.

2) Panic button

If during their duties an employee feels vulnerable, threatened or under attack; they can immediately press their Panic Button. Easily identifiable on their two-way radio - this allows them to quickly call for help.

The Panic Button automatically dispatches a text message or tone to the person or team responsible for their security. Text message alarms can be picked up by monitoring stations, security guard radios, mobile phones, pagers and even email accounts.

3) Fire alarm integration

This feature instantly notifies staff to the location of alarms and emergency door use. The system alerts the fire group on their radios by dispatching a text message. If the selected team do not acknowledge the call-out; the system notifies back-up personnel in order of priority - escalating the alarm until it's managed. This means there is less dependency on control room operators to monitor fire alarms, so

they can focus on other high-priority activities.

4) Radio telemetry

This enables users to call 999 at the touch of a button, even when there is no mobile signal. The radios can be used like a phone, with the added bonus that you avoid the recurring costs of mobile phones, and you get better coverage and at a fraction of the cost.

5) Group calling

Group calling allows users to broadcast an emergency situation to all two-way radios. It also means members of diverse workgroups have the ability to communicate in private with each other. System-wide calls automatically override individual and group calls, ensuring urgent messages reach every radio user at the same time.

6) 100% in-building coverage (which you don't get with mobile phones!).

Tolerating poor coverage means your staff often have to run back and forth between different areas, so they're able to communicate with colleagues. But worse than that, when calls are missed and messages become garbled, this could potentially be fatal in an emergency.

With digital radios, the built-in error correction reconstitutes the voice with virtually no loss of coverage over a greater area. It also reduces background noise by compressing speech and filtering out everything except the human voice. By choosing to have up-to-date technology at your finger tips; you can easily enjoy more consistent audio performance.

7) GPS

When staff are on the road, especially working in hazardous or dangerous locations, everyone involved feels more relaxed and secure when you can pin-point their position, using GPS-enabled radios.

With a GPS modem and receiver integrated into your radios, members of your team or the police can

instantly come to the rescue of a worker who's injured or in danger. (The GPS feature is often used in association with the Man Down facility.)

Making the technology work for you

You have heard about the technology available so now it is worth thinking about how you can make it work for you, your school's priorities and the health, safety and risk management procedures you already have in place.

There are a number of companies out there offering this technology who can talk you through your options and find a solution that fits best with the needs of your school.

One such company is Brentwood Communications who have been providing communications solutions in the form of two-way radios to the Education Sector nationwide for the past 40 years and offer a flexible service tailored to the sector's needs, for example:

- Their equipment can be hired either for single events, or long term, offering schools flexibility
- There is no capital outlay – you only pay for the equipment you use
- Immediate repairs and equipment replacements are provided to avoid down-time (with cost-saving servicing and repairs)
- Support and set-up is offered to provide peace of mind
- Free site surveys are provided guaranteeing perfect coverage
- They can offer onsite support – supplying a qualified member of staff (or a whole team of engineers if required) for the duration of any event - anywhere in the world.

To find out more visit www.brentwoodradios.co.uk or telephone 0808 250 8254.



A digital revolution

Aimee Tan, Director of Teaching and Learning, shares an exciting development at Barrow Hills School

In the week before half term we took a small team of Year 7 children to Samsung.

In their technology showroom, talking to our children, Tim Skinner and Philip Oldham were able to paint a vivid picture of how technology will continue to enhance our lives over the next decade. They were able to describe in great detail what it may be like to live in an 'inter - connected' world. We have moved in to an age of technology-enhanced living. As a generation of digital immigrants grappling to make technology serve us in work and in leisure, how might we

prepare our children for their futures as digital natives, a generation whose use of ICT is intuitive, confident and fluent?

How must we adapt our teaching and learning for the modern world? Some things are certain:

Once prized and rewarded qualities in children: neatness, accuracy, the ability to retain and regurgitate enormous bodies of fact, for example, are becoming increasingly less relevant to our modern society. Instead, we look to the development of key, transferable skills that will prepare our children for tomorrow's work place. Our children must

be able to analyse, to evaluate, to synthesise information. They must be motivated to work independently, they must have the sensitivity and empathy to collaborate. They must have the tenacity and the curiosity to experiment. They must have the creativity, the confidence and the freedom to take risks.

The Samsung Galaxy Note, selected for its digital pencil and split screen, will change the ways we teach and thus the ways our children learn. All our pupils from Year 3 have their own. Pedagogy will become child-specific and differentiation heightened as children choose how they wish

to receive, record and present information using text, images, photos and film. These choices will engender greater metacognition – a sophisticated awareness of how they work and learn most effectively. With this increased control, children will feel a greater sense of ownership over their learning; with increased opportunities for self and peer assessment, they will become more reflective. With greater reflection, children will want to review, edit and improve their work. Freed from the constraints of ‘neatness’, and buoyed by a digital toolkit, they will become more creative.

The Note’s split screen function coupled with safe, monitored access to the internet encourages children to draw

and synthesise information from a range of sources. They will learn to question its reliability and to evaluate its worth. The device’s portability, the School’s virtual learning environment and the use of cloud technology will ensure a consistency in learning, whether in the classroom, on the sports’ field or at home. Communication between school and home will be improved, as the Note becomes the window through which parents can view their child’s academic life. Subject web pages will give information on curriculum, tips for homeworks and links to relevant websites. ‘Hand outs’ will be un-losable and as preps are distributed, submitted and marked electronically, dogs will have to eat something other than homework.

Whilst the path ahead may seem uncertain, the destination is clear. Learning through ICT must be an embedded practice. 21st Century children must view technology as intrinsic to their successes at senior schools, universities and in the work place, and if we are truly to prepare our children for greater things, 21st Century adults must accept and promote its value too. For Barrow Hills, slotting together excellent pastoral care, our Catholic ethos and high academic standards, a fully integrated approach to ICT is the last piece in our jigsaw. Only now may the picture be complete.

aimee.tan@barrowhills.org.uk



Online and inline

Prep school examinations

in a digital age



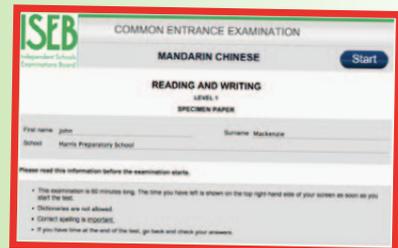
Meeting the need

With children spending more and more time online both in and out of the classroom, the exciting move to digital examinations is a straightforward step for prep school pupils. In June 2013 **e2focus**, a company comprised of a dynamic group of experienced educational software developers, established an online platform that enables examination boards and schools to move their examinations online (www.e2focus.com).

Observations over 2013-2014 were that many prep schools have or are in the process of either significantly upgrading their IT teaching facilities or moving to a totally mobile solution i.e. iPads or Chromebooks, which are booked out by pupils on a daily basis. In addition, it was noted that there has been considerable investment in improving IT infrastructure, with the majority of prep schools now benefitting from ultra-fast internet connections and, in some cases, innovative school intranet solutions. These improvements keep the door firmly wide open to enable paper examinations to move into the digital age.

Smart testing in a variable format

Online examinations can now test pupils through various smart online templates, which range from image matching, odd one out, open questions & answers and multiple choice. The innovative layout and format of the online examinations mean that results can be made immediately available and in full detail to both teachers and pupils. The online aspect will also enable pupils to complete trial papers at home, which is particularly useful in the lead up to the live examinations. The online examinations are published in full colour, which makes them both pleasing to the eye and easy to follow.



ISEB

In September 2013, the ISEB (Independent Schools Examinations Board) agreed to trial an online Mandarin Chinese Level 1 specimen examination; not only was the trial received very favourably but also a live online version was successfully sat by Year 8 from the Charter School in South West London in January this year. The Board has subsequently agreed to run Mandarin Chinese as a **live** exam from September 2014 and to provide Spanish as an online Level 1 specimen examination to further gauge interest amongst prep school pupils and teachers.

"The online trial versions of selected ISEB examination papers have been warmly received by both our schools and authors; they also form an exciting part of us looking ahead to further align our examinations to the expectations of a prep school audience."

Ann Entwistle, General Administrator, Independent Schools Examinations Board

Advantages

- Provides examination authors with a high level of flexibility via online
- Auto-marking means that results are available on demand
- Saves examination boards and senior schools considerable amounts of time
- Examinations available in colour with attractive look and feel
- No requirement for dispatch of examination papers, which is both expensive and open to risk.
- Controlled access to both the scores and printable copies of the pupils' marked papers
- Detailed insight into the results, offering comparative data analysis and breakdown



The future for online examinations

Whilst the online templates are initially focused on passive style responses i.e. pick and choose, there are exciting plans afoot to work with more open style questions whereby pupils can answer more freely. The flexible nature of the online examinations will enable examination boards and teachers to jointly agree on what is acceptable as a set of rules e.g. grammar, content and punctuation. Online examination development is a dynamic work in progress whereby all parties will, in the fullness of time, better understand how pupils are likely to respond to a wide range of questions across multiple disciplines.



Specimen papers now available!

Both the Spanish and Mandarin Chinese Level 1 specimen papers are NOW available through the **subject pages** on the ISEB website (www.iseb.co.uk).

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ISEB Independent Schools Examinations Board



Giving teachers the freedom to inspire

Julie Booth, head of SIMS Independent, examines the new world of pupil assessment and asks whether the technology prep schools use provides the flexibility needed to track progress while supporting creativity in teaching

In recent years, prep schools have become increasingly skilled at adapting to change. In doing so, many schools have grown stronger, emerging from the unpredictable economic climate with a more powerful ethos and a clearer idea of how to demonstrate their value to families.

As the new school year begins, there is yet more change in the air – and this time it affects the education landscape more broadly.

Exploring the future of assessment

The methods schools use to assess pupil progress have been under

the political spotlight with the introduction of reforms to the national curriculum. The government has removed the assessment levels traditionally used by state schools to measure achievement and they will not be replaced.

While fee-paying schools have always had the freedom to choose the

Assessment

assessment and reporting approach that works best for them, the use of levels has been popular with some schools.

Unlike senior schools, that can measure achievement through pupils' attainment in public examinations

such as GCSEs, A Levels or the International Baccalaureate, it can be harder for junior and prep schools to demonstrate the difference they are making to children's learning. In the past, assessment based on national curriculum levels has provided an

effective way for many schools to demonstrate, to both prospective and existing families, the high quality teaching they provide.

Parents want to understand how those small, incremental steps their children make day-in-day-out at



school contribute to their overall progress; and putting a number or a letter on this can make this easier.

The removal of national curriculum levels could leave those schools which have embedded this approach into their teaching and assessment, questioning the validity of continuing to assess by levels now that state schools are no longer required to do so. They may also be unsure of whether they have the right tools to track their pupils' achievement post-levels.

Changes to the pupils assessment framework may offer a valuable opportunity for independent schools to reflect on the systems that they have in place and evaluate whether they are working as well as they could be. There are a number of options open to schools.

Staying with the national curriculum levels

Some schools may feel that, for the time being, it would be wise to stick with the familiar system of national curriculum levels. They are understood by parents and have been useful for helping schools to support children working towards their learning targets.

The vast majority of schools have a management information system (MIS) which they use to record data on pupils' achievement. The best systems allow teachers to enter their pupils' marks in the classroom as well as recording details of their other achievements – be it on the sports field or out on the stage. They can then easily track progress and analyse trends across pupil groups to help them deliver the best possible academic and pastoral support to every child.

For schools which intend to continue assessing against the national curriculum levels, solutions such as the MIS supplied by SIMS Independent will have templates with mark sheets in which teachers can enter pupil attainment by level and sub-level. Regular recording of these marks will enable schools to track the progress of pupils as they move up through Key Stage 1 and 2.

Using the data from these mark sheets, schools can produce and analyse tracking grids in the core subjects of reading, writing and maths with ease. These grids are colour-coded so teachers can see at a glance how much progress their pupils have made by sub-level and which pupils are meeting, exceeding or missing their targets.

Using the MIS in this way simplifies the management of pupil data, helping schools to keep track of progress by sub-level, level and Key Stage, and supporting schools which decide to retain levelled assessment.

Taking an alternative assessment approach

For some schools, the time might be right to move away from levels and consider a new assessment method. Other schools will have built and used their own assessment systems already for measuring their pupils' achievement in teacher assessments or have perhaps adopted the Prep School Baccalaureate. For all of these schools, there is a need to look carefully at how they define the landmarks that their pupils reach in the curriculum, while giving parents an understanding of the progress their child is making.

To respond to this need, systems like SIMS now offer progress grids pre-loaded into the system that display knowledge descriptors matched to the new curriculum for all core subjects and foundation stage learning goals. Teachers will be able to use these progress grids regularly to record whether a pupil is achieving as expected or is reaching above or below what they are capable of.

In SIMS, the assessment progress grid contains all that schools need to measure how well their pupils are performing at each learning objective. It is easy to track performance from one objective to the next, and analyse the progress of each pupil.

By using pre-prepared templates, teachers retain the flexibility to teach the curriculum as they wish, using topics that will engage the children. When their work is assessed, it can

be entered into the system using the metrics that have already been set up, saving time and simplifying the process.

Early Years assessment

Changes to pupil assessment will affect Early Years provision too. Any school that has a nursery setting will be required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework until at least 2016. After this, independent schools will have the choice of whether to follow it or not.

Although the settings must follow the framework, there is flexibility within it for schools to teach creatively. And with the right technology, it will be easy to record and measure pupils' progress in their learning objectives too.

SIMS Independent has developed assessment templates covering all the Early Years areas of learning. The progress grids with the learning goals are already in the system, so all the teacher needs to do is fill them in. How the teacher decides to help pupils towards each goal is open to them. A nature walk could be used to help pupils learn their colours as well as their numbers, for example.

The advantage of having these templates in the MIS is that the data can be entered quickly and easily, freeing teachers up to plan and deliver their lessons. The Early Years data in SIMS can follow the child as they move up into reception and onwards, so their knowledge and skills can be recorded and monitored as they develop over time.

At this early stage in a child's education it is critical to provide the right environment for learning, and by recording, tracking and analysing progress effectively, schools can help their pupils get off to the very best start.

Contact SIMS Independent on +44 (0)1285 647459 or visit www.capita-independent.co.uk and make sure your school has the right tools to support your pupils in achieving all they are capable of.

Collaborative and transparent assessment

David Winfield, an advisor to IAPS and Head of IT at Pownall Hall School in Cheshire, writes on the latest technology to improve educational outcomes

Whilst reviewing various approaches to assessment during a Masters research project in 2010, I came across an internet-based formative assessment system that, despite being established for 10 years and now used by around 1200 UK schools, is almost completely unknown in the independent sector. The system, called Incerts, has been developed by a not-for-profit organisation of the same name, and their guiding principle is to simultaneously improve teaching and learning in schools whilst reducing teacher workload. I was intrigued by the collaborative and transparent approach to assessment that an online system, open and shared between the whole teaching staff, would entail. For the independent boarding school where I was Deputy Head of Juniors at the time, adopting this approach would mean revisiting some fundamental assumptions about the part that assessment could play in the next phase of our development. After extended discussions among the whole-school leadership team, we took the plunge and bought the Incerts system.

Simplicity Itself

The 'engine room' of Incerts is its assessment page, where teachers make judgements about the progression of children. Each subject is broken down

into core skills and competencies that build upon each other. Once they have 'benchmarked' the children using both classroom evidence and test data, they have a base-line National Curriculum level (or a different type of numeric score as an alternative) from which to track day-to-day progression. Quite simply, each time a child achieves one of those skills or competencies, the teacher ticks a box on the screen and the progression can be seen by all the teaching staff.

The beauty of the system is its sheer simplicity, and even staff who are not confident with technology have found the system highly intuitive and flexible. It can be accessed in a variety of ways: either from an internet browser or by using one of the apps for smartphones and tablets that Incerts have developed. A teacher carrying an iPad, for example, can easily capture evidence, perhaps photographing some written work or recording a child's reading or their performance in PE, and attach it in support of the judgements they have recorded.

Immediate Impact

Once Incerts had been configured and the first assessments made, the impact was immediate. Staff commented how much time the

system was saving for actual teaching. Assessments could be made during lessons quite unintrusively, and teachers found the system helpful in identifying targets and adapting their planning around individual children's needs. Within a short space of time, the easy-to-interpret analysis pages had drawn attention to some areas of difficulty for children, and timely interventions were made.

Engagement with parents

Crucially, we had already made the decision to be completely open with parents about the assessments and evidence that we would collect. However, it would be imperative to explain and contextualise this information alongside the standardised data that we collected in the summative assessments.

Historically, parents had only been able to gauge their child's comparative ability through standardised scores. By using Incerts, we were now able to show them clear and concise graphs that indicated the actual progress made during each academic year, as well as an accurate and evidence-based National Curriculum level achieved by their child in every subject.

The depth and quality of the information that we were able to

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convey ensured that the learning conversations during parents evenings were of the highest quality. They were evidence based whilst still allowing for subjective opinion, and they improved the professional image of our school and our colleagues in the eyes of parents. Teachers were able to show parents key pieces of work alongside progression graphs using school laptops and on tablets, which illustrated how their work in the school was being supported by appropriately modern technology.

The impact of termly reporting to parents was even more profound as we could easily show contextualised data and graphs coupled with a highly-personalised commentary for every single child. Along with specific progression and target comments that were generated by Incerts, our teachers added their own advice to help parents support their child at home to help them achieve these goals. If the frequency with which they were being produced at dinner parties is an indicator, the quality and detail of these reports was having an enormous impact on the academic reputation of our school in the local community!

Engagement of Pupils

The pupils themselves were also directly motivated by the way teachers shared Incerts with them. They loved seeing the colourful progression graphs and being able to revisit their work in the online portfolio. They commented most of all, though, on

the sense of momentum that they felt when teachers were immediately setting new structured goals for them the moment they achieved success.

As most of the targets within Incerts are skills-based, the teachers are free to continue to develop schemes of work specifically for each cohort of children. Whilst we as a staff believed in the benefits of subject specialist teaching, Incerts remains equally appropriate for topic-based or 'creative curriculum' approaches.

Meanwhile, as parents were 'talking up' our academic rigour, the results of the children were confirming it. Entrance to our Senior School was by examination, and over two years our Junior School secured an unprecedented 8 out of the top 10 results, including all of the top 5 places in the last academic year. Remarkably for a non-selective school, our average result for Mathematics was over 10% higher than our best performing academically selective rival. For the first time ever, our Junior School pupils secured every single academic scholarship on offer in the Senior School.

Underpinning Success

The success that we saw in the two years following the introduction of Incerts, including a 35% increase in pupils on roll in the depths of a recession, was delivered by our first-rate teaching staff, and reflects their commitment and expertise. I remain convinced, however, that we would

not have achieved this level of success if our strategic decisions and working practices had not been underpinned by our choice of Incerts as an assessment system. It is a remarkable tool that will benefit any independent school that chooses to embrace it; the staff, pupils and parents at my current and previous schools certainly thought so.

David Winfield is former Deputy Headmaster who is now an Advisor to the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools and Head of IT at Pownall Hall School in Cheshire. He is also a Director of BlueCow Education, an educational consultancy that offers independent advice and training to schools on how to use the latest technology to improve educational outcomes for all children
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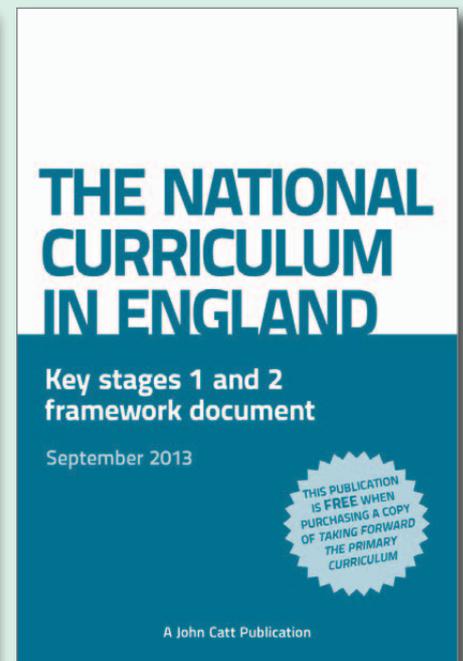
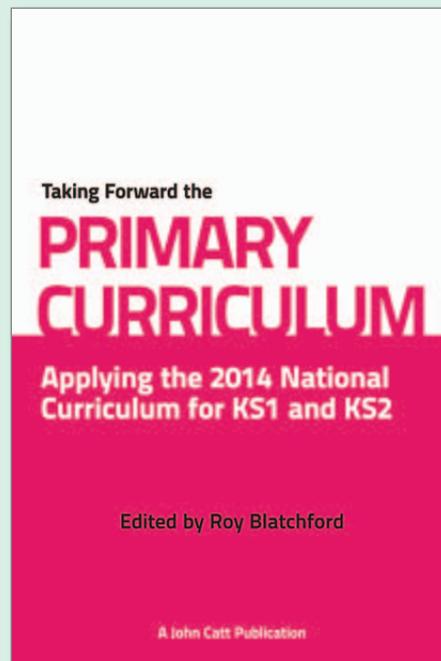
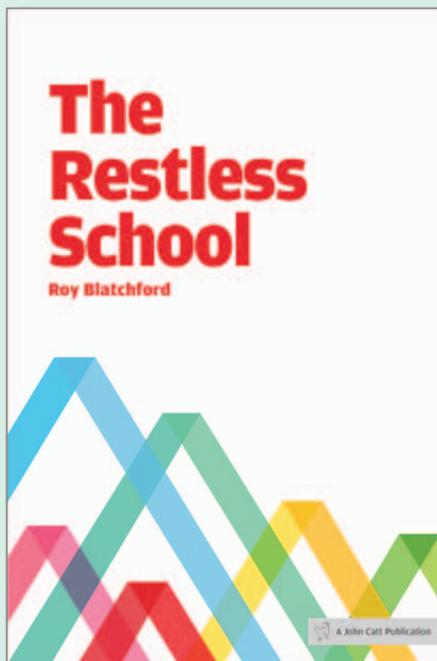
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Welcome to the world of 'joined-up software'

Synchronising systems can have huge benefits, say Oasis School Accounting

Schools are, by their nature, departmental, dating from the time when each academic discipline was seen as separate. Increasingly, now there is a more holistic and integrated view of education. However this integration is not always true of the information systems inside most schools. Often introduced to solve a particular issue or problem, each system exists on its own, yet it is logical and desirable for different systems to share the same data. Schools are frequently caught in a 'Catch22' situation, where they have 'islands' of information in their administration and accounting and other systems that just about work for them but restrict their ability to get real meaningful management information.

As more regulations in schools have meant more complex software

requirements to satisfy them, it has become increasingly difficult for any one company to be able to say 'our software will satisfy all the needs of the Head, the Bursar, HR, marketing, catering' and so on. Software suppliers have been part of the problem too, supplying niche applications for particular needs. This may allow the catering manager to buy the best catering system but this might not provide the pupil information for the new cashless catering system and may have no way of being passed back to the accounts team for termly billing and management reporting.

This is where data integration comes in – rather than try to find the non-existent system that suits every department in the school, why not get the system which suits each department to talk to the systems which suit every other department? Welcome to the

world of 'Joined-up software'. Using new techniques, it is now possible to link up multiple systems such as pupil/parent databases, cashless catering systems, and accounting systems so that they all share and interchange data.

Below are a number of ways such integration can be achieved:

- All three companies can co-operate with each other to make sure there is a suitable piece of software that will link up company A's bit to company B's bit, and then Company B's bit to Company C's bit. This bit of software could be tailored to deal with the various links needed but the companies involved might also need to maintain this link.
- An Application Programming Interface (API) may be provided by one or more of the companies. APIs are pieces of software that some companies have written specifically to make their data available to other software. Often these work well, but there can be cost implications for the other companies, such as a licence fee to allow Fees or Catering systems to access pupil/parent data.
- Data may be made freely available via exports or SQL Views to other suppliers.

Good software should always be able to provide data to other systems,



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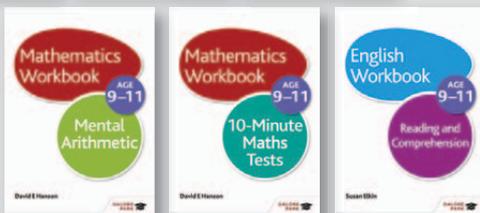
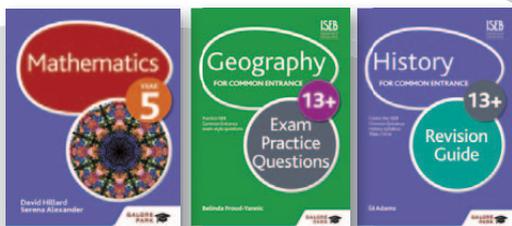


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It has become increasingly difficult for any one company to be able to say ‘our software will satisfy all the needs of the Head, the Bursar, HR, marketing, catering’ and so on

using the methods described above. It should also be able to import data from a wide variety of sources.

At Oasis, our main integration tool is OASIS-Synch – developed as a result of the increasing number of administration systems on offer for schools. Some time ago we realised that rather than try to replicate all the different admin systems it made more sense to concentrate on our strengths and make use of the expertise of others in different areas. Our strength is in the area of accounting – we provide a dedicated schools accounts package making full use of a pupil/address database and so it makes sense to ensure that we can use the information already being maintained by the schools admin system of choice. We have created a ‘multi-purpose’ system which can be used with most other systems without modification.

This provides for ease of maintenance both for us and the school, allowing them to change their admin database at any time without impacting on the accounts. The same process can also be used to synchronise external HR/Payroll systems with the OASIS payroll/HR data – allowing the school to make use of the features of the OASIS HR specifically geared to schools.

An example of this in action is Harrow, who have been using the OASIS synchronisation modules for many years now – firstly synchronising OASIS with CMIS and more recently with Isams.

Dr Christopher O’Mahony, Director of ICT at Harrow School, says:

“It was many years ago that schools gave up the search for a “one-product-

for-all” database management information system. The needs of different constituents in schools are so varied that it’s almost impossible to find a single product from a single vendor that does everything. The alternative goal, which is much more realistic and achievable, is to (a) always ensure any database system that a school procures is standards-based and well supported (ideally SQL or MySQL) and (b) invest in the development of integration connectors between these standards-based systems. In this way, one can begin to eliminate the multiple data entry points into various school systems, which inevitably can result in inconsistency, typing errors and invalid data.

“At Harrow School we have been working on a variety of ‘Identity Management’ projects designed to improve the integration and interoperability of our management information systems. As a result, we now have a single authoritative source for pupil/parent data, and a single authoritative source for staff data. From these two, all other subsidiary systems link to synchronise their data. We have been seeing operational benefits and productivity savings across the school as a direct consequence of these projects.”

Harrow have also made use of the integration between the Caternet system used by their catering department and the Oasis purchase ledger. Daniel Emkes, Harrow Finance and Systems Director says:

“As a long term user of OASIS, we have recently been successful in using Caternet for catering procurement

and asked OASIS to help us import purchase invoices directly into the Purchase Ledger from Caternet. This highlighted issues with the treatment of VAT in Caternet for partially-exempt schools and required Alex to write an import routine for OASIS. With help from Caternet and OASIS we have now achieved this and look forward to less duplication of entries and greater efficiency in future.”

Claire’s Court Schools have also been using the synchronisation with Furlong’s School Base, and have recently integrated their cashless catering system from Live Register with the OASIS Parent Pay portal.

We have found that Prep schools are increasingly looking to integration, whether with SchoolBase, iSAMS, School Manager or another admin system. Using integration they can have, for the first time, the admin software the Head and teachers like but link that database to the accounts system the Bursar prefers.

The options are available now for schools, allowing them to pick and mix the ‘best of breed’ software and make them talk to each other in a way that ensures their school is making the best of what is available, without putting all their eggs in one basket. I’m sure this approach will continue and as long as software suppliers demonstrate willingness to co-operate with other software suppliers to ensure the different products easily integrate, the schools will have even more choice of available software. Software suppliers, like ourselves, will also be exploring new ways of easily integrating other products with their own.

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‘A stunner!’

Theatretech have completed a prestigious rebuild of the Memorial Hall at Christ College, Brecon to celebrate the School’s 475th anniversary

The site is immediately adjacent to a Grade 2 listed chapel and cloisters, and although tight, there was sufficient space to build a two story foyer extension between the rebuilt Hall element and the chapel, taking advantage of spectacular views across the playing fields to the Brecon Beacons, and on the roadside, to build a similar scale two storey extension containing dressing rooms and a separate dance/drama studio.

The overall height of the building had to remain as before, as views from the town side to the chapel and the Beacons beyond needed to be

maintained, but the original Hall is much modified internally as a result of the ground-up rebuild. It is now a flexible and professionally equipped theatre space, with deep ‘courtyard’ style side galleries, a large technical control room at the rear of the auditorium, telescopic seating for over 200, some electric hoist rigging sets, and a completely new heating and ventilation system.

The general, house and working light system is fully programmable, and is entirely LED, with lux levels throughout achieving in excess of levels required for exams, but with

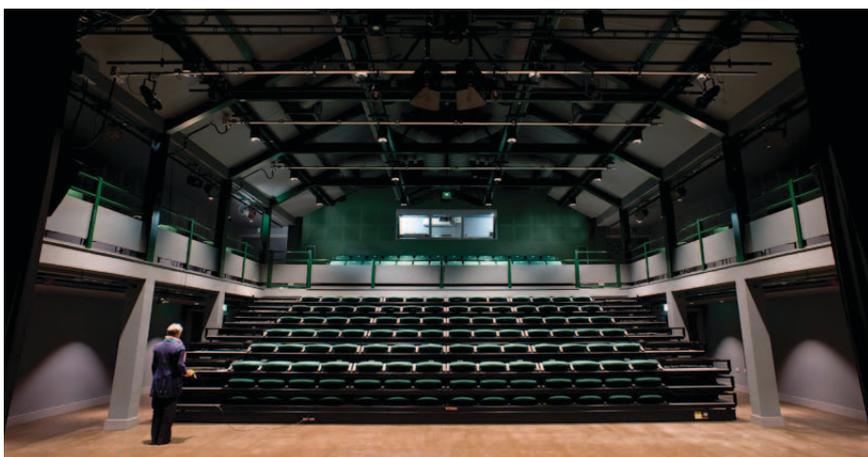
switching, dimming and grouping capability to any desired configuration – all different functions required in a theatre space being met by one fitting type instead of three or four.

The main theatre space is equipped with state-of-the-art performance lighting with 72 dimmer channels available, and a 32 channel digital audio mixing desk. The drama studio is a simpler space, but its control room also acts as a recording studio, and is linked to the main theatre with ethernet and audio tie lines. Presentations can be effected from a laptop or iPad via a high quality projector and the house audio system.

Likewise, the foyer spaces are lit by LED adjustable downlights, as the two levels are also used as exhibition areas. There is a large servery/bar, and a feature staircase linking the two foyer levels. Externally, the ground floor elevations are clad in random pattern welsh stone, with an off-white insulated render at first floor level, and the foyers are floor to ceiling glazing to maximise the views, both looking inwards and externally.

“The new Memorial Hall is, quite simply, a stunner! It is, and provides, everything we asked for and more,” is the generous testimonial received by Theatretech from the Headmistress Emma Taylor, and Theatretech are indeed extremely proud to have been selected as architectural designers and specialist theatre consultants for this significant project.

Should you require any further information on this project, or on Theatretech’s experience and services, please visit www.theatretech.net or contact them on 020 8780 1830.



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For more information on any of the *satips* courses below, please contact Sarah Kirby-Smith, course director, on coursedirector@satips.com
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24 Nov	Creative curriculum in the pre-prep	London
13 Oct	Non-fiction writing	London
10 Oct	Teaching languages to dyslexic pupils	London
7 Nov	Eliminating failure in language learning	London
7 Oct	Mathematics: Delivering the new National Curriculum in Key Stage 2	London
3 Oct	Assessment and evaluation in PSHE	London
3 Nov	Emotional health and resilience	London

Other courses and events

BSA

Further details on BSA courses can be found via www.boarding.org.uk

5-7 May 2015	Annual Heads' Conference	London
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GSA

For details of all courses and conferences in the GSA Professional Development Programme visit: www.gsa.uk.com/professional-development

9 Oct	Moving on up: from middle to senior leadership	Birmingham
15 Oct	GSA/IDPE Girls' Schools Seminar	London
16 Oct	ISQAM for middle managers Level 1	London
4 Nov	ISQAM for middle managers Level 1	Leicester
19 Jan	SEN in the classroom	Farnborough

ISA

14 Oct	Preparing your inspection documentation	Waltham Abbey
4 Nov	Deputy / Assistant Heads Conference	Cheshire
6 Nov	Appraisal and performance management	Great Chesterford, Essex
2 Dec	School development planning	Wolverhampton

Society of Heads

Further details on Society of Heads courses can be found via www.thesocietyofheads.org.uk

13 Nov	Heads of junior schools	Leeds
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Hit 'send' and collect your P45!

Dear Parents,

I trust that you have had wonderful summer breaks and that your children are enjoying the new term. As always the year is packed with opportunities and experiences for the pupils, the first of which is the residential trip, looming before us.

You have now received a kit list for your child which I am sure they will follow as they pack their rucksacks. One of the key objectives of a residential is for your child to be independent. Please could you ensure therefore, that your children can clean their own teeth without supervision and realise that the 'floordrobe' is not the appropriate receptacle for their dirty clothes.

The first trip of the year, as you know, is an outwards bound trip and as such you have been asked to provide old clothes. Tempting as it is to kit out your child in brand new outfits, it really isn't appropriate. I can assure you that most of the clothes will be fit only for the bin when you return. Ralph Lauren and Armani chinos, or a new mini Moschino pair of leggings are really not necessary. Your child will bring home the remnants of their clothes in a bin bag which I can assure you will be headed straight for the bin.

Now we come to the really tricky part. The farewells. I know that it is tempting to take your child out, with the extended family, for a farewell meal the night before we leave. You may even be tempted to shed some tears as you tuck them in, to their final night at home in bed. In the morning you may breakfast them like a king before driving them to school. You may want to stay and wave them off on the coach, howling like a banshee.

Surprisingly none of this helps. The breakfast often reappears on the coach, much to the annoyance of the staff and no child ever cries as they leave school unless they have a sobbing snotty parent wailing in the car park.

You will note that the kit list does not include mobile phones and this is for good reason. If your child does bring a phone then the temptation can be too great. Not just for the phone call home but to access their Facebook page and update their status. The staff do not appreciate being Snapchatted from behind whilst crawling through a pipe or Vined whilst swinging through the air on a rope. Nor do they appreciate a running commentary on their night wear. Quite unnecessary.

So, please do prepare your child for the residential but then allow them to enjoy it. They are now Year 8 and fairly mature. Enjoy your week of freedom and if you have any sense go away yourself, somewhere child free, but please remember to collect them on Friday evening. Freddie was most upset last year when his parents had mistakenly thought the trip didn't return until Saturday. The return trip from Paris was a long wait for him and the staff.

Finally, a word on manners. Whilst on a residential the staff see your child in a whole new light. We notice very quickly the child whose family have staff and the child who has a pathological avoidance of the magic vocabulary, please, thank you and sorry. We tend to find that this is mirrored completely by the parents when we return their children to them. The staff are exhausted, having given up their time for your children. They have struggled with no sleep, home sick children and fussy eaters. We normally have at least one vomiter and one with projectile diarrhoea. We patch up cut knees and smooth over bitchy arguments. Occasionally we subtly change wet beds or lift the heaviest children from top bunks for nighttime loo stops. We love, care for and cherish your children to the point where we have nothing left for our own. We do this out of love, not duty.

Go on, every now and then amaze us, stagger us, overwhelm us with a 'thank you', a bottle of Chablis would be great, a box of chocolates soul warming but simply... a thank you...that would be magic.

Best wishes for a peaceful week.

Yours sincerely

Miss E Doff

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