



SSAT Journal 11

Spring 2018

ssat the schools, students
and teachers network

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Welcome

*Sue Williamson,
Chief Executive, SSAT*



I always enjoy reading the articles in the journal, particularly when the successes of students, teachers and school leaders are highlighted. I take it for granted that each term we will have a range of top quality stories written by practitioners and school leaders.

It has not always been the case that teachers have had the opportunity to publish their practice other than in an academic journal or to share what works with other colleagues. National networking for me started when my school became a member of the Technology Colleges Trust in 1994. For the first time I met fellow headteachers who wanted to talk about school improvement and how we might work together to achieve success for our schools. It was a career enhancing moment.

In 1994, I attended the national conference of the Technology Colleges College Trust and met the chairman, Sir Cyril Taylor. Cyril was a man on a mission – he wanted schools to work with business and industry; to engage with the new technologies; to use data to improve exam results and, most importantly, to prepare young people for the future. His focus was always on the most vulnerable child – they could succeed, they just needed more help.

Cyril died at the end of January. I was shocked. I thought he would go on forever – driven by his passion for education. I saw him the week before he died. His office walls hold dozens of photographs of Cyril with famous people who had helped with his various projects – Robert Kennedy, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair. Also the cartoons lampooning his work with specialist schools – Cyril enjoyed a joke. At our meeting, Cyril was his usual self – throwing out ideas and

asking how he might help. As I left, he said it was important that SSAT continued to work with schools to help every child to succeed, and particularly the vulnerable children.

We will – we are currently shaping our social justice work and planning on setting up a charity to administer this. More on this in a later edition, but for now, I want to focus on Cyril's legacy. He laid the foundations for the school-led system with the introduction of CTCs, which led to specialist schools and academies. He introduced many leading businessmen to education – Lord Harris, Garry Weston, Stanley Kalms – who invested money and time into the school system. Many headteachers/principals of the CTCs and specialist schools have gone on to be system leaders.

Cyril brought together the best thinkers and practitioners from a range of sectors to share their expertise with schools and school leaders. It was he who worked with professor David Jesson on the use of data and value-added measures. He always wanted to publicise the successes of schools and their students, and this has always been at the heart of SSAT's work.

There is so much more that I could write about. I am pleased that he visited my school when I was a headteacher and that I had the opportunity to work with him when I joined SSAT. Cyril would have loved the story of the student from Beckfoot Upper Heaton School who gained the apprenticeship with Aston Martin (page 47).

I hope you enjoy this edition of the journal, and we would be delighted to share your story with other schools and teachers. If you are interested in writing an article, please contact your Relationship Manager – RMTeam@ssatuk.co.uk.



Spaced repetition learning – what we have learnt

Adam Sturdee,
St Augustine's Catholic College

It's not a panacea, but it is valuable. Adam Sturdee, Head of History and SSAT Lead Practitioner, St Augustine's Catholic College, explores the published research and his school's effective use of spaced learning

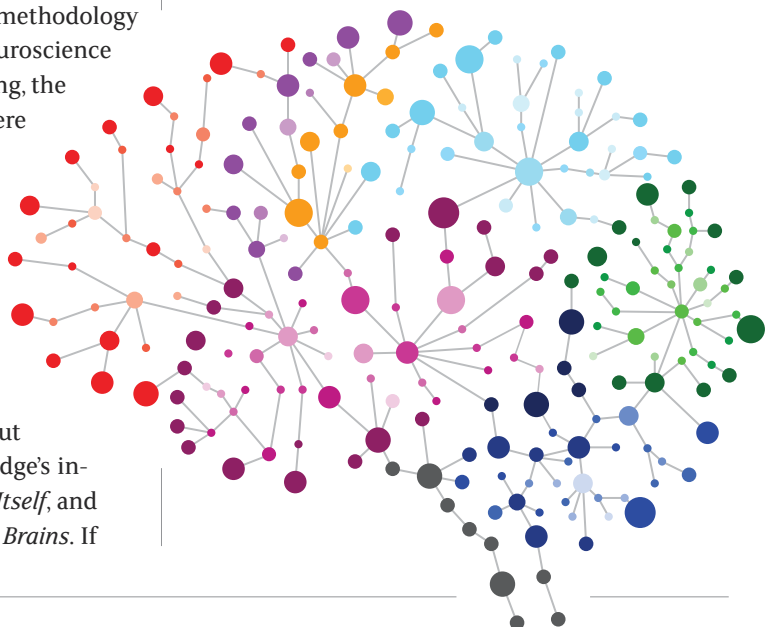
While looking for ways to support my students in their revision, in 2014 I started experimenting with spaced repetitive learning following a Google search along the lines of 'revision techniques – what works?'

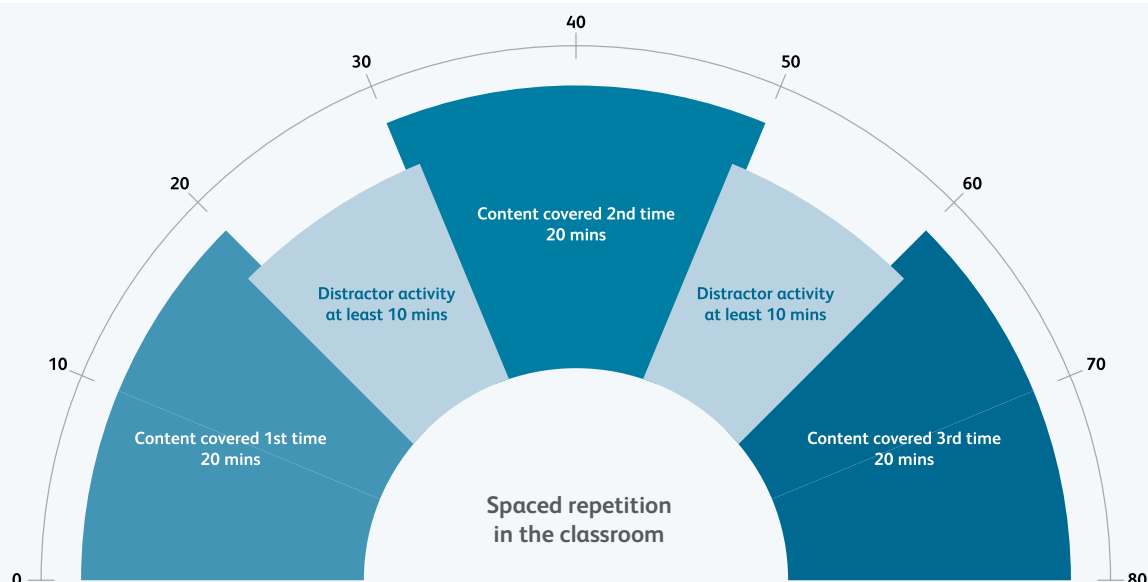
One of the links that stood out was Dr Paul Kelley's work with Monkseaton students, using spaced learning to secure long-term memories. Monkseaton and Learning Futures had published a practical PDF guide for teachers, which proved to be the start of a journey down a rabbit warren for me. It rapidly progressed from teaching methodology into the unfamiliar domains of neuroscience and cognitive psychology. In my reading, the transition probably occurred somewhere between Paul Kelley's *Making Minds: What's Wrong with Education and What Should We Do About It?* (2007, Routledge) and R Douglas Fields' 'Making Memories Stick' (Scientific American, February 2005).

Needless to say, I was soon hopelessly out of my depth in the literature, but not before stumbling on Norman Doidge's intriguing book, *The Brain that Changes Itself*, and Dick Swaab's easy-to-read *We Are Our Brains*. If

mind is ultimately the product being produced in schools, then developing a working understanding of the organ that manufactures it must be an advantage for teachers.

Upon emerging from the literature into a more familiar world of fast-approaching exams with anxious students and parents seeking practical guidance on revision, I started to implement spaced repetition in the classroom, initially in a very rudimentary way. In single sessions, we taught students to break up revision with 10-minute intervals, repeating the same content in slightly different ways over 3x15 minute sessions. (The advice we gave students was that session times should be determined by attention span; when you become mindful of losing concentration, take a break!) The





science behind the repetition is explained in Field's research uncovering the process by which long-term memories are formed and described here in the Learning Futures guide:

'Surprisingly, constant stimulation of the cell did not make the cells switch on. Stimulation had to be separated by gaps when the cell was not stimulated. The breakthrough came when the team "began to realise that the important factor was time". The length of stimulation was not vital, but the gap between stimulations was. This insight is the basis of Spaced Learning.'

Crucially, to ensure the knowledge pathways cells were not being 'switched on' I designed distractor tasks to be used in the classroom, including colouring in mandalas, making playdough animals and completing origami challenges. Colouring in the mandalas to calming music (search 'relaxing drum and base' or 'spa music' on YouTube) was a favourite with students, some of whom gained the additional benefit of learning meaningful relaxation in the unusual situation of being given 'down time' in a lesson.

I taught students the basic science behind spaced repetition and how to use it at home to revise. I set spaced repetition homeworks and educated parents, at revision evenings and by way of the school newsletter. Spaced learning displays around school explained the method and the science, and

I delivered Saturday revision sessions, before the summer exams, using the spaced repetition method.

High quality sleep

Feeding into spaced repetition methodology is the landmark 2001 study conducted by Matthew Wilson of MIT. Dr Wilson's work shed light on memory formation by studying the process in which rats dream about their activities during slow wave sleep as well as during REM sleep. Wilson's study underpins the importance of high-quality sleep to stabilise memories as a dynamic element in building solid long-term memories. This provided an opportunity to teach students about the importance of sleeping well in an age of omnipresent social media. We now advise our students (and more to the point, their parents!) that mobile phones should be left downstairs at all times and not taken into the bedroom. We also recommend that screen time is limited to an hour a day at key stage 3 and two hours a day at key stage 4.

In an attempt to test the effectiveness of the spaced repetition method, I conducted a crude experiment using two year 12 classes of largely equal ability. In the control group, students completed a 45-minute revision session on the causes of the American Civil War using memrise.com. The control group were not given a break. The experimental group were given the same memrise.com revision task, but with three 15-minute sessions separated by two five-minute

breaks. (Note: ideally breaks shouldn't be less than 10 minutes but to complete in an hour's lesson we had to reduce this time), in which they coloured in a mandala while listening to calming background music as the distractor activity.

In a recall test four weeks after the revision task, the group using spaced learning recalled almost twice as much as the control group

In both cases, students were given five minutes to complete the recall test four weeks later. The group using spaced learning recalled almost twice as much as the control group (average test score of 22 versus 11.8). Interesting too that overall the experimentals had accrued fewer points on the memorise activity (average of 12217 versus 13426), indicating

that on average they hadn't covered as much of the content as the controls and yet the test results suggested they recalled significantly more, almost twice as much.

In a wider sample of student voice, 80% of our students said they found the process effective or highly effective.

I am grateful that I started my informal action research into spaced repetition at about the same time Michael Gove was putting the final touches to his ED Hirsch-inspired GCSEs. The increased emphasis on a knowledge curriculum is apparent across the board but arguably nowhere more so than in the new history GCSEs. Our students now cover four topics, collectively spanning almost 1000 years. We have developed our understanding and application of spaced learning to support our students with this challenge.



For the building of secure long-term memories, the gap between exposures to the stimulus material can be systematically lengthened; forgetting is an important part of the process. As primarytimery.com points out in her excellent blog post, *Memory not memories – teaching for long term learning*, what we are trying to build is semantic, not episodic memories. (The episodic memories formed in the prepare for learning/presenting of new information stages are a minimal part of the overall product, serving the short-term outcomes of engagement and capturing imagination at the start of a learning cycle.)

To this end we have delivered the new specification in the first time of teaching by testing all delivered content in extensive knowledge recall tests (100+ questions) every term, so as to exploit the testing effect, also explained very clearly in primarytimery.com's blog post. Peer-assessed tests reduce workload for teachers and produce instant, usable data. Student scores are captured straight after the test and inform teacher and department planning and intervention, reports to parents, tutors and the head of year. More importantly, the process reinforces knowledge and provides feedback to students on the quality of their revision methodology and long-term memories.

No panacea, but valid methodology

In a 2009 Guardian article, Alan Smithers, professor of education at the University of Buckingham, made the valid point that the idea of spaced learning as a panacea is 'a harmful exaggeration'.

Notwithstanding, it has its place as valid methodology to build knowledge.

Where to from here? We'll be collecting student and parent voice on the termly knowledge recall test process and analysing the results of all tests taken over two years with our current year 11 cohort. In term four we will be writing to the parents of underperforming year 10 and 11 students with a guide to spaced learning and how it can be applied at home to support their children. In the summer we will review the teaching timetable for our four GCSE topics, with a view to identifying more sophisticated ways to reinforce content over the two years, using spaced learning with increasing gaps.

In 2017 the EEF in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast and 15 schools assessed the impact of spaced learning. Their report can be found here: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evaluation/projects/spaced-learning>

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What does great learning look like?

*Abby Chivers,
Bristnall Hall Academy*

Abby Chivers, Assistant Principal, Bristnall Hall Academy, explains their effective focus on learner behaviour aligned with teacher collaboration on strategies

As a school that has social deprivation indicators significantly above the national average, we have a compelling focus on raising the aspirations of all learners. This has been at the forefront of all our school improvement work over the last four years.

A key aspect of our journey has been to shape students' understanding of what great learning looks like. One of our greatest challenges was combating students' fear of challenge which, in some cases, was because of a lack of self-belief. Comments such as 'I'm no good at this subject' became an invisible barrier for some students' low expectations of themselves. This was exacerbated by the GCSE reforms with one student commenting that they would be 'happy with a grade 4 because the GCSEs are

harder now.' While this was not the view of all, an analysis of progress data and the use of PASS data (pupil attitudes to self and school) showed a relationship between low expectations, low aspirations and underachievement. This inspired a discussion among staff about the kind of learner behaviour we need to cultivate to ensure that all learners are equipped to meet their full potential.

The starting point was standardising what we expect great



There are many ways students can learn the value of effort as the path to mastery

learner behaviour to look like. This was ascertained through staff and student focus groups in which they were asked: ‘Think about a learner who makes great progress. How might you describe their learning behaviour?’ This helped to establish the ten key qualities we wanted to nurture in all learners: risk taking, resilience, flexibility, engagement, determination, relentlessness, curiosity, confident communicators, seekers of knowledge and pride. The next step was to make tangible what a ‘curious’ learner and so forth looks like, which led to the formulation of key behaviours, written from the perspective of the learner, relating to the ten characteristics.

Revising peer observation

To ensure an investment by all stakeholders in our guiding principles, it was paramount that these qualities should permeate through the academy. This prompted a revision of how we observe our peers. The learner behaviours became the standards by which we began to observe lessons, positioning the staff as facilitators, who create opportunities through planning and teaching, and the students as responsible for their own learning. This has been instrumental in ensuring a consistent learning experience across the curriculum for all, and holding students to account through the promotion of high expectations.

In order to make the message explicit, every learner engaged in pupil workshops, planned to role model the learner behaviours and set the bar high. It also provided a vehicle to promote high aspirations and dispel the

Challenge RISK TAKING	Support RESILIENCE	Independence and homework FLEXIBILITY	Engagement ENGAGED	
C1: Students are challenged throughout the lesson by accessing work that is pitched at where they need to be which allows them to maximise their progress.	S1: Students are on different learning journeys (where appropriate) but aspire to outcomes pitched at where they need to be.	I1: Students work as independently as possible at points/throughout the lesson.	E1: Students remain on task and enjoy engaging in challenging work.	
A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	
C2: Students complete work that is pitched correctly to allow them to make maximum progress.	S2: Students make use of support available to them and know the steps they need to take to succeed.	I2: Students are resourceful; they make use of information, other learners and the teacher effectively.	E2: Students participate and know that there is nowhere to hide.	
A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	
C3: Students, where appropriate, can use high order thinking skills to complete activities and to answer questions.	S3: Students make at least the expected progress because they use all available support as a bridge to their learning.	I3: Students think creatively to find solutions to problems.	E3: Students work confidently independently and with others, taking responsibility for their part.	
A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	
C4: Students feel confident taking risks and learning from mistakes because there is a positive atmosphere created through stretch, challenge and collaboration		I4: Students welcome and complete challenging homework and hand it in on time		
A M S NE NA		A M S NE NA		
		I5: Where opportunities arise, students lead their own learning, planning how to go about it.		
		A M S NE NA		

Figure 1 Learner behaviour standards

myth of fixed ability and talent. The workshops discussed how students who have a fixed mindset will often spend their time avoiding challenges that may threaten their self-beliefs, instead of welcoming them. They also believe that talent alone, not effort, creates success.

In the workshops we promoted growth mindset, through which students recognise that their

basic qualities can be developed through dedication and hard work – that effort is the path to mastery. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for lifelong success.

Pupil evaluations showed that the sessions were well received. Furthermore, they provided stimulus for discussion between staff and students about the kind of behaviours and mindset

	Progress DETERMINED	Pace RELENTLESS	Marking and feedback SEEK AND USE FEEDBACK	Questioning CURIOUS	Basic skills COMMUNICATION SKILLS	Subject knowledge/ depth of learning MAKING CONNECTIONS	Behaviour for learning PROUD
	Pr1: Students take steps that allow them to make the expected, or better, progress during the lesson and over time.	P1: Students remain focused which allows them to work at their full capacity throughout the lesson.	M1: Students respond meaningfully to teacher marking in green pen.	Q1: Students answer questions during the lesson that helps them to progress their learning and develop higher order thinking skills.	B1: Students make use of available resources to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.	D1: Students use subject specific terminology verbally and in their written work.	BL1: Students show respect to all and recognise that others have different beliefs and attitudes.
	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA
	Pr2: Students understand the learning outcomes and know what steps they need to take to meet them.	P2: When students have finished tasks they move on to more challenging activities, ensuring that there are no breaks in the learning.	M2: Students, when referring to their work, can discuss areas of strength; targets for improvement and their next steps to make progress.	Q2: Students ask thoughtful questions to add, develop, challenge and deepen (ACDC) their learning.	B2: Students are proactive in correcting literacy and numeracy errors in their work and ensure that the same errors are not made again.	D2: Students make use of opportunities to revisit prior knowledge, making appropriate links across topics and subjects.	BL2: Students value learning; they strive to do their best.
	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA
	Pr3: Students demonstrate their understanding (through regular learning checks) in the lesson and over time.		M3: Where appropriate, students engage in self and peer assessment against marking criteria and use this to set realistic targets for themselves.		B3: Students are aware of the zero tolerance words and strive to learn the correct spelling.	D3: Students build on their knowledge during each activity.	BL3: Students approach learning with the understanding that determination and hard work can improve abilities.
	A M S NE NA		A M S NE NA		A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA
	Pr4: Students are 'busy' learning in the lesson and make constant steps towards meeting learning outcomes in the lesson and over time.		M4: When a second attempt at learning is made, students use feedback effectively to make improvements.		B4: Students speak and write in full sentences	D4: Students deepen their knowledge and understanding through activities that involve high order thinking (using Bloom's Taxonomy).	BL4: Students arrive punctually and are prepared for learning with the correct equipment.
	A M S NE NA		A M S NE NA		A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA
						D5: Students offer detailed explanations by expanding their ideas.	BL5: Students take pride in the presentation of their work, meeting the expectations of the BHA presentation poster.
						A M S NE NA	A M S NE NA

A - All learners

M - Most learners

S - Some learners

NE - No evidence

NA - Not applicable

they should be embracing before each activity. To ensure that high expectations live in the fabric of the school, pupil speak posters, delineating concrete examples of positive learner behaviour for each of the ten qualities, are displayed in every classroom.

Concurrently, staff received training on how to ensure that positive learner behaviours are nurtured and planned for.

Observing practice against the new learner behaviours was instrumental in empowering staff to evaluate their own practice. It also provided teaching and learning data that encouraged leaders to ask:

- » To what extent are our students demonstrating the necessary behaviours that secure excellent outcomes?
- » To what extent are our

teachers promoting high aspirations through planning and delivery?

Collecting teaching and learning data by student mindset has helped leaders to harness expertise across the academy and offer bespoke and targeted support to move everyone's practice forward. Moreover, the lead practitioners have each adopted a strand to develop, offering CPL



Teachers' new strategies took some unexpected routes

opportunities, video case studies and 'strategy of the fortnight' to inspire change.

A whole-school CPD evaluation showed teachers want greater opportunities to collaboratively plan and evaluate new strategies

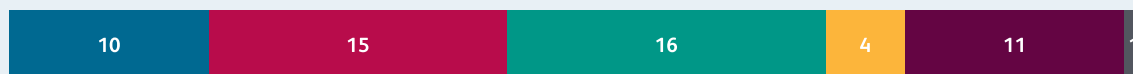
Following an initial observation of all staff in the first term,

teachers evaluated their practice, informed by the visual teaching and learning graph, and each identified three standards they needed to nurture through planning and delivery in order to improve their everyday practice. They then chose from a menu of CPD sessions, led by the lead practitioners. Following the training sessions, staff engaged in three 'blended learning' opportunities: tasks related to the CPD workshops attended, with a focus on a plan, do, review

approach. Each staff member has an online folder where they upload their blended learning activities, which then provides stimulus for discussion with the lead practitioner responsible for that particular strand. This has been instrumental in encouraging staff 'buy in'. Feedback from a whole-school CPD evaluation carried out at the beginning of the academic year highlighted that teachers want greater opportunities to collaboratively plan and evaluate new

Teaching against the new learner behaviour standards

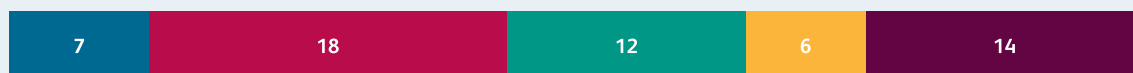
Students think creatively to find solutions to problems



Students welcome and complete challenging homework and hand it in on time



Where opportunities arise, students lead their own learning, planning how to go about it



Students remain on task and enjoy engaging in challenging work



Students participate and know that there is nowhere to hide



Students work confidently independently and with others, taking responsibility for their part



All

Most

Some

No evidence

Not applicable

No rating

Figure 2 Visual report of teaching against the new learner behaviour standards

strategies. Devoting CPD hours to the implementation of the new approach to standards has given it credence and ensured it is a whole school priority.

Work-related learning

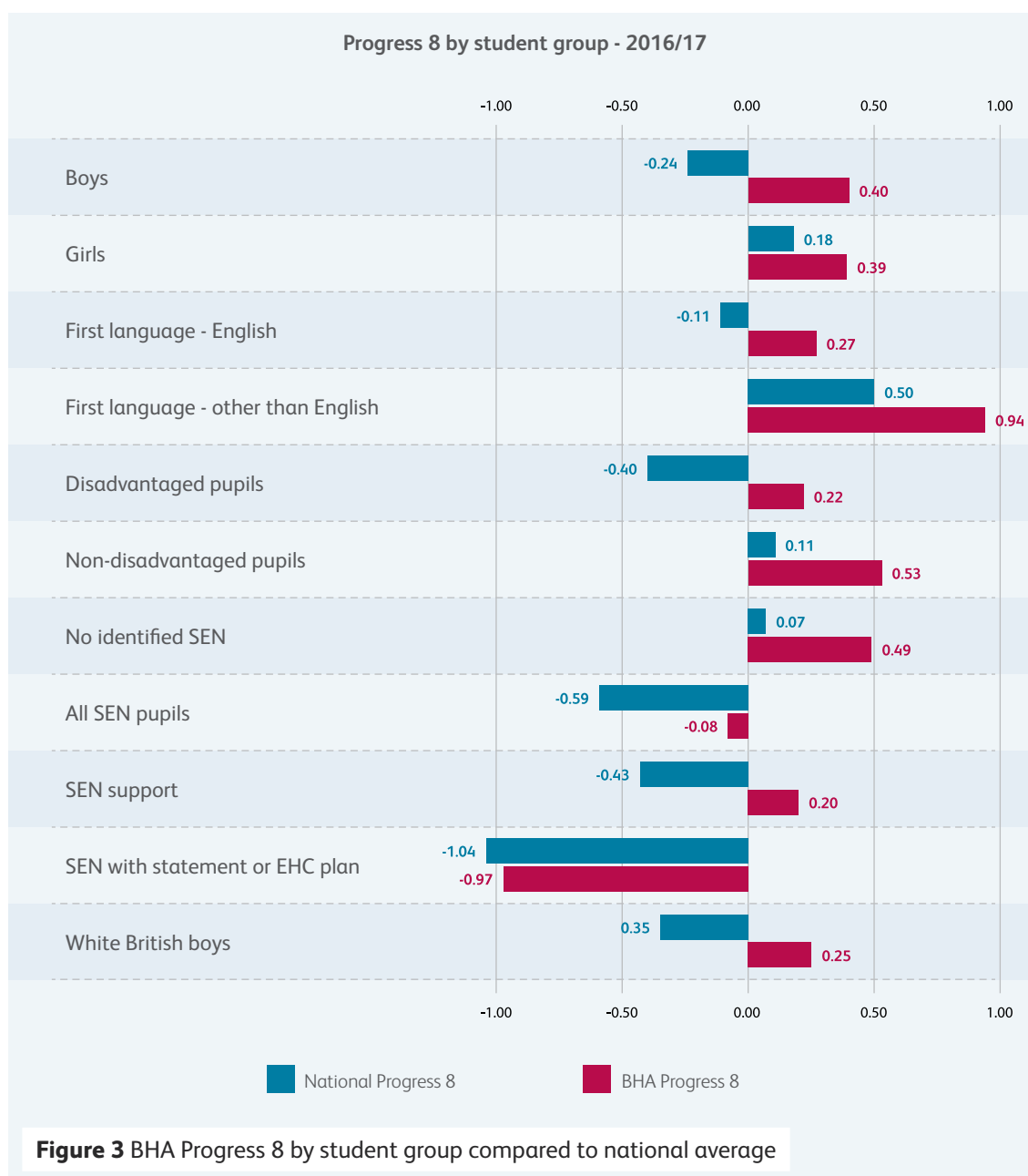
Alongside the work we have done to develop staff, the welfare team and our high potential coordinator have been pivotal in ensuring that all students are inspired and motivated to learn through the expansion of careers and enterprise opportunities. All students

now engage in a work-related learning project every year from years 7-11, offering the opportunity to engage in at least five work-related learning experiences.

Careers evenings and focus weeks for all students have helped to ensure that all learners, particularly those who are most disadvantaged, have high aspirations and know how to achieve them. Building the ten learner behaviours into the

careers programme, and sign-posting the behaviours required to carve out a successful future career, helped students to understand the relationship between aspirations, expectations and school achievement.

While we consider ourselves to be on a constant journey progress 8 outcomes, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged, place Bristnall Hall Academy above the national average for all student groups.



Aligning high aspirations and high expectations through the expansion of work-related learning and the implementation of tangible learner behaviours has undoubtedly contributed to excellent academic outcomes. What we have learnt as an academy is that aspirations can help students improve their

achievement – but it will be much more influential if they are accompanied with high behavioural expectations as well. Motivating students to expect more of themselves has been a trigger to unlocking the potential of all learners at Bristnall Hall Academy.

Students with a growth mindset recognise that effort is the path to mastery, which leads to resilience and a love of learning



Recruitment and retention: factors for school leaders to consider

Andy Williams,
SSAT

SSAT senior education lead Andy Williams reviews some of the more useful recent contributions to the debate

Recruiting new teachers and keeping the ones we have in the system seems to be at a crisis point, although when discussing this with some education professionals recently, I was informed that it's not a crisis, in part due to the fact that numbers leaving have roughly matched those entering the profession.

But we know we are going to need more teachers due to an increasing population and we are seeing a worrying downturn in recruitment of new teachers. The very definition of a 'crisis' is a time of intense difficulty or danger. In schools up and down the country, in many different contexts, we are indeed facing a time of intense difficulty and we are in danger of failing to provide a quality education to the children in our care.

Recruitment

The woes of teacher recruitment have been well documented, with a third fewer applications in December 2017 than the previous year. This equates to 6510 fewer applicants, at a time when we know we need more teachers.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of ASCL, observes that in part this could be due to the confusing routes into teaching, supported by Schools Week's comment: '[ITT routes are confusing, contradictory and overwhelming](#)'. He notes that teacher workload and accountability are important factors in putting off young people who understand they would find a better work-life balance in a career other than teaching.

Despite bursaries, compelling advertising and social media recruitment tactics, the targets for ITT have been missed in all but PE and history. At a time of rising pupil numbers, not only are we failing to recruit enough teachers to the profession. In

many cases, we are also failing to stop the flood of teachers leaving. There is no doubt that government needs to act to improve recruitment of teachers, hopefully including improved clarity of routes into teaching.

We need to think long and hard about what we are doing to teachers in the pursuit of education for our young people

An important consideration for retention is clarity about the data. For example, if we focus on the numbers of teachers still in the system three years down the line, we could be fooling ourselves thinking we're helping to resolve the recruitment crisis, only to exacerbate the retention crisis, – unless dropout rates beyond three years, as well as within that period, are low.

But dropout, and retention of existing staff, are things that schools can directly influence.



Retention

To quote a headteacher I worked with recently, 'it's not rocket science!' There are a myriad of reasons why we are failing to hang on to teachers, and we know what they are. Curriculum and assessment changes are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the swathe of changes that have been brought to bear on schools. Add the funding crisis (that word again) and the sheer volume of work teachers have on their plates, there is little wonder one educationalist described it as 'a relentless policy onslaught.'

Factors associated with teacher retention: job satisfaction, adequate resources, reward and recognition, and management support

We need to consider the thousands of teachers on long term stress leave (up 5% on last year) and just some of the reasons why this figure is increasing.

A Lib Dem survey in 2017 revealed 3,750 (1 in 83) teachers are on long-term sick leave citing stress and mental health issues. We need to think long and hard about what we are doing to teachers in the pursuit of education for our young people. There is little doubt that all teachers feel the responsibility to be the best they can be – no-one comes into the profession to do a bad job. And contrary to some beliefs in society, teachers work long hours – on average 55 hours per week, so not 'leaving with the kids at 3.30.'

Are we doing enough in schools, exhibiting courageous leadership to deflect some of this policy onslaught and consider how a teacher with a full timetable is coping?

In September 2016, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published a report entitled *Engaging teachers: NFER analysis of teacher retention*. This was based on a comprehensive survey of teachers' attitudes to the question of remaining in the profession entitled *Should I stay or should I go*.

And I admit to having The Clash lyrics in my head whenever this is mentioned – perhaps ironically, this section:

*'One day it's fine and
next it's black*

*So if you want me
off your back*

*Well, come on and let me know
Should I stay or should I go.'*

NFER's findings indicated that, indeed, many teachers needed to know they were valued. Job satisfaction, having adequate resources, reward and recognition and being well supported by management were factors associated with retention of teachers. The report goes on to talk about teachers being 'engaged' and the strong interaction between engagement and retention. In fact, of the teachers surveyed, 90% of those who describe themselves as engaged are not thinking of leaving, whereas the disengaged are much more likely to be considering leaving.

Teachers are adept at adapting their lesson planning to engage learners, so in the same way it may be useful to consider how

leaders engage teachers. In the NFER report the engagement questions considered:

- » teachers' opinions of the school management
- » communication within the school
- » how satisfied they are with their job
- » opportunities for professional development
- » resources available to them
- » whether they feel part of the school community.

To take just one of these: Educational Policy Institute research shows on average teachers in England spent only four days a year on CPD in 2013, compared with an average of 10.5 days across the 36 countries covered by the analysis (Pither 2017).

Wellbeing the key to engagement

When considering teacher engagement, most if not all of the protective factors can be thought of under the umbrella of wellbeing. School management listening to the opinions of teachers and acting on it; general communication in school – not just about accountability measures but about the people at the front line; job satisfaction and the conditions for enhancing this; a shared responsibility for all staff; and the 'community feel' – that gut feeling you get when you walk into a school that truly cares.

We know that we can always work harder and longer hours in the short term to achieve our

goals in education. But this is unsustainable, leading to disengagement and teachers leaving the profession. Let's not kid ourselves here either: although over half of those who leave a particular school remain in education, a significant proportion of them take a pay cut to do so. So it's certainly not pay that keeps teachers in the job.

At an SSAT Lead Practitioner Conference in February 2017, entitled *High performing culture: high impact practitioners, education thinkers*, (see photos) leaders and both aspiring and accredited SSAT Lead Practitioners came together to discuss how to create high impact without staff burnout. We essentially wanted to examine how we can create a high performing culture in schools while maintaining staff wellbeing.

Quoting Patrick Ottley-O'Connor, leaders must:

- » establish a values driven vision
- » reassure and inspire
- » listen and observe (staff perception)
- » create a shared and owned 'burning platform' (the most urgent and important issues for your school)
- » plan – do – review – repeat
- » create a culture of distributed leadership with accountability, trust and wellbeing at its heart – enthuse, engage, empower
- » build a narrative of the journey and celebrate incremental success.

In this way, Patrick argues that a good leader is not a hero, but instead a hero-maker in the staff.

Martyn Reah, founder of the invaluable #Teacher5aday, spoke about the time teachers spend thinking about the wellbeing of their students and the irony of how little time they (and their leaders) spend thinking about staff wellbeing, despite this being key to a successful school. He quotes Briner et al: *Staff wellbeing is key to school success* You can see more of Patrick's and Martyn's work through their very active Twitter accounts @ottleyoconnor and @teacher5aday.

SSAT's [Lead Practitioner conference](#) was an ideal platform for this discussion, celebrating and showcasing the work that teachers and support staff do to become accredited lead practitioners.

What works – learners' views

More recently, we heard from a cohort of LPs at their celebration event on 4 January. In May 2017, Samuel Ward Academy Trust set out to establish a core group of aspiring lead practitioners who would investigate 'what works' in their classrooms across the trust. Using the LP framework as their guidance and support for individualised professional development, the aspiring LPs carried out their action research on a wide range of teaching and learning foci – from maths and English teaching excellence across the trust, to developing art across primary school clusters.

Staff involved in the LP programme spoke of their work in creating the right ethos, influencing the culture of their schools, and of the high challenge/low threat approach to collaborative, evidence informed practice.

But there was a surprise in store for the newly accredited LPs, as unbeknown to them, their cohort leader Chris Dale had organised some responses from the learners. In [the resulting video](#) the learners answered some important questions, such as:

- » Why are teachers important?
- » What is your earliest memory of your teacher?
- » Can you name one interesting thing about your teacher?
- » What are the key things that teachers do?
- » What was your favourite lesson?
- » Can you describe your teacher in three ways?
- » If you met your teacher in 15 years, what would you say?

With due care and diligence and by working together, school leaders can support teacher dedication by 'loving the ones we have' so they stay with us



The learners' comments included:

- » 'they shape us and help us to grow as people, as well as teaching us everything we need to know for our GCSEs'
- » '(she) wasn't my teacher, but helped me understand Macbeth in under an hour'
- » 'Mrs Davies is a walking dictionary... which is really inspirational for us'
- » 'a great teacher shows you how passionate they are about what they do'
- » 'it is never boring in their lessons'
- » '(in 15 years' time) I would say thank you for teaching me everything... I have used all the knowledge you have given me and put it into practice'.

Little wonder that one of the LPs receiving her certificate commented on having 'leaky eyes'.

Schools already do much to recruit and retain staff that align with their vision and values. LP accreditation enables individuals and groups of teachers and support staff to extend this further, to strike the balance between accountability, responsibility and engagement. After all, ask any educator about their job and they will talk about it being a vocation – defined as the strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation... especially one regarded as worthy and requiring dedication.

The education of children undoubtedly requires dedication from all involved, including the children themselves. With due care and diligence and by working together, school leaders can support this dedication, by looking after staff and 'loving the ones we have' so they stay with us.

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Mindfulness: opening the doors to mental health and wellbeing

*Jo Price,
Brompton Academy*

Jo Price, Director of Corporate Services, University of Kent Academies Trust (UKAT) explains her conversion to mindfulness and its value to staff, students and the community

Always vigilant for personal development opportunities, I had frequently read and heard about the benefits, indeed wonders, of mindfulness and how meditation was like going to the gym, but working out the brain instead of your biceps.

I signed up to an eight-week course (two hours every Sunday evening) at my local Quakers community hall. Alongside nine other adults I discovered yoga mats, Teapigs liquorice and peppermint tea and the benefits of regular meditation. I confess: I never found nirvana, I can't say that my mind didn't wander throughout the various practices. But I can say that I found something very special that had been missing in my life: kindness and compassion and a real sense of being ok – what some might call inner peace.

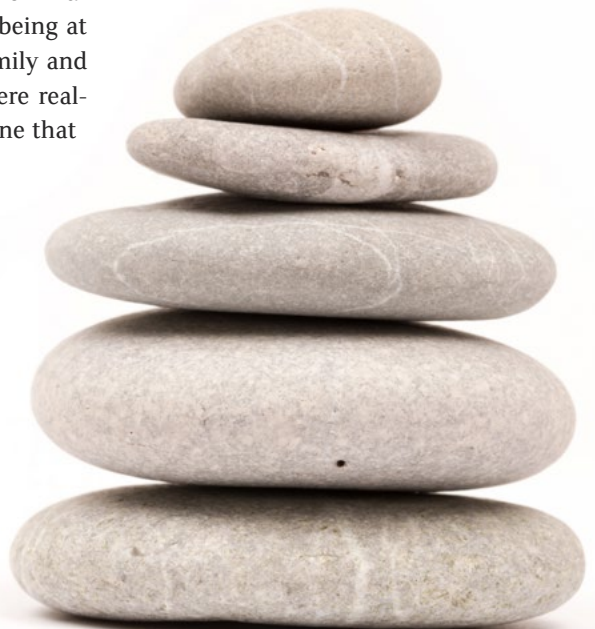
New perspective on challenges and successes

Truthfully this course really did change my life. It gave a new perspective on my challenges and successes. Ultimately it gave me a very new way to live and be, that's the crux of mindfulness, learning to just 'be' with whatever life brings your way. I was genuinely amazed by the shift in my thinking and perspective. What was really impressive was that this shift was shared by the group: my mindfulness counterparts had similar stories of finding a new sense of wellbeing at work, at home, with family and friends. The changes were really significant for everyone that attended.

I was really taken aback that such a course could create this much positive change, across a diverse section of everyday people attending for two hours on a Sunday evening! How was it possible that over a period

of only eight weeks, we really could change our perspective on life? Our mental health had improved, and most importantly, we were enjoying our daily life with a sense of fulfilment.

I quickly realised that this really was a gift, a gift that deserved sharing. So I took on my next exciting challenge – to bring mindfulness to my place of work, to offer students and staff the tools to live a happier, more balanced and easier way of life. Maybe





this was my nirvana moment, I wanted to bring mindfulness to our schools ASAP – in the present moment.

Inspired, enthused and mindfully proactive, I met with the Executive Principal of UKAT, Judy Rider and shared my enlightenment (without my yoga mat and new love for Teapigs liquorice and peppermint tea) and managed to convey my thoughts with clarity and vision. This was that mindfulness could be a great investment for Brompton Academy students, staff and the wider community. Gifted with an executive principal who was innovative and not afraid to think outside the box, I was given the go-ahead to grow my idea and was tasked to make it happen.

With a little research, mainly using the wonders of the internet, I was led quickly to the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP), a non-profit organisation teaching secular mindfulness to students, teachers, parents and carers using the .b (dot-be) courses. They are an established organisation and they know their beans when it comes to offering mindfulness in schools.

Through MiSP I was able to locate a qualified and experienced tutor and we started with our first mindfulness .b course on a Wednesday after school. It was a success, students really enjoyed the course (particularly tasting and eating chocolate mindfully). I could see the benefits quickly as students warmed to the easy mindful techniques of FOFBOC

(feet on floor, bottom on chair) and 7/11 (relaxation breathing) and were receptive to the excellent teaching materials with easy watchable animations.

I offered several 20-minute presentations to staff to introduce the concept of mindfulness. We quickly had our first cohort of 13 staff signed up ready for their eight-week course in October 2016. The tutor, Lorraine Millard, was a real find, a qualified psychotherapist and mindfulness practitioner who also happened to be employed by our lead sponsor, the University of Kent. Lorraine knew how to pitch the course to a group of enthusiastic teachers and support staff. She was compassionate, sensitive, flexible and extremely humorous. She made it clear that if you

didn't do your home practice, you could still come along to the next session and it would be ok.

Mindfulness changes the dynamic

We now have approximately 50 staff that have completed the eight-week course. The general vibe is that introducing mindfulness was a good decision and there is a different feeling among those mindful participants. I have noticed that relationships have improved between colleagues. There is more understanding and a shared collective that we all still work tirelessly, daily, in busy demanding jobs, but we have time to connect through a few words or just a smile. I can see the difference, we have changed the dynamic of our academy.

Since those early days in 2016, I have qualified as a MiSP .b mindfulness practitioner and now deliver the .b courses to students at the academy. Mindfulness is built into the curriculum. All of our year 7 students have one hour every Thursday in which

I teach them how to be more mindful, more resilient, more balanced and ultimately to be a bit more in touch with the beautiful world that we live in.

Young people find a toolkit to calm down, to focus, to concentrate, to understand what stress is. And they are learning to be ok when it's not ok

It's working. Young people can quickly find a toolkit to calm down, to focus, to concentrate, to understand what stress is. And they are learning to be ok when it's not ok.

I also run the .b course with students that have been identified as vulnerable: maybe they are having a difficult time at home, maybe they are exhibiting signs of anxiety, stress or depression and they are not coping. These groups are working really well and the young people

are learning that they cannot always change their circumstances but they can change how they respond.

Sometimes, I am accompanied by my dog Monty, who is a professional mindfulness hound. He is known for his epic moments of relaxation and meditation (sleep) and the young people adore him. I use him to demonstrate focus and concentration: as he is very ball focused, he also knows a trick or two. Monty's addition to teaching .b has been truly magnificent. Whoever said never work with children and animals is missing out.

To date, mindfulness at UKAT is built into our curriculum, on offer to staff during training and development schedules and made available to students who need it most. Mindfulness is also delivered in the evenings to our parents/carers and the local community. We are developing a hub of healthy mindsets and opening the doors to mental health and wellbeing.





14 years in SLT before headship: it was worth it

Caroline Barlow,
Heathfield Community College

Caroline Barlow, headteacher of Heathfield Community College, describes the challenges and joys of her first three years in the most fulfilling and rewarding role in her career

‘So, explain to us: why it has taken you so long?’ The well-intentioned yet lancing question from my headship interview in April 2015 provided an outsider’s view on my journey to headship. It took 14 years in different senior teams to get to the point where I felt ready to take that next step. A year with SSAT allowed me to reset my professional clock and receive the much-needed nudge from an inspirational CEO. Having taken the step, answered the question and been offered the job, I never looked back. It is, quite simply, the best job of my career so far.

To be able to shape a vision that enhances life chances for young people, nurture an environment where teachers are valued as professionals and watch them flourish? It’s empowering

I was fortunate. Professional networks provided a wealth of highly skilled and experienced leaders whose wisdom I tapped into. I asked questions, read books and absorbed like a sponge. But all that shared knowledge and expertise was irrelevant unless it connected with who I was and the school that I was appointed to lead. So began the

‘leap’ as Jill Berry accurately calls it: taking the experience I had gained, my vision for the school and translating that into the most fulfilling collaboration of my career.

Stephen Tierney’s description of ‘why headship’ resonates deeply: ‘I came into teaching because I wanted to make a difference to young people and their life chances. Headship was the place where I felt I could make the greatest impact.’ Possibly my greatest strength, but also my greatest challenge, is the emotional connection I make with my work. A deep conviction in the potential of our school, our staff and students has provided the most rewarding, challenging and exhausting role I have held to date... bar parenting!

In East Sussex, a changeover in the last 3-5 years has created a new generation of heads. Each of us different, and different from those who held the roles before us, yet in challenging times for education there are common aspirations and experiences that provide opportunities for bonds of unity and friendship. I do believe there are far fewer resources (human and financial), more fragmentation and greater accountability pressures than any of our predecessors faced. It is a different job.

Reality check

Any aspirations I had at the start of setting out my vision to a community that I fondly imagined would instantly be inspired to walk with me into our glorious future were quickly tempered with a reality check of structures, finances and outcomes.



'We reset aspirations... celebrating when they achieved things they never previously believed possible'

All created for a different time, with different budgets and performance measures. Significant change was needed. However, this was not a school in crisis; a surgeon's approach was not appropriate. When 'building on strength' is what the community expects it is not straightforward to effect significant change, but we did.

With the help of a talented senior team and sensible, intelligent governance we changed the

structure of all leadership posts, removing inequalities based on funding no longer available. We simplified the focus and asked staff to concentrate solely on teaching and learning, working to remove all distractions from the 'main thing'. We supported a consistent, centralised approach to behaviour and reset the aspirations of the students and staff, celebrating when they achieved things they never previously believed possible. We expected excellence and tried to model it, because these students and their teachers are among the best I have ever worked with and deserve nothing less.

When you tell people that what they thought was 'good enough' no longer is, it is challenging in a way that some take personally

It was not easy. When you tell people that what they thought was 'good enough' no longer is, it is challenging in a way that some take personally. There were hard conversations with staff, students and parents, attempting to understand where they were but hoping to take them where we needed to be. By the end of the first year we could see a clear direction of travel and a gathering momentum. Outcomes were up significantly, year 7 filled for the first time in four years, and Ofsted gave us an endorsement to continue our trajectory of 'rapid improvement'.





You might be forgiven for thinking that's a good point to get to. However, year 2 brought a serious wakeup call that the whole profession is facing. Unless we drastically addressed the budget, none of us would be there to see the fruits of our labours realised. No new headteacher receives detailed finance training, it's often the seemingly secret business of bursars and long-serving heads. I suspect that is changing. With over £750,000 to cut from our budget in one year, this was a conversation for the whole college. Whatever we were going to do, we would do together. A significant restructure took all year, threatening to distract from the resolute focus on excellence and teaching and learning. It was personal and painful for many. The financial issues facing all our schools are a cause about which I feel angry enough to fight on a wider scale, but this magnificent community stood together and delivered changes needed to survive in an age of austerity.

The college did more than survive: it thrives, with its best ever outcomes at both GCSE and A-level, more students than ever applying for places at Russell Group universities. And it is oversubscribed for 2018. But more than outcomes, I am proud of the way we are working and the bubble of professional positivity we have created in an increasingly bewildering world. Students are at the heart of everything we do, we've made financial decisions that give them the support and inspiration to succeed. We prioritise teaching and learning, giving staff time to learn and grow. We engage in wider professional debates that help take us forward. Ours is a genuinely collaborative community. While I was battling budgets or lobbying MPs, a veritable army of highly skilled, values driven leaders and teachers helped shape and deliver on the vision for our college.



Headship: expectations and reality

Is headship what I expected? Yes and no. Our team approach makes it feel less like the lonely outpost often described. But at times I do still feel the isolation of the role and huge weight of responsibility.

I did not expect the personal and often vicious nature of some complainants, which I understand from colleagues I'm not alone in receiving. I worry about balance with home life but take seriously my role to model it rationally. And this year, after all our previous work I did not expect to be staring down the barrel of yet another desperate financial projection.

Despite all that, it is still the most fulfilling and rewarding role of my career. To be able to shape a vision that enhances life chances for young people, nurture an environment where teachers are valued as professionals and watch them flourish? It's empowering.

Small things are rewarding: a note or email that voices appreciation, a milestone reached, a particular student's achievement, or the external recognition of staff who previously had no voice.

While I was battling budgets or lobbying MPs, a veritable army of highly skilled, values-driven leaders and teachers helped shape and deliver on the vision for our college

To play a part in unlocking this potential is an exciting privilege. It might not have been the fastest route to headship but every experience along the way informs my decision-making and my confidence. I still have a lot to learn but I'm in it for the long haul and can't wait to see what the next three years will bring.



Governors: don't be afraid to tell Ofsted your story

Sue Williamson,
SSAT

As chair of Melbourn Village College's governing body, Sue Williamson gives her perspective on their recent Ofsted inspection

I was asked to be chair of the governing body of Melbourn Village College by Stephen Munday, chief executive of the Cam Academy Trust, in April 2015. He was clear in his directions: the job was to ensure that Melbourn became an outstanding school, in Ofsted terms and beyond.

The first task was to determine what we meant by outstanding – by 'we' I mean students, staff and governors. To do this we called on the expertise and advice of a number of people. As CEO of SSAT, I have access to the SSAT team and many school leaders, academics and partner organisations, which can of course be available to other governing boards and schools.

First, we held a day's workshop, with governors and staff working together, and a separate workshop for students. The result was

a vision statement: 'Everybody is Somebody'. To demonstrate our commitment to this, we produced posters with pictures and stories of past students for display around the school and on the website.

Curriculum: challenging thinking

It was important to review the curriculum provision. We knew we wanted a broad and balanced curriculum that met the needs of all students. In our workshop we had identified the knowledge, skills and attributes that we wanted for the outstanding Melbourn student – how could we ensure that we provided the curriculum and extra-curricular activities that delivered these skills and knowledge?

Our next step was a workshop with the senior leadership team, which I led with my colleague Tom Middlehurst. As a resource we used one of *SSAT's Redesigning Schooling pamphlets – Principled Curriculum Design*, by Dylan Wiliam. Our job was to provide examples of curriculum design from other schools and, most

importantly, to challenge the thinking of the leadership team.

One outcome was a major change to our languages provision. The SLT recommended to the governors, and they agreed, that we should no longer deliver French and German. Instead, we would have Spanish as our main language and introduce Mandarin. This provoked much debate, particularly about the relevance of Mandarin for the less able.

Governors from HE add vital expertise

It was also agreed to introduce an enrichment programme for all students to develop their love of learning and help with the mastery of subjects. Both initiatives were implemented in September 2016. Throughout the planning stages the governing board was involved mainly through the school's teaching and learning committee. New governors from higher education were recruited to add expertise in Mandarin, and also science. These governors were critical in our being able to recruit top-quality staff.



The problem for any small school such as Melbourn is capacity, particularly within the leadership team. Unfortunately the last academic year was a bad one for staff sickness and we were also struggling with budget cuts. However, everyone had agreed the approach and worked hard on implementing it.

In August, we were delighted with our GCSE results and the opportunities these gave to our students. Did we now think that we were an outstanding school? We had debated this point in our governors' training, in meetings and with the MAT throughout the previous academic year. Simon Holmes, the principal, is a whizz with data and produced a great analysis – we were close.

Time to improve?

Most importantly, we knew the areas where we had to improve. Ofsted was a year overdue, but

we thought we might have time to improve these areas before they arrived. However, on 11 September Simon had the phone call: Ofsted would be in the following day.

The HMI wanted to meet me and other governors. This proved very difficult as everyone works. In the end, it was just one other governor and I who met the HMI. It was a good meeting – we were encouraged to tell our story. We did not exaggerate our strengths or hide our areas of weaknesses. We explained how we provided challenge and support. I came away believing that we had not let the college down. The two inspectors decided not to do a second day and that we are a good school – do look at the letter on the Ofsted website. When I read it, I think it captures very well where we are and what is needed to be outstanding, within the Ofsted definition and beyond.

While we had a positive experience of Ofsted, I can understand why many governing bodies focus so much time on the next inspection. The desire for the outstanding category does not go away and can dominate meetings. The short notice of the inspection means that working governors are often ruled out of attending; none of our chairs of committees could attend. We've resisted short cuts, but the temptation is there.

Know when to challenge and when to support... faced with serious staffing issues, the governing board had to slow down the pace of change

From this experience, my recommendations to other governing boards (some with quotations from the Ofsted report to support them) are:

» Agree the **vision** with all stakeholders and do what is right for the young people in your care. Ensure that there is a relentless focus on improving teaching and learning – I recommend the four questions posed by Guy Claxton and Bill Lucas in their Redesigning Schooling pamphlet – *What kind of teaching for what kind of learning?*:

1. What are, for your school, the desired outcomes of education (DOEs)?
2. What kinds of learning, in your school, with your students, will deliver your DOEs?
3. What kinds of teaching will lead to the kind of learning that is needed?

4. What kind of leadership is required to create the kinds of teaching and learning which are desired, and so ensure that students leave your school with your DOEs?

(Ofsted: 'Your work to ensure that the school's vision of 'everybody is somebody' is evident in the support you provide for all pupils.')

» Your **development plan** should focus on achieving the vision and key milestones. It is important to appoint governors with the right skills and knowledge. As well as appointing governors with specialist knowledge, we added governors with strong roots in the local community.

(Ofsted: 'The governing body's breadth of expertise has added momentum to the school's improvement plans. For example, the decision to introduce Mandarin as a language option from year 7 was facilitated by the governing board's expert understanding of China and language teaching. Pupils told me that they felt privileged to study Mandarin.')

» Design a **curriculum** that meets the needs of the young people in your school.

(Ofsted: 'Leaders, including governors, have worked hard to create an innovative curriculum that truly meets the needs of pupils. Your vision is clear and parents value the ways in which the school offers their children a broad and rich curriculum alongside strong pastoral support.')

» It is important to know **when to challenge and when to support**. Last year, we had serious staffing issues at the college and this significantly increased the workload of the senior leadership team. The governing board had to slow down the pace of change.

» Governors' training should focus on the school improvement plan and development as a team.

And above all:

Create your story and do not be afraid to tell it. Ofsted will listen.





When a school really becomes part of the community

*Jon Dix,
Dartford Science and Technology College*

Jonathan Dix, RSL Year 7 at Dartford Science and Technology College, explains the rationale, challenges and benefits of the school's annual community day

Dartford Science and Technology College is a girls' school in Dartford, Kent. In the midst of MATs and selective schools, we are the only single-sex non-selective school in Dartford. We are also members of the Schools Co-operative Society whose values are self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

In 2014 the then principal asked me how we could engage with the community in a deeper way, one that would make an impact not only on the locality but also on our students. So the community day, or volunteering day as it was initially known, was born.

What was done and how?

We decided that the most appropriate time for our community day would be just before the end of the academic year. This meant that year 11 and year 13 would

not be taking part, but it would still mean that some 500 students and over 60 staff members would be involved.

The use of social media was vital. In our area there are at least 15 specific websites focused on community-related discussion. The advert we produced immediately created great interest. A community day email address was set up so all enquires could be sent and responded to centrally. I then began to speak at a variety of local networking events which also generated interest in the project, and in funding.



It was important to stress that we wanted to work with groups that were already helping the community in different areas; we were not looking to work in isolation. The ultimate vision was to build a network that could be drawn on throughout the year and long-term, for the mutual benefit of all parties.

We had requests for painting, gardening, fundraising, raising awareness, animal care, senior citizen befriending.... Year 12 students trained in water safety went into feeder primaries to teach year 6 students

From then we had requests for painting, gardening, fundraising, raising awareness, animal care and senior citizen befriending, to name but a few. We also pioneered community projects ourselves while working with other charities. For example,



the Royal Life Saving Society trained our year 12 students in water safety, the students then went into seven feeder primaries to teach year 6 students. The programme is now being rolled out nationwide.

On the very first event in 2015 there were 31 placements, 420 students involved and one sponsor, Kent County Council. The enthusiasm of the community, parents, staff and students indicated that we were on to something. In 2017 we had 51 placements involving 600 students and 14 sponsors. In 2018 we are hopeful that, in addition to increased numbers and sponsors, we will be successful in securing a royal visit.

Problems?

One issue was funding, as we decided that the students should wear branded t-shirts for both visibility and corporate identity. We also decided that, if we were to really help the community, we needed to fund equipment used on the day. Many of the charities and groups who wanted help were very small and lacked funding themselves.

Community day costs around £4000 per year to run, depending on the specific projects, which includes the t-shirts, equipment

such as paint and gardening tools, and insurance. In the first year, all the funding came from six Kent county councillors who hold a fund for community projects; we secured the maximum amount available. This covered the t-shirts but not equipment. Since then, through social networking, face-to-face networking and cold emailing we have gained support from a number of companies who could supply free paint, decorating and gardening equipment.

Proactivity and tenacity are certainly needed. This applies to the services we offer as well as covering costs. Social media enabled us to see where groups needed volunteers; and we would then contact them to offer help.

The organisation of the groups needs careful planning. In our first year we allowed students to pick their top three choices of placement. Unfortunately this did not work as many chose to work in primary schools. In the following years I gave consideration to where they lived and then allocated placements. However, girls were able to swap between themselves (within a tight deadline, and with approval).

In the lead up to the day there can be issues with travel (parents

getting their child to the placement, as all students make their own way to and from the placement). However, if all parents are well informed in plenty of time before the day, issues can generally be minimised.

Contingency planning is needed to cover student absence, staff absence, a placement pulling out on the day (yes, this happened!) to name just a few issues. We have some first aid trained staff based at the school, with access to our minibus, who travel to placements throughout the day if necessary.

We have some first aid trained staff based at the school, with access to our minibus, who travel to placements throughout the day if necessary

Outcomes, costs and benefits

The benefits certainly outweigh the hard work. The day as a whole takes around three months of planning – with a frantic final month. However, any memories of 4am starts soon fade when driving around Dartford on the day. To see our town bustling with our clearly

identified, hardworking and happy students with one collective goal makes it all worthwhile.

Funding in the first year, 2015, was incredibly hard as we had no contacts or access to funds apart from the council. However, once everything was established in that first year, things got much easier. As we accomplished our third community day in July 2017 we are now finding that corporate sponsors are requesting to come on board.

So what are the outcomes?

- » For many of our students it is life-changing. Many had never before stroked a horse, painted a door or spoken to a senior citizen.
- » Students are moved out of their comfort zone to experience new things.
- » It builds resilience and character. For the placements, we offer thousands of hours of manpower.
- » For the school, it offers a wealth of contacts that we use throughout the year – and a USP in marketing DSTC.
- » We have also gained many work experience placements via the corporate sponsors and established an ongoing relationship with them.
- » And the programme shows our community that young people actually do care.

In addition, there is now good evidence showing that volunteering improves mental health, including reviews by Oman (2007) and Casiday (2008). Crucially,

these reviews present evidence that volunteering can improve mental health – not just that it is associated with it.

To see our town bustling with our clearly identified, hardworking and happy students with one collective goal makes it all worthwhile

Recently, a newly appointed teacher at the school was asked why they wanted to work at DSTC. They answered: 'I saw your community day and liked that you did something different'.

What have we learned?

The experience of managing the community day has taught us as a school that the community is desperate for help. In any school, many students probably go to clubs or help with groups and charities that struggle for manpower and funds.

We have also learned how generous businesses can be. While it is true that many companies have nominated charities, there are many more that do not and are keen to be involved in the community – whether through a moral or ethical view or their corporate community policy.



And on a personal level for school staff: dedication and persistence are needed for this to work. Many of the speaking events I undertook were in the evening. Most of the work was done after school and during evenings and weekends.

How might other schools benefit?

I hope it is clear from this how other schools can benefit from organising something similar. It is logistically a challenge and there can be problems on the day, but the positive effect on students cannot be overestimated.

For us at DSTC, the community day is something distinctive that is an embodiment of our co-operative values.

For help or advice on starting your own community day: community@dstc.kent.sch.uk

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Thanks to a partnership with Innovate My School, School Business Managers at last year's SSAT National Conference had the opportunity to apply to attend a speed-networking session with our inspiring exhibitors. Innovate My School inspires the education sector by showcasing, across a range of platforms, exciting new practices and products by teachers and educational suppliers. Their speed networking keeps busy school leaders updated with the latest innovative services through a fast, efficient and effective format.

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SSAT Curriculum Development Partner

ASDAN is an education charity and awarding organisation whose programmes and qualifications transform life chances through learning.

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Customer testimonials

The testimonials below are taken from ASDAN's 2017 customer survey.

"I can't say enough positive things about ASDAN and its products. The programmes we subscribe to are hugely flexible."

"I like that every student can take part and achieve regardless of their ability. I have looked but found no other curriculum that can offer the same range of support for all students to achieve."

"Students have gained self-confidence, independence and social skills that I am certain have helped them in their English and mathematics GCSEs."

"ASDAN's courses have given my learners confidence and increased their literacy levels. Some of my students have improved their attendance because of their ASDAN classes – they look forward to coming to school now."

"The staff at ASDAN give me a feeling of being fully supported as a coordinator. The ASDAN Short Courses are brilliant – they provide excellent personalised learning opportunities. Animal Care is the favourite."

"Staff are friendly and always act in a polite and professional manner. Good advice and feedback is always given after moderation visits and I would recommend other centres to use ASDAN."

SSAT member schools are entitled to a 50% discount on the ASDAN Lift Off programme.

For more information call **0117 941 1126** or email **info@asdan.org.uk**.

 **asdan.org.uk**
 **@ASDANeducation**

FutureDJs

Music Education Partner

FutureDJs is an education focused agency delivering DBS screened and highly qualified DJ/Music Production Tutors nationwide via peripatetic lessons. Their unique programme of study is created by professionals to inspire future talent, starting at Key Stage 2 and running through to Key Stage, 5 in accordance with the new AQA and OCR GCSE music specifications.

Objectives and opportunities for students

- » Open the door to music for students
- » Show students new horizons and alternative opportunities in the music industry
- » Uncover hidden talents and passions
- » Develop focus, perseverance and dedication
- » Build self-confidence

FutureDJs encourage students to find their passion and embrace what they love and

in doing so students will discover an inner confidence to strive for new frontiers in both their thinking and approach – this is often the catalyst for how originality is born! Originality breeds self worth, confidence, success and ultimately enterprise.

"I have seen first hand the transformative effect the use of DJing and MCing in the classroom can have upon learners."

Dr Pete Dale, Senior Lecturer, Musics, MMU

"Having a platform like FutureDJs in schools for students is essential, valuable and proactive in assuring all students have the access to achieve and aspire."

The Fellers School, SSAT member

For more information call **020 8242 1674** or email **interest@futuresdjs.org**.

 **futuresdjs.org**



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Using a combination of unique resources and instruction, Lexonik improves literacy levels, vocabulary and comprehension, and accelerates learning for even the most able of learners. Lexonik provides an intensive boost, challenging and motivating learners, enhancing engagement, confidence and success throughout the curriculum and in life itself!

Lexonik can be delivered to students in your school by one of our experienced teachers, or we can train members of your team, providing a fantastic CPD opportunity as well as the skills, knowledge, resources and licence to teach their unique prescriptive

programme. For those needing help to support EAL learners or those with limited literacy, the Lexonik Leap one-day training course for teachers is the answer. With the knowledge, diagnostic tool and resources to provide flexible, needs-led instruction, teachers are revolutionising their approach to this group of learners with Leap.

"Lexonik Leap EAL training was one of the most valuable pieces of training I have received for EAL teaching. Remarkably simple to use and deliver with quick results." Bodmin College, SSAT member

SSAT member schools are entitled to a 10% discount on the price per pupil.

For more information call Sound Training on **01642 424 298** or email enquiries@lexonik.co.uk
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Vocational Qualifications Partner

NCFE is an Awarding Organisation with over 170 years of experience in designing, developing and certificating high quality technical qualifications. Their comprehensive schools offer includes V Certs, NCFE's flagship technical alternative to GCSEs. They are suitable for pupils aged 14-16 and count as part of the Progress 8 measure. NCFE provision also includes post-16 qualifications, PSHE and employability qualifications and CACHE qualifications in Health, Social Care and Child Care. All NCFE qualifications are supported by exceptional resources, delivery support and guidance.

For more information call **0191 239 8000** or email service@ncfe.org.uk

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Lead National Conference Partner 2017

humanutopia, established in 2004, has worked with over 250,000 young people and 30,000 adults in schools across the UK and are hugely proud of a partnership with SSAT that spans ten years. humanutopia help make positive changes and improve life chances of young people by increasing levels of Hope, Confidence, Happiness, Relationships and Employability. They have grown to 21 colleagues, 13 of whom have been former participants of their inspirational programmes in UK schools.

"I thought Graham Moore and the humanutopia presentations were inspirational and really useful. His passion and experience really came through and allowed us as the audience to refocus and remember the struggles students may face."
SSAT National Conference delegate

For more information visit
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**SSAT
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Career Guidance Partner

Unifrog is the Universal Destinations Platform used by over 1,000 schools across the UK to help students find and apply for the best courses for them.

Unifrog connects students to the best university courses, apprenticeships, college courses and school leaver programmes, while making it easy for teachers to track their progress. They are unique in allowing students to compare every post-16 and post-18 opportunity in the UK as well as a huge number of English language university courses overseas. They can reduce staff admin time by more than 40%, and have an impressive track record of reducing NEETs and increasing access to Oxbridge, the Russell Group and top school leaver programmes.

The Unifrog Application Management tools make the process of writing Personal Statements and Teacher References easier and more successful, marrying expert guidance with progress bars so that every student and teacher knows their next step. Younger years have access to a host of useful tools to record and develop their skills while considering which post-school

pathways are most suitable for them. There is even have the facility for parents to access the platform if you wish!

"There was an initial staff fear towards adding another process - another 'log on'. This was to be expected, but Unifrog were so helpful in positively and patiently conveying the benefit this was going to bring to our school and to their workload. We're a massive 6th form - we have 400 students, we have over 38 different A-levels, collecting all the Subject References is an absolute organisational nightmare. Having one tool to seamlessly collate all that information was extremely helpful." City of London Academy Southwark, SSAT member

SSAT member schools are entitled to a 7.5% discount on the price per pupil.

For a no-obligation demonstration of Unifrog, call Daniel Keller on **020 3372 5991** or email daniel@unifrog.org
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Local and national promotion does help raise the school's appeal

Dean Jones,
Firth Park Academy

Dean Jones, headteacher of Firth Park Academy, describes measures from staff accessibility to taking every opportunity to celebrate success in the community

An urgent goal at Firth Park Academy was to positively change community perceptions of our school. This couldn't have been clearer than when I sat down with a local councillor just after we had achieved status as a 'good' school (Ofsted inspection June 2015) for the first time in a decade. Having arrived unannounced, his purpose was not to congratulate us, but to ask, 'what are you doing about the knife crime and violence in your school?'

We immediately set off around school to try to find some of this violence. Having returned from a calm – and successful, in the sense that we didn't find any – tour, the councillor agreed to help us on our journey to change perceptions. We needed to combat what was clearly unfounded negativity. We began by inviting our local MP and lord mayor for a photoshoot in our 'good new academy'.

We set about seeking opportunities to promote what our students, staff and community are really like

Firth Park, part of Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), is the fourth largest school by intake in Sheffield with a pupil admission number (PAN) of 273 – yet in 2015 the roll of each year group had fallen to around 160. Many local families wanted to send



their children to the 'old grammar school', which despite performing less well than us in league tables had a legacy of a good reputation. We had a legacy of a bad reputation. One of our feeder primary school heads had even approached the grammar school to explore becoming their feeder school instead.

We knew that to change perceptions many other local schools invested in advertising: banners at Meadowhall shopping centre, posters on local buses.... One local competitor even had their own 'boogie bus', which parked outside primary schools and engaged students in a DJ music mixing experience on the top deck, writing a jingle about how great their school was. We had no budget for any of this, but we have a really strong ethos of being an 'open doors academy'. So we set about seeking opportunities to promote what our students, staff and community are really like.



» **Strengthening primary school partnerships:**

the heads and governors of the local feeder schools hadn't walked round our school for years. On doing so now, their perceptions immediately began to change. 'I thought they'd be hanging from the rafters' said one local governor who we knew had previously deterred families from applying to join our school. We employ two part-time staff as community partners to help build relationships with local primaries, running an established programme of transition, beginning in year 4, to create 'buy in' for students as future members of our school.

- » **Making our staff visible and accessible to our community:** senior leaders at bus stops means local people have a direct contact for questions and conversations. While we were improving outcomes each year and outperforming the 'old grammar school', what mattered most to parents was the safety of their children. Staff in high vis jackets that they could talk to at home time helped here. One parent said to me, unaware I was the

head: 'I've heard this new fellow doesn't stand for bullying, so my kids are going to come here now.' Hosting Christmas and summer fairs, with staff running stalls, is another very visible way to build community relationships.

- » **Celebrating success of our students and staff:** we enter our staff and students for awards all the time. We have earned more Children's University Awards and Sheffield Superkids Awards for our children than any other school in Sheffield over the past three years. In 2015-16 we won the 'best secondary school' award at the Sheffield Star Best in Education awards, an accolade we started all job advertisements with for the next two years, challenging prospective applicants to think differently about us. Teacher Bill Lynn won a silver lifetime achievement award in the Pearson National Teaching Awards; his past students, many of whom are now parents of our students, were so proud of this. We even had a name-check from Sue Williamson at last year's SSAT National Conference.



- » **Networking to build partnerships with high profile organisations:** one of our assistant heads was the ultimate 'yes man', in the most positive way. When the DfE teacher recruitment TV campaign was being filmed, in the summer holidays, he managed to become part of the advert. As a result, we were then asked if our students and staff could feature in the photo campaign for teacher recruitment. This led to Firth Park Academy staff and students appearing in magazines and on billboards the length and breadth of the country.
- » **Regularly featuring in local newspapers:** local families read local newspapers, so we email our local reporters photos and stories on a regular basis. We try to get to know local journalists on first name terms. Inviting the local MP to visit once or twice a year is a sure fire way to generate a good feature too. Be prepared for reporters' creative licence, though (thinking of one article which started 'Balding headteacher Dean Jones ...').

- » **Getting on TV:** we initially responded to the opportunity to participate in the 'Educating' series and as a result of having our details on file, we were approached by the TV company TwoFour, creators of the Our School series on CBBC. We subsequently featured in a 15-programme series on CBBC during autumn term 2017. Having the chance to share our children's journey through the first term of big school, and promote our school directly into the homes of local families, will we hope have the greatest impact to date in changing perceptions. The students, staff and families featured have had nothing but positive feedback and have had a taste of celebrity when visiting local primary schools too.

We really believe these efforts have had a positive impact. The number of students in each year group has risen from 160 in year 11 to 273 in year 7. The number of families choosing us as their first preference is higher than ever. However, the journey is by no means complete and until we have 100% of students at our school making Firth Park their first choice, the journey continues.



Attendance problems can be overcome

Sarah Murphy,
SSAT

SSAT relationship manager Sarah Murphy reports on her survey into the myriad effective ploys schools are using to encourage high attendance among all students

An issue that comes up repeatedly in our relationship managers' conversations with school leaders is that of raising attendance, in particular in areas of higher deprivation and low aspirations. So we decided to ask a number of schools and academies with larger than national average cohorts of disadvantaged students whose absence figures are

consistently below the national average to share their policies and strategies. While each school had their own particular structures and approaches, some common themes appeared which could be applied in any context.

High internal goals include ambitious targets for tutors; targets being set above national average; monitoring cards issued to students with <95% attendance

Attendance is everyone's responsibility

In all cases the schools had high expectations for their students in every aspect, attendance being a key strand. These expectations are communicated on a regular basis and in a very visible way across the whole school, for example:

- » Weekly assemblies where attendance figures are discussed in relation to their impact on attainment, or congratulations or rewards are announced.
- » Noticeboards and displays around the school giving prominence to attendance, such as pictures of the '100% club', posters promoting whole-school targets or successful tutor groups.
- » Posters in tutor rooms displaying the group's attendance figures for that week, acting as a constant reminder as well as a conversation starter for the tutor. In some cases students are given responsibility for updating these to increase the sense of ownership.



Giving attendance a high profile drills home to all stakeholders, staff, students and parents, that the school takes it seriously. And by having attendance as a constant topic of conversation you are also making it everyone's responsibility. Every class teacher knows the importance of completing their register accurately and on time, every student knows what is expected of them and the consequences – both immediate and long term – of not attending school.

Another common theme was that of healthy competition. Making tutor group, house, or school numbers visible and relating rewards to these creates a positive peer pressure not to let the side down.

The high expectations for students are reinforced by very high internal goals, demonstrated through examples such as: ambitious targets included in performance measures for tutors; internal targets being set above national average, eg at 96-97%; the use of monitoring cards issued to those students falling below 95% attendance.

Effective teamwork lightens the load

While emphasis was placed on getting everyone's buy-in and commitment to raise attendance, also common among all these schools were clear lines of responsibility for those key staff involved in directly tracking and tackling attendance.

Staffing structures and responsibilities varied, but in each case the senior leader with responsibility for attendance had oversight while being supported by a team of individuals who are all clear on their accountabilities. A common theme was effective use of, and communication with, pastoral staff. Year leaders or equivalents work collaboratively with attendance officers and/or education welfare officers to monitor all students, in most cases having weekly or biweekly meetings. By giving responsibility to year leaders and tutors there is more capacity for every student to be monitored more closely and support or interventions put in place swiftly.

Tracking to identify trends

Again the specific methods for tracking and reporting on attendance figures will differ from school to school but there were two consistent themes.

First, information is gathered and monitored daily and acted upon swiftly through effective communication across staff teams as well as with the students and parents. The introduction of tracking documents which detail every student and RAG rate them based on attendance figures has significant impact. They are used as a crucial communication tool between SLT, attendance officers and pastoral staff.

Second, longer term trends are analysed to identify patterns and problem areas. For example, a broken week analysis looks at how many weeks a pupil has missed as well as days, using this to communicate to students the cumulative effect of their absence.

Beginning/end of term analysis: identifying trends with particular students and following these



up with conversations with the student/parent. In many cases this may highlight a particular issue related to family circumstances, such as access to clean uniform or family issues that have arisen over the holidays.

Telephone calls to parents, early on the first and each day of absence, are more effective than text messages

Analysis of AM/PM data: one school identified a trend of students going home in the afternoons because they claimed to be unwell. So it introduced a policy that all students had to see a member of SLT before they could leave, encouraging students to stay in school when their 'illness' was not actually significant.

Touch points for support

The word collaboration came up time and again in our conversations. Strategies worked best when a collaborative and supportive approach was taken, both internally among staff and with students and parents. Creating a two-way dialogue between home and school opened up many more opportunities to address barriers to attendance.

This supportive atmosphere is created through many touch points in the process, some examples being:

- » Telephone calls to parents early on the first and each day of absence, rather than relying on text messages. Having the conversation allows expectations to be reiterated and low level

excuses illuminated, eg the student was ill yesterday but may be well enough to come in today.

- » Selected persistent absentees assigned to a pastoral lead and required to sign in with them each morning and afternoon for the period of a term, with the incentive of a voucher given for 100% compliance. This creates two daily touch points in a non-threatening scenario where issues can be discussed and resolved: eg difficulties with a particular subject, or sitting next to someone they don't get along with in a particular class.
- » Introduction of a policy for term time holidays whereby parents complete an application form and have a meeting with a member of SLT before booking their holiday. These conversations give the opportunity for the school to emphasise the impact of the time out of school on the child's education, and to advise on ways to minimise this. Parents feel consulted and in many cases change their plans to incur fewer days out from school.

Support for health, both physical and mental, was widespread. In some cases effective use was made of the school nurse to provide advice and guidance to parents on how to deal with low-level health issues and which services are available. This also creates opportunities to make clear what actually constitutes a good reason not to come into school. One school has a 'health hut' facility, where students can access counselling and alternative therapy on both a scheduled and self-referral basis, which provides a safe space for students who may suffer from anxiety and low self-esteem.

Power of the pizza

All schools used some form of reward and recognition for students, sometimes extending to parents and staff. However there is a balance to be struck between re-enforcing the integral value of attending school, with good attendance as a baseline expectation, against using monetary and high value rewards to raise the profile of attendance and capture the attention of more hard-to-reach students.



Certificates, congratulatory letters or calls home to parents, 100% badges, pictures on the wall were used in all schools and are effective as low cost motivational tools.

Rewards for tutor groups (or other pastoral groupings) such as certificates, breakfasts and lunch queue jumps can all add to the ethos of everyone being in it together and having a responsibility to your peers as well as yourself. A couple of schools also had days where the whole school was encouraged to pull together:

- » Branded 'all in day' with posters themed around DC comic characters highly publicised around the school. Staff and students were all in it together and a buzz was created around school.
- » In response to student voice requests, one school agreed to a non-uniform day on the last day of term if 95% or above attendance was achieved across the whole school for that week. A positive tannoy announcement was made each day and a strong team spirit was generated among the students.

Pizza parties were a very popular way of rewarding attendance and generating an atmosphere of positive peer pressure. High-attending tutor groups or individuals with 100% attendance are provided with pizza, either in lesson time or tutor time, with the addition of the freedom to listen to their own music.

Collaboration breeds success

The word that came up most frequently in my conversations with these schools was collaboration, characterised by: an ethos where the whole school is working towards the same goals; open lines of communication between teams of staff responsible for attendance; two-way dialogue with parents; and a balance of support, rewards and consequences for students.

In this spirit of collaboration more detailed information from each of the participating schools will be made available on SSAT's online Khub platform. We invite you to contribute your own ideas and strategies as well as learn from the practice of others. Contact your relationship manager directly or via RMteam@ssatuk.co.uk to find out how.

High-attending tutor groups or individuals with 100% attendance have pizza, either in lesson time or tutor time, and the freedom to listen to their own music

Thanks to the following contributors:

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Jason Carey, The James Hornsby School



Developing resilience through a 'personal best' programme

Clare Chambers & Tom Vandenberg,
The Chalk Hills Academy



Clare Chambers, vice principal, and Tom Vandenberg, personal best curriculum leader, The Chalk Hills Academy, describe their wide-ranging approach to character education

Prince William Award

The Chalk Hills Academy (TCHA) introduced the Prince William Award (PWA) programme with a number of our key disadvantaged year 7 and 8 students, giving them the opportunity to endeavour in a variety of different tasks which look to promote personal development. The PWA dares our students to be 'their best self'. It looks to underpin a number of key attributes and guiding principles which will allow students to embed knowledge and behaviours through experience. These include enabling them to become resilient through practice; confident through problem solving; and disciplined through routine.

We have also introduced the 'trailblazer award', which aims to integrate work on different aspects of character development. The emphasis of the trailblazer is to encourage individuals to recognise that they possess leadership capacity which can help them to take increasing personal responsibility.

This highlights the necessity of equipping our students with life skills and confidence, so that they are prepared for society when they leave education here at TCHA. It is an exciting opportunity for our students to really reflect on their behaviours, learning and aspirations. We believe the award will promote positive outcomes for all participants.

Personal best programme

We launched the 'personal best programme' (PBP) to broaden our students' experiences across years 7, 8 and 9. This programme is having a real impact on





the resilience of all our students. Each year group follows three main strands: skills, community and 'my future'. These strands link together to develop young people to have a broad and far-ranging skill set. Students endeavour in key areas such as charity, literacy, oracy, sport, SMSC, PSCE and British values.



Charity

Students explore the meaning of charity through a 'take a tenner' challenge. The challenge scheme of work begins with students enhancing their knowledge of what charity is. Students then share their knowledge of different local and national charities before voting to decide the charity their tutor group will support. Clear links to British values of democracy are explored in this challenge.

Each tutor group has to plan an activity designed to raise awareness of their charity as well as doubling the initial amount of £10 supplied by the school. Students take key roles as part of the planning of their charity event, including treasurer, chairperson, secretary and many others. Tutors oversee the planning and completion of the task and donation of the monies, but their role is generally one of support and guidance; students lead all related event activities.

Literacy and oracy

Literacy skills are an essential tool in order to communicate effectively in all aspects of life. We expect all our students to read widely and regularly and they are set a minimum 'words target' across the academic year. Alongside the promotion of key skills in literacy and oracy, we believe that expected progress should be made across all subjects.

'When I first got up to present my topic to my PL group I felt really nervous about speaking. However, I knew that everyone else would be doing it at some point so I decided to just go with it. Afterwards, I felt it had improved the way I was able to interact as I realised the importance of being able to speak clearly, this has really helped improve my confidence.'

Sam, year 7 student

Sport

Physical education promotes a variety of personal qualities, including leadership, teamwork and

effective communication. This is explored through the PBP by giving our students the opportunity to participate in a number of sporting activities such as fencing, tennis, trampolining and basketball. The academy subsidises the cost of participation and the sessions are especially well attended by our DA students to broaden experiences in sport.

'It has taught me how to be adaptable, competitive and helped me build my confidence through learning a new skill. Most importantly it's taught me the importance of being resilient because even if my opponent scored a point against me I can still get a point back, so there's no need to throw in the towel.'

Mohammed, year 7 student



SMSC PSHCE and British values

Our academy ethos is built around British values, which are promoted through cross-curricular activities, assemblies and PSHCE lessons. We provide a secure environment to enable students to learn, discuss and challenge in a safe and appropriate way. PSHCE lessons cover topics such as healthy eating, sex and relationship education, child sexual exploitation, current affairs and British justice.

'Over the years I have seen time and again how the development of personal skills puts a person in better stead for education, future employment and for life.'

Prince William

Work experience

We know that work experience plays a pivotal role in a student's education to promote personal development. Each academic year, students in years 7, 8 and 9 complete a day of work experience in the

academy. This is to give the pupils a chance to see how a busy academy setting operates. Year 7 focus on the working in administration in the LRC (learning resource centre) and school reception. Year 8 discover many of the technical roles in the academy by working as technicians with the faculty of art and design, ICT services or the science technician team. Finally, year 9 discover the role of the curriculum leader by shadowing the role in humanities, English and maths departments. Personal best work experience is having a hugely positive impact as it enables students to see beyond the classroom.

'At school reception, I thought that you just had to take planners to students, drop off letters and deliver messages to teachers, but it was much more than what I thought. I got to meet visitors and work closely with the reception staff, this taught me not only how to develop my communication skills, but also how to be responsible. Overall it was a great experience and I would love to do it again.'

Ocean, year 7 student

At the end of the academic year students are recognised for their achievements across the PBP through a formal graduation ceremony with awards at gold, silver and bronze levels for achieving their targets. The gold level award is gained when a student achieves their PB targets and has attendance that exceeds 96% for the year. The ceremony is held at the academy, with parents and teachers attending, to celebrate the students' graduation and success.

We believe this has an important part to play in the students' education, as it shows the appreciation of persistent hard work and effort. Ultimately, the PBP provides opportunities which inspire our students to become confident, competent – and above all else, resilient individuals in line with our academy mantra: 'Strive, achieve, believe'.

SSAT Leading Edge is an exclusive network for high-performing SSAT member schools, led by a steering group of headteachers. Joining criterion for 2018-19 is Ofsted grade 1, or Ofsted 2 with statistically significant student outcomes.

Find out more about becoming part of the network: ssatuk.co.uk/leading-edge.



Celebrating GCSE and A-level results? Turn the focus to KS3

*Hannah Storey,
Bishop Vesey's Grammar School*



Hannah Storey, head of history, Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, explains the importance of a focus on KS3, and some ideas on the crucial engagement of both students and teachers

In the history department at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, we start each year with the same conversation: where are we going next? Our GCSE and A-level results are outstanding and most students make excellent progress, in large part due to a relentless focus on teaching and learning and consistent assessment. However, we have found that actually key stage 3 is proving even more important to sustained success.

Capture and engage at KS3

The importance of capturing the interest of students is nothing new in teaching but it remains a key cornerstone to outstanding achievement. Hearing year 13 students talk about and remember topics and activities from their year 7 lessons and teachers is testament to this. In year 7, we have refined the use of 'murder scene' and Agatha Christie style 'murder mystery' lessons in order to introduce students to source evaluation and the questioning of evidence; a topic that my team and I have traditionally found more challenging to 'sex up'.

Broadening topic areas has created a course that gives students a whistle stop tour of the medieval period, which allows us to cover a huge amount of content

relatively quickly. The development of skills in medium and short term planning for year 7 have allowed us to create an effective course for the new, hugely content-heavy GCSE. This of course requires a relentless focus on teaching and learning. Again, this is not a new notion but maintaining the conversation about teaching and learning and 'where we go next' with year 7 has spread across all of our year groups, leading to constantly revaluation and finding new ways to teach old favourites.

DIRT

Probably the idea that has had the greatest impact on our department in recent times is DIRT. Following a department based training session in 2012 we wholeheartedly adopted the



notion of building Dedicated Improvement and Reflection Time into our curriculum. Every assessment completed at key stages 3, 4 and 5 is followed by a feedback session, in which students first complete activities using model answers and are then given the prized Purple Pen of Progress so they could act on their feedback. At first it was tricky to get students to focus on improving their work rather than fixating on their assessment grade or level. But completing this after every assessment has produced something of a cultural shift within the department, and the school. Students have greater ownership of the process and assessment has become a two-way conversation between teacher and learner.

Getting assessment right

It is difficult to say when assessment and policies are actually completely right but the old adage of weighing the pig doesn't make it fatter certainly comes into play. Having a clear idea what you want from your assessments is the key starting point. This idea is very straightforward for GCSE and A-level, as using exam board marking criteria and questions is standard practice across most schools and institutions.

The question becomes trickier with key stage 3. With the death of national curriculum levels it is tempting to simply use GCSE-style questions and criteria from



year 7. We have found that this does a disservice to the distinct nature of our key stage 3 course. We posed the question of whether we are simply here to get good grades at years 11 and 13 which thankfully was met with a resounding 'no'. We went for a more nuanced approach that incorporated the ideas of GCSE – being able to write a sensible essay and evaluate the purpose and utility of sources – but retained the essential notion that we were not simply learning it for the sake of an exam. So in years 7-9 standard essay and source assessments are complemented by giving students the chance to complete a presentation-based assessment. This could be producing a time traveller's guide to the medieval period, which focuses on writing for purpose in year 7; or producing a museum display piece relating to the Holocaust in year 9.

Let teachers develop their own style

In order to accomplish outstanding achievement you need outstanding teaching, and to recognise that this comes in

many forms and guises. Allowing teachers to develop their own ideas and tasks is very important. A colleague relishes the opportunity to incorporate role plays into his lessons; another enjoys creative and open-ended tasks.

Allowing teachers to plan, teach and evaluate their own style of lessons has brought a variety to the curriculum that has massively benefited student enjoyment and engagement. It has also given new impetus to practice sharing. Teachers are now able to share ideas that genuinely impact on each other's teaching, and move even experienced teachers out of their comfort zone.

This building of team spirit has helped to develop team relationships very quickly, and the power of this cannot be underestimated. From a student point of view, they experience different types of lessons and are engaged in different ways. This no doubt prepares them well for varied styles of learning in both higher education and the workplace.

SSAT Leading Edge is an exclusive network for high-performing SSAT member schools, led by a steering group of headteachers. Joining criterion for 2018-19 is Ofsted grade 1, or Ofsted 2 with statistically significant student outcomes.

Find out more about becoming part of the network: ssatuk.co.uk/leading-edge.



How ‘learning families’ develop teaching practice

*Daniel Pyatt ,
The Streetly Academy*

Daniel Pyatt, Head of Physics, explains how Streetly Academy is implementing and gaining from the SSAT Framework for Exceptional Education

How can we systematically drive school improvement? If we could ever definitively answer that question we would have stumbled upon a modern holy grail.

Let's face it, we can't expect teachers to work any harder. Most teachers are motivated by their passion and their willingness to immerse students in wonder and challenge. This already causes many teachers to work themselves to exhaustion.

So ultimately the only way to improvement is to take a critical and reflective approach to everything we do.

Sometimes improvement means asking difficult questions and changing what we do for something that could potentially add greater value. We need to be bold and take risks, but to be

measured in our responses, so that we do the best we can for our learners.

One tool for self-evaluation, which has very much been a catalyst for us at Streetly Academy, is the SSAT Framework for Exceptional Education (FfEE).

Developed by SSAT, FfEE is subtitled 'A journey to world class'. Its goal is to evaluate performance against a global standard, to encourage practice that is truly transformational and exemplary. The framework breaks performance down at three levels and 10 strands.

The three levels are:

Professional knowledge of the classroom, directly applicable to classroom teachers.

Professional disciplines, broadly applicable to middle leaders.

Strategic leadership of learning at a senior management level.

However, the 10 strands are not exclusive to particular groups: each contains points relevant to all groups. In this article I'm going to outline how, while we at Streetly have only just scratched the surface of the framework's potential, we can share what impact it has made at a strategic level.

At the outset of our use of FfEE we recognised a need to create a more structured and consistent approach, not just to teaching but to the development of teaching practice. This coincided with a shift from one-off performance management observations to a system of coaching for every member of staff. This creates a culture and ethos of ongoing and continuous development as opposed to high pressure judgement. Ultimately, we want all staff to develop, from those who need the most support to our top performers. We supported this with learning families made up of trained coaches and a range of staff from various departments. These groups not only meet to share best practice on focus areas but also have a



personal research focus. They work together in twilights, when a cross-curricular approach encourages colleagues to actively support each other through peer-to-peer observations.

Professional knowledge of the classroom

At a teacher level, professional knowledge of the classroom and its four strands – *effective learner behaviours*, *climate for learning*, *variety of teaching approaches* and *culture of reflection* – allows highly personalised evaluation. As part of our coaching programme, before their first meeting every coachee completes a self-evaluation document comprising the four strands. We broke down the key aspects of each strand into approximately 10 statements, which staff then evaluate themselves against on a personal continuum line.

The next step from this to identify the areas they wish to develop and create specific targets and action points about progressing their chosen foci. This evaluation document is personal to the member of staff who completes it and is only shared with their coach. Departments are then able to work collaboratively to evaluate themselves as a team against the framework using our in-house software, 'the suite'. This can then be calibrated against department reviews at a senior level. As we have moved into the second year of this process we then improved and focused our self-evaluation document to also include specific whole-school focus areas.

At a monitoring level the framework is used to inform our strategic planning, our whole-school focus areas and the criteria we look for in learning observations.

We constantly come back to the framework when we are evaluating our performance at this level, as a tool combined with our analysis of whole-school data on progress and performance. This ensures that we continue to operate with a world-class mindset. The framework is part of our language for learning used across the school with both students and teachers.

As part of our whole-school development of learner behaviours, we developed our own student learning model. This was in part to try and promote a more reflective and metacognitive approach to learning, so students can more accurately understand the process of learning. While the same learning cycle is shared and understood by teachers and learners, there are specific underpinning skills relevant for each group. We delivered this to

our students as part of their curriculum. We didn't want it to be a separate add-on to their lessons and so instead encouraged staff to make it part of their day-to-day language in order to make our model part of learners' experience. In year 7 we have supplemented this through a structured curriculum, which ensures that the foundations of effective learning are developed as students move through the school.

Another part of our strategy is to systematically link the various strands within the model. For example, when we run CPD on one of our teaching and learning foci we ensure that we build on the culture of reflection by sharing a variety of approaches to teaching and learning. We then give time for staff to explore and embed this practice in their lessons and bring what they have done to the next 'sharing best practice' meeting. We then follow this up with learning walks by middle and senior leaders to ensure developing practice is embedded across the school. Observations focus on the quality of learning taking place in a specific teaching practice.

Assessing the quality of learning

We look to ask simple questions to assess the quality of learning.

- » How is this activity making students think more deeply or at a higher level?
- » Are students engaged in purposeful learning which has value?
- » Is the learning sufficiently challenging for all learners?



An example

We identified through our coaching model that staff didn't feel confident with the 'construct meaning' phase of the learning cycle. So we dedicated a meeting, facilitated by our coaches, sharing best practice specifically on this phase. Staff brought examples from their own practice and discussed the nature of construct meaning. We fed in additional information to clarify understanding. Part of a middle leaders meeting was used to moderate our expectations in this area and clarify what exemplary practice looked like. We then updated our observation form to focus on this point and collect live data on its impact and progress within lessons. This enables us to plan further action.

The findings of learning observations are then fed straight into our planning for future training, triangulated against evidence-based practice, and our systems are rapidly updated to continue to drive further improvement.

Our next goal is to expand the level of use of the framework by departments, through further developing our self-evaluation framework – particularly to make better use of the criteria for professional disciplines and strategic leadership of learning. When we have done this and identified the areas of practice that make the most difference we want to then encourage more sharing of best practice by the members of staff who already embody these principles day in and day out.

As outlined at the start, I feel we have only just scratched the surface of the potential of FfEE, and are continuing to use it as part of our own search for growth and improvement.



Overcoming special measures through curriculum, quality of teaching and culture

*Simon Wade,
Beckfoot Upper Heaton*

‘No badge yet’, but Simon Wade, principal, Beckfoot Upper Heaton School, delves into the staff and student contributions that give great cause for confidence in the school’s future

As I sat in the Alhambra Theatre, Bradford, just before Christmas watching a group of our students from years 7, 8 and 9 performing Macbeth to a live audience, I was mesmerised and incredibly proud. I couldn’t help but think that our belief that anything is possible was being demonstrated to me by those children. Our school values of enjoy, learn,

succeed shone from every one of them on the stage that night. It felt good to know that we were making a difference.

Our journey (we like to call it that) began officially in September 2015 when we opened as a converter academy as part of the Beckfoot Trust, a cluster of nine cross phase Bradford schools. All of them are within a 20-minute drive of Beckfoot School, all genuinely comprehensive in character and keen to demonstrate that school collaborative practice can create exceptionally successful learning communities.

Beckfoot Upper Heaton, previously known as Belle Vue Boys School, had been in the depths of special measures when I arrived as principal, having been deputy head at Beckfoot School. It was awash with supply teachers and there was a distinct lack of trust across the staff given what they had been through in the preceding years. The school roll was falling dramatically and finances were a major concern. Other factors to note included students’ extremely low starting points, the absence of a SENCo or bespoke SEND provision, high levels of deprivation, low self-esteem (staff and students), English as a second language for the majority and a crumbling site that was leaking in most areas every time it rained. Where to start?

As a trust we believe passionately in the power of leadership at all levels. So, the first and most obvious task was to restructure the leadership team. I worried about how the team I was inheriting would view me and adapt to the change. I look back now and will never forget how fortunate





I was to begin work with a team that were so supportive and who all had a strong desire to be liberated to make a difference. We discussed what was expected of each of them, how they would be held to account and the importance of emotional intelligence. I wanted a group that understood their own roles and those of others in the team; no silos. I really wanted them to be more strategic in their work and for us to forge a unit that was impenetrable. As long as we were honest we would mature and grow in confidence.

The message that anything is possible was given a major boost when one of our year 11 students secured an apprenticeship with Aston Martin, beating thousands of other applicants

Just over two years in and we all really get on, don't take ourselves too seriously and remain

resolute in our determination to make this a great school in this part of Bradford.

Once that was done and, given the enormity of the task ahead of us, we prioritised three main areas:

- 1. Behaviour, attendance and punctuality**
- 2. Teaching and learning**
- 3. Culture.**

To begin, I was adamant that, to work here, staff really need to believe that all young people have talent and can achieve great things. It is our collective job to prepare them, by the time they leave us, to be able to stand tall beside any other young person, anywhere in the world, regardless of background, race, religion or gender. Of course there is much more, but that was the starting point.

Placing the responsibility on students

Behaviour needed sorting and we began with the introduction of basic expectations that were clear, easy to follow and placed

much of the responsibility for learning, progress and attitude on students. We facilitated a group of young people to write a strategy and spent a little money making their work come to life around the school. Within the first term, staff and students were telling us that things were different; staff could teach and students could learn.

What I had missed, though, is that this work really needed more of our own school's stamp. So by the end of year one, the students rewrote the strategy to better suit our school. We introduced tutoring and an assembly programme (I know!) and made a big issue of communicating with students, challenging them and instilling in them the importance to aim high and believe that anything is possible. This was given a major boost when one of our year 11 students secured an apprenticeship with Aston Martin, beating thousands of other applicants most of whom were graduates. One of our own doing something so amazing made a huge difference.

I was fortunate to begin work with a staff team who were supportive and had a strong desire to be liberated to make a difference

At the same time, we created what we thought at the time was an absurdly aspirational school learning journey, based on at least 5+ levels of progress (in old money) for all. Our students quickly embraced the challenge, knew and understood their targets and the importance of being supported via intervention when they were struggling. We are getting stronger all the time and our work on curriculum, quality of teaching and culture will help improve our attainment, I'm sure.

Our recent IDSR shows a school that is improving, and in the context of similar schools our vision and hard work is beginning to have impact. FFT Aspire is more positive still and, this year,

our basics English and maths (4+) ranks us 11 in comparison to similar schools. Contextually it's even better at 8, which is a positive I'm delighted to take given where we have come from.

Reviving neglected subjects

Of course teaching and learning was the number one priority but the school was littered with supply staff and there was little or no geography, MfL, music or PE happening. In science, three of the five staff were supply, and it was all a bit of a mess at the start. Again, we set out our expectations for staff, had a major recruitment drive, with the support of the trust, and by the end of year one we were fully staffed and the quality of teaching was getting stronger.

We worked tirelessly on the little things, like meeting and greeting students at the door, seating plans, using the registers to assess students' attitude to learning. We also introduced a prescriptive lesson structure (we have moved away from that now, thankfully) all tied together with

a rigorous performance management programme. Staff understood their role in supporting students, supporting our ambition and making a difference to the lives of young people. We have such a long way to go but our bespoke programmes such as Progress 9 and Take 10 are having a significant impact. We will never shift our drive to secure 100% high quality teaching and learning across school; we are not there yet.

Culture is that thing that is often hard to measure. It's the buzz, the feel, you sense around the building. It's growing here and is being hugely supported by a few things. Firstly, the manner in which we try to communicate with students and especially how we talk to them; respect is critical. It's about believing in them and allowing them as many opportunities as possible to experience new things and broaden their horizons. Our new building, which we have recently moved into, has also made a huge difference.



A culture of genuine student leadership

But culture also involves empowering students, in my view. We are big fans of genuine, not tokenistic, student leadership. We have a Beckfoot Upper Heaton Student Leadership (BUHSL) group, which is just entering its second year, and we take the election process very seriously. They are a very special group who have totally revamped our rewards strategy and who are working on impact initiatives related to eco school status and healthy eating. They are incredibly insightful and honest and they are making a difference, in their own way, to helping us create the school we want.

We believe that we are doing special things here and the school bears little or no resemblance to the place I started at over two years ago. We continue to work tirelessly on our curriculum; on how we use data to support every aspect of our work. Our three-year strategic vision (involving the whole school community), our SEF and our school improvement plan (SIP) are very simple documents understood by all. Those staff that are here share our desire to make this school great and know the role they must play on our journey to outstanding. I keep saying that while we are making a difference, the reality is that we have no badge just yet. We'll get

there though, as long as we keep believing in our vision and our journey and we work hard!

The student leadership team are incredibly insightful and honest and they are making a difference, in their own way, to helping us create the school we want





10 weeks in... 10 things for Mr Hinds to consider

Tom Middlehurst,
SSAT

The new secretary of state, Damian Hinds, is 10 weeks into the job. Now he's found his feet, Tom Middlehurst, SSAT's head of policy and public affairs, asks: what are the things he should really be thinking hard about?

1 Sufficiently, and fairly, fund all schools and colleges

The elephant in the room during any discussion on education policy is inevitably funding. Schools' funding impacts on their ability to enact any other reform: whether it's continuing to provide breadth and depth in the curriculum, attract and retain the best teachers, or support their weakest learners.

There has been a hot debate about the extent to which school funding is in crisis. More and more schools, including multi-academy trusts, are reporting end of year deficits. Prominent system leaders have warned that under the current funding arrangements, educational outcomes will deteriorate. Others have argued that schools are still better funded than they ever were in the 1980s and 1990s and that savings and streamlines have not been fully realised across the system.

Either way, it is clear that as costs continue to rise, without a significant further injection of cash many

schools will be unable to do all that the government, and society, expects of them. If the government is unwilling to provide more money for schools, then it needs to be clear what it wants schools to give up. The DfE needs to work out what it really costs per pupil to run a school, in order to achieve its aims, and then fund this sufficiently.

It must also address the vast inequalities in school funding between similar schools in different areas, even under the proposed new funding formula coming in 2018. This must not be done by reducing the funding of any area, but by funding the worst-funded areas better. The *WorthLess* campaign, representing almost 30 local authority areas, has shown how unjust the current system is.

Furthermore, at a time when post-18 funding is being reviewed, an urgent review of post-16 funding is needed. Currently sixth form funding is significantly less than pre-16 funding, at odds with many successful education systems and with the private education market. SSAT is supporting the *Save our Sixth Formers* campaign to lobby for this.

The secretary of state must work with his cabinet colleagues to ensure that the life chances of today's learners are not hampered by insufficient funding in any school or academy in the country.

2 Continue the mission of social justice

Prior to becoming education secretary, Damian Hinds was a vocal advocate for social justice, as a backbencher, junior minister and chair of the all-party parliamentary group on social mobility. He clearly sees social mobility through the lens of character development and employability; stressing the importance of valuable qualifications, careers advice and lifelong learning. In this way he continues the work of his immediate predecessors Justine Greening and Nicky Morgan.

A focus on social justice is to be welcomed. We must think carefully about what it means for every individual in society to lead fulfilling lives – and education's role in achieving that; not merely the betterment of individuals while accepting the status quo.

I agree with the secretary of state that character development, coupled with rigorous and appropriate qualifications, is key to achieving this. So while schools must continue to pay close attention to children's formal attainment and progress, more space and flexibility needs to be given to allow for character and employability development.

3 Properly review the evidence around selection by attainment or faith

Many grammar schools and majority-faith schools have contributed significantly to the social justice agenda; indeed both types of schools have published articles in previous SSAT journals explaining the steps they have taken to support the most disadvantaged young people in their communities. However, the evidence about what effect increased selection in the system (whether academic or faith-based) might have needs to be carefully considered.

It is highly likely that Hinds, who himself attended a Catholic grammar school, will seek to remove the 50% cap on faith admissions currently in place for all new free schools; having been critical of the cap previously. His views on increased academic selection are less clear. He has said that 'there is no appetite in the country for a wholesale return

to academic selection at 11' in 2014, but suggested you could have 'at least one unashamedly academically elite state school in each county or major conurbation.' In February he suggested that, rather than Teresa May's original plan to open new grammars and allow current comprehensives to convert to grammar status, he would be interested in allowing existing grammars to expand where there is a demand for places.

SSAT previously opposed the plans to increase selection in the system, while acknowledging the excellent work of existing grammar and majority faith schools. With this new proposal, more research will need to be done to analyse the likely impact of the policy across different areas of the country. In particular, we need to understand the impact of such a policy on students who do not get into an expanded grammar school, or cannot attend their local majority-faith school. The secretary of state must carefully consider this research before making firm policy announcements.

4 Work out a role for the middle tier

With the rapid expansion of academisation and the development of MATs under the Coalition government, we now have a mixed and fragmented system, which has destabilised and confused the middle tier. It is clearly undesirable and impractical for central government to have oversight of all 25,000 schools in the country. A wholesale return to local authorities maintaining schools is also undesirable and impractical.

What is the future role of local authorities? What is the future role of the regional schools commissioners; and how can their role be more clearly defined and their decisions made more transparent? How can we realign stakeholders across the system to ensure sensible local accountability? These are big questions, but ones that need answering and acting on if we are to avoid repeats of the high-profile controversies and failings of the MAT system in the past.

5 **Ensure proper governance in all academies and schools**

Effective governance is key to strong leadership and therefore school performance. Some of the controversies and failings of the MAT system alluded to above may have been avoided had governance been more robust.

In particular the secretary of state should ensure that there is a clear separation between members and trustees in every MAT and single academy in the country, which is not currently the case. Clear roles and responsibilities need to be agreed and clarified between a trust's members, trustees, executive and central team, local governing boards, and local leaders.

Once the system supports strong governance and clear accountability, the DfE needs to continue helping all schools to recruit effective governors and trustees, and provide high-quality support for these individuals, especially in the most vulnerable schools.

6 **Train more teachers**

The figures are startlingly clear: we are facing a teacher recruitment crisis, especially at secondary. Last year, although the number of teachers being trained was the highest in the last three years, it was still over 3000 trainees less than the government's own prediction of the number needed. More worryingly, one fifth of secondary places remained unfilled, and within that only two thirds of physics places were filled and just one third of D&T places: the lowest proportion for many years.

The Department needs to act quickly to train more teachers, especially in shortage areas and subjects, through a strategic approach to careers recruitment and incentives for graduates and career-changers. They should work closely with teaching schools to support local recruitment onto school-based ITT routes, as well as with the HE sector.

7 **Reduce workload in schools**

At the same time as we are not training enough new teachers, we are losing a large number of teachers from the profession each year (although this has somewhat stabilised over the last decade). A possible reason for this is high level of workload in schools, particularly in teachers' early careers, along with often inflexible working arrangements. It is not possible to attribute this as the main reason for career-leavers, but it is certainly one factor.

The Department's workload task force identified three areas of significant workload: planning and resources, marking, and data. The current workload group at the DfE are producing a resource for governors, leaders and teachers to use to address these three areas. This will be worthwhile, so long as use of the resource itself does not inadvertently create greater workload!

Some commentators have questioned where workload demands have come from, and suggested that both the Department and Ofsted have been clear that some school practices are unnecessary, and that demands are therefore being driven by school leaders themselves. Such comments from those outside schools have understandably made many school leaders angry!

We do need to engage in a rational debate about this. The reality of performance measures and high-stakes accountability has certainly resulted in some negative, and unneeded, behaviours. For instance, regular marking in books (once required by the inspectorate) may still be a common feature of many schools' feedback policies, but may not be the most effective way of giving feedback.

Hinds, along with his colleagues at the independent Ofsted, need to continue reiterating the messages of what is not required, and what effective practices may look like, while acknowledging their continued role in creating unnecessary workload, and seeking to constantly refine and address this.

8 Consider the implications of three year average KS2 and KS4 performance measures

Much of the debate around workload comes back to an argument about performance measures. Rightly or wrongly, some school leaders worry about the impact of a single year's results on their jobs. The reasons for this concern are complex, stemming from some persistent myths about inspection, to documented realities of governing bodies removing heads due to poor results or RSCs intervening when there is a dip.

A possible solution to this may be to use three-year averages, rather than single-year results, for schools' headline measures. 2018 will see the third new primary KS2 test results, and the third universal Progress and Attainment 8 figures, when published. Using a combined average of the past three years may be a fairer way of holding schools to account, and should also guard against knee-jerk reactions over a single year's results. This is something Damian Hinds and his team may want to consider.

9 Value all subjects

The obsession by successive ministers over the Ebacc subjects – English, maths, sciences, history, geography and languages – is not only boring but restrictive and damaging to the curriculum and therefore to young people's experiences.

SSAT has vehemently opposed any attempt to make the Ebacc compulsory for all, or even most, students. We maintain that Progress 8, already skewed in the Ebacc subjects' favour, and the publication of Ebacc entry rates as a headline measure, incentivise schools to offer the Ebacc widely to its students, without restricting subject choice. We do not believe that the Ebacc is right for all students – although all students should have the opportunity of studying the full complement of Ebacc subjects, and prior attainment and disadvantage should never be reasons not to offer curriculum entitlement. Furthermore, our modelling has shown that

in many schools, particularly at a time of financial restraint, a near-compulsory Ebacc would lead to a decline in other subjects – probably the arts, technical and vocational subjects. It is vital we maintain breadth in the curriculum.

The secretary of state will also need to consider the future of vocational learning. The investment made in T-Levels is welcome, but is one pathway and will not be right for all learners. We also need to offer other applied and blended routes that allow students to experience both rigorous academic learning and rigorous hands-on learning.

We must value different subjects and different routes for what they are. The rhetoric that we should value subjects equally, though, is somewhat lazy: we need to recognise and celebrate the differences between subjects and between different ways of learning – and ensure broad and deep curriculum entitlement for all.

10 Trust your teachers

Ultimately the best thing that Damian Hinds can do in his remaining time in office, however long or short that is, is to continue to listen, consult and work with the teaching profession. Too often the expertise from within has been ignored or, at best, paid lip-service to; while the government pursued policies ungrounded in evidence, and supported by a vocal few.

Teachers and school leaders are rigorous professionals. If an aspiration of a school-led system is to be realised, they must be supported through the policy framework to make autonomous decisions in the interests of their young people.

Clearly, schools are accountable for their actions, but they must also be trusted to act in the way they know is best.



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