'Fundamental reform of the way Ofsted operates is urgently needed'

Pressure is growing on Ofsted to reform its inspection machine. Having experienced 40 inspections in nine years, Paul K Ainsworth considers the fall-out from Ruth Perry's inquest and offers eight inspection wellbeing tips

The media coverage of the inquest into the death of primary school headteacher Ruth Perry has been traumatic for many colleagues.

There are many among us who have been badly hurt by the Ofsted process, whose careers have been ruined, and whose health has been damaged. Without getting too personal, I had my own traumatic experience with Ofsted which I still carry with me today.

Like many, I still bear the psychological scars and the haunting memories. I still remember waking up at 2am and being unable to get back to sleep. Laying awake for hours at a time. This lasted for 18 months.

This experience is now what drives me. It is one of the significant reasons for doing the job I do – an education director within a multi-academy trust supporting school leaders through inspection. I remain committed to supporting headteachers because I never want anyone else to be affected like I was.

Is change coming?

As we returned for the spring term, news broke that new Ofsted chief inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver, had paused inspections until January 22 so that his inspectors could undergo emergency mental health awareness training. This was a direct response to the damning ruling at Ruth Perry's inquest in December.

The inquest ruled that the November 2022 inspection of her school had "lacked fairness, respect and sensitivity", was at times "rude and intimidating", and had "contributed" to her suicide.

Critically, the coroner asked Ofsted witnesses during the inquest when and how an inspection could be paused or stopped if a head was distressed – the lack of a definitive answer led the coroner to question whether a paused inspection was a "mystical creature".

Many of us are hoping that Ruth Perry's legacy will be one of significant change to the Ofsted machine. The early signs from Sir Martyn's tenure are positive. He pledged that every single lead inspector on a school inspection will have completed the mental health training before inspections resume. He also revealed plans for a "big listen" consultation exercise this term in which he wants professionals and parents to tell him the "strengths and weaknesses of Ofsted's current approach".

Ruth Perry's death had already led to a number of "tweaks" to Ofsted procedures, including changes to the complaints process and a new helpline. However many of us are agreed that the changes do not go far enough.

In December, the National Association of Head Teachers said: "Fundamental reform of the way Ofsted operates is urgently needed to improve the reliability and usefulness of inspections, while reducing the unacceptable toll on the wellbeing and mental health of leaders and teachers."

And Ofsted must act. A prevention of future death notice issued by the coroner means that Ofsted must set-out what it plans to do to mitigate the chances of something similar happening again. Sir Martyn said he will submit his response to the coroner wwon January 19, "setting out clearly how Ofsted will conduct inspections with professionalism, courtesy, respect and empathy".

Ofsted has said it will seek permission from the coroner to publish this document as soon as it is completed.

Protecting wellbeing

I have been through almost 40 inspections in the last nine years and have been directly involved in four inspections during 2023. I have also supported other schools to prepare for inspections and have read far too many inspection reports than is good for me.

I have seen every single judgement and have always tried to support school leaders to do their best and to reduce their stress and anxiety.

So while emphasising that a change in approach from Ofsted is clearly necessary, in this edition of *Headteacher Update* I want to offer practical suggestions to empower school leaders, too.

On pages 14-15 you will find nine general inspection insights based on my experiences of Ofsted last year. And below I offer eight suggestions to help support your own wellbeing during school inspection.

1, Who is there for you?

Being a head during inspection can be a lonely experience so you need to know who you can seek advice from at all stages. If you are part of a multi-academy trust (MAT), it should be expected that colleagues will be alongside you at every step. They will help prepare you, be there for the phone call, during the inspection, and then help you handle the communication of the result afterwards. If you are a local authority school or a standalone trust, who can help you? Could you buddy up with a fellow head and offer mutual peer support?

Remember, one of Ofsted's tweaks last year was to make it clear in the handbook that school leaders can be joined by colleagues in meetings with inspectors. You can also share inspection outcomes with colleagues, family, medical advisors, and wider support groups before sharing with parents.

2, Where is your base?

You need a base where you and your leaders can escape to let of steam. In small schools there is a temptation to give inspectors the headteacher's office – resist this as you need some space for yourself.

3, Eat well

If we are going to perform at our best over the course of an inspection, we need to make sure we eat as well as we can. After you get the call, make sure you have some ready meals available that you can prepare quickly in the evening. During the day, make sure you have healthy snacks to graze on.

4, Know the handbook

We must understand the process and the best place to look is the Ofsted handbook. There is so much detail on what will happen prior to inspection, during inspection and after inspection. If you do not know the handbook, you cannot...

5, Challenge inspectors

It is hard but there are times when you have to challenge inspectors. Be assertive but remain professionally polite. I have done this on a number of occasions. During a monitoring visit of an "inadequate" school, inspectors began to question (and criticise) why the school had not been rebrokered. I politely stopped them, pointing out that this was not in their remit. They quickly apologised. In another case at an infants school the inspector referenced national attendance figures. I had to point out several times that they were looking at figures for primary schools rather than infant schools. Eventually the inspectors accepted my point.

6, The end of day one

It is always tough at the end of the first day. Unfortunately, the Ofsted process can seem to operate a deficit model and one element of this is that at the end of day one we are very aware of everything we seem not to have done or the areas where we are not at our best. I have seen many inspections where school leaders at the halfway point are convinced they will be downgraded – and yet the final outcome is positive. Be prepared for this. Remember if the outcome is at risk of being the worst, inspectors have to notify you during the inspection.

7, Work in pairs

I have a golden rule: no-one should speak to an inspector on their own. For middle leaders in primary schools, subject leadership is just one part of their duties. Try and see if it is possible for you or another senior leader to accompany your middle leaders in Ofsted conversations. If you are part of a MAT, it is perfectly acceptable for MAT colleagues to accompany your middle leaders. In a recent inspection, I accompanied the EYFS lead. It was her conversation but at points I reminded her of things she had done which she then elaborated upon. Also make sure the supporting colleague is writing down inspectors' questions so you can share them with those still to be interviewed.

8, Be realistic

Be realistic about what is possible. If you are leading an "inadequate" school, your first challenge is to get to "requires improvement". Equally during monitoring visits it is very hard to persuade inspectors to convert to a graded inspection in order to move your school out of "inadequate". Try and accept this. Equally, only a very small number of schools are graded "outstanding" so be realistic about the possibility of this too.

Final thoughts

While we wait for Ofsted to change, I hope this advice can help in reducing anxiety and stress during your inspection. If you feel your inspection has gone badly, talk to trusted people and believe that this could be the point that makes you an even better leader. Equally if it has gone well, enjoy the moment but try not to be carried away by the hype. Remember, an inspection does not define you or your leadership. Ultimately, take care of yourself and those around you. School improvement is a team game. **hu**

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> "Remember, an inspection does not define you or your leadership. Ultimately, take care of yourself and those around you. School improvement is a team game"

Research Round-up

Our regular round-up of educational research looks back at some recent studies and reports relevant to primary school education, including links to more details from *Headteacher Update* online

Cost of schooling

A quarter of parents are struggling with the cost of sending their children to school – with the top three challenges being uniform, trips and school meals. The annual National Parent Survey shows that 27% of parents and carers are struggling to afford school – rising to half of parents with children entitled to free school meals. This equates to as many as 2.8 million children living in UK families who struggle to afford school.

The survey has been published by charity Parentkind and involved 5,126 parents and carers. It shows that only 60% believe that the costs of school are acceptable. Of those who had concerns over the affordability of schooling, 10 problem areas were identified:

1. Uniforms (50%).
2. School trips (44%).
3. School meals/drinks (30%).
4. Technology, including computers, tablets, internet access (19%).
5. Transport to and from school (19%).
6. Costs of materials for specific classes (19%).
7. Before and after-school clubs (18%).
8. Extra-curricular events, such as sports days and concerts (16%).
9. Cost of general stationery and materials (13%).
10. Costs of voluntary donations to the school fund (8%).

■ *Full report: https://tinyurl.com/2amc42t5*

Mental health

One in five children and young people in England aged 8 to 16 had a probable mental health disorder in 2023, NHS figures reveal, including notable numbers of primary-age pupils. The research shows that prevalence in 2023 has increased slightly when compared to 2022 (20.3% compared to 18%), but is notably higher than in 2017 (12.1%).

It finds that 22.6% of 11 to 16-year-olds are considered to have a probable mental health condition as well as 15.7% of 8, 9 and 10-year-olds.

The study comes as NHS England has rolled out 398 Mental Health Support Teams within schools and colleges to provide early support, covering an estimated 35% of pupils.

■ *Full report: https://tinyurl.com/ywsts4k6*

Young carers

Hundreds of thousands of young carers – many aged under-9 and some as young as 5 – are still going unidentified in schools with devastating consequences for their education, wellbeing, and future prospects. An inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Young Carers and Young Adult Carers has warned that official figures drastically underestimate the true number of young carers in the UK.

A young carer is someone aged under-18 who cares for a family member who, due to illness, disability, mental health, or an alcohol or substance misuse problem, cannot cope without the young carer's support. The 2021 census identified 127,176 young carers, while the 2023 schools census put the figure at 38,983 (for young carers aged 5 to 16). However, the inquiry's report estimates that 10-13% of the pupil population could have caring roles to some degree. This would equate to two in every classroom or as many as one million young carers. Key barriers to identification have historically included a reluctance on the part of the young carer to come forward. The report also warns that many young carers might not identify themselves as such even though they are in a caring role.

■ *Full report: https://tinyurl.com/59vybppw*

Teacher retention

Ten flexible working enablers, nine workload priorities, and three leadership actions – all aimed at boosting teacher retention – have been outlined in three research reviews. The first considers flexible working approaches that have potential to keep teachers at the chalkface, including a list of 10 "enablers" that help schools to make a success of flexible working.

The second offers workload reduction strategies including nine suggestions for priority areas in schools. The third looks at the role of leadership in driving teacher retention, identifying three key areas where effective leadership can make a difference.

The three reports, published by the Education Endowment Foundation, offer further advice and lessons learned that might be adapted by schools on top of these 22 elements.

■ *Full report: https://tinyurl.com/425pa7db*

Book ownership

More than 1 in 12 children in the UK do not have a single book of their own at home, rising to as many as 1 in 8 disadvantaged pupils and as many as 1 in 5 pupils aged 5 to 8.

Research from the National Literacy Trust shows that 8.6% of children and young people aged 5 to 18 do not own a book. However, when it comes to those who are disadvantaged, this figure rises to 12.4% – and things are getting worse. The annual research has revealed that the numbers of disadvantaged children without a single book has been growing since 2020 (from 7.9% to 12.4%).

The worst category for book ownership is 5 to 8 where almost 1 in 5 (19.2%) pupils do not own a book. This figure improves to 6.2% for 8 to 11-year-olds. By region in England, the worst levels of book ownership were found in the North East, North West, and Yorkshire.

Separate NLT research featuring more than 3,000 parents and carers found that 20% have had to cut back on books for their children as a result of the cost of living crisis – rising to 36% of those parents who are struggling financially.

■ *Full report: https://tinyurl.com/3avmzv8r*

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TOP 7 MOST READ BEST PRACTICE

1 **Staffroom: 10 ideas**
Is your school staffroom a place where all your colleagues can find space and inspiration? We offer 10 tips…
https://tinyurl.com/msf3navh

2 **The cost of winter**
This winter will exacerbate the economic hardship that many families are already facing. How can we support children?
https://tinyurl.com/4dryhu9n

3 **Disclosure barriers**
Twelve barriers that prevent children from disclosing sexual abuse and four factors that help
https://tinyurl.com/5n8jfsma

4 **Filtering & monitoring**
What do the strengthened requirements around filtering and monitoring mean for your safeguarding work?
https://tinyurl.com/ysduzzk8

5 **Autism: 47 tips**
Small tweaks can make all the difference for autistic pupils. Here are 47 tried and tested ideas
https://tinyurl.com/4mm5txr8

6 **Data protection**
Schools must be on top of their data protection duties. Expert advice from the Information Commissioner's Office
https://tinyurl.com/bdzezrh7

7 **Afro discrimination**
How can we avoid illegally discriminating against pupils with Afro hairstyles in uniform policies?
https://tinyurl.com/2p9pehyc

What is Number Sense?

Written by **Whizz Education** www.whizz.com/teachers

Number sense is not memorising a sequence of names of numbers and reciting them, like a nursery rhyme and it's not memorising facts such as one plus four equals five.

Number Sense is a complex understanding of the meaning of a number. Let's think about the number Five.

Five has character qualities like a person has personality. What do we know about five-ness?
- Being five means being half of ten
- Five is one more than four and one less than six
- Five is the sum of two and three, four and one
- Being five is like a four sided box with a dot in the middle like a domino or dice five or in a five frame
- Five has one hand's worth of fingers and there are four fives if you include fingers and toes
- Five multiples, such as fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty....
- Five is odd, it's a prime number
- Five is a coin
- Five is fifth in a sequence
- Five o'clock, five years old - Five travels through time: the minute, the hour, the day, the month...

The way we learn about five is by spending time with five, like a friend. We must see Five in a variety of situations before we realise all of the wonderful characteristics that Five has.

Number sense develops over time through opportunities to explore and play with numbers. Making Maths-Whizz part of your students weekly routine builds consistency and consolidates learning through the variety of lessons that allow the student to visualise numbers in different contexts, spot relationships between numbers, understand the composition of numbers and predict patterns. All of this contributes towards developing good number sense.

To ensure the consolidation of foundational concepts in number sense, there are some key strategies educators should focus on and Maths-Whizz aligns well with these:

- **Hands-On Learning:** Provide hands-on activities and real-world examples to make abstract concepts more tangible. Maths-Whizz brings maths to life using powerful representations that convey the underlying patterns of numbers and allows the students to interactively manipulate numbers.

- **Conceptual Emphasis:** Focus on developing a deep conceptual understanding of numbers rather than just memorising procedures. Maths-Whizz helps to make deliberate use of language that seeks to enlighten students on where mathematical ideas derive from with animated visuals to suit all learners.

- **Individualised Instruction:** Maths-Whizz differentiates instruction to meet the diverse needs of students with their own personalised learning journey, providing additional support as needed. Teachers also can specify the learning focus and track progress.

- **Application in Real-World Contexts:** Maths-Whizz connects mathematical concepts to real-world applications to demonstrate the practical value of number sense, to make the learning real and fun.

- **Positive Learning Environment:** Maths-Whizz fosters a positive and supportive learning environment to promote a positive attitude towards mathematics with scaffolded support, opportunities to consolidate learning and rewards.

By implementing these points using Maths-Whizz, educators can help ensure that students develop a strong and enduring foundation in number sense, setting the stage for success in more advanced mathematical concepts. Knowing about numbers isn't just a chore; it's a treasure hunt, and the more treasures (numbers) students discover, the merrier their mathematical adventure becomes!

War and conflict: Helping pupils to cope with disturbing world news

Recent years have seen a number of international crises, including the conflict in Gaza and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. How can we help our pupils to process and cope with what they are undoubtedly seeing and hearing? Suzanne O'Connell takes a look

Image: Adobe Stock

We cannot – and perhaps should not – prevent our pupils from having some awareness of international crises.

The extent to which they will be exposed to these will vary enormously of course, and some pupils will certainly have seen and heard far more than they should have for their age.

However, the fact remains that we are all surrounded by the images of war and conflict at the moment, not to mention many other worrying international issues such as the impact of climate change.

Whatever your approach as a teacher or a school, we alone cannot protect pupils from the wider sphere of influence that they are exposed to on a daily basis – especially in a world of social media.

However, we do have a key position as trusted adults and, as such, are in a position to provide children with an opportunity to share their anxieties and to help them find a way of dealing with them. This is a sensitive and difficult role and one that can cause staff themselves much concern.

Of course, this issue has come to the fore for many because of the conflict in Gaza, but Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 also led to many questions from our children.

In *Headteacher Update* in March 2022, child psychologist Dr Stephanie Thornton wrote about the impact that wall-to-wall media and social media coverage of war can have upon children and young people (see Thornton, 2022).

There are variations in the extent to which children will be exposed to the images on the newsreels and there will be differences in the extent to which they have an impact upon them.

You may already have had discussions in the classroom or in assembly. Pupils may have raised their anxieties. Wherever you are as an individual and as a school leader in terms of dealing with your own, your staff's and your pupils' anxieties, perhaps it is time to prepare your approach as a school – if you haven't done so already.

Tackling the issues together

This is not a proposal for creating another school policy. However, there is definitely merit in discussing the issue of how to handle pupil talk and questions about conflict and other anxiety-triggering news. What is your approach as a school and how well are staff prepared to

Pictures of war: Houses destroyed and burned during the Russian invasion of Ukraine

deal with those difficult and disturbing questions? As a staff you might want to discuss and agree on:
- Your approach as a school – when and where will these issues be addressed.
- The language you will use.
- Guidelines for what to say and what not to say.
- Any additional support or training that staff feel they might need.

As a school leader you should consider how staff may feel too and what opportunities there are for them to discuss with peers (or others) any concerns they might have.

> **"By focusing on what the young want to 'know' rather than what they 'fear', we may direct the conversation away from overwhelming anxieties. A focus on knowledge can be empowering, a focus on fear is not"**

When to talk

You will have to decide in your school if, when and how to open the discussion. You may already have it built in to your curriculum plans. Alternatively children might raise the subject themselves. Using circle time or class discussion time is probably ideal and you might want to delay answering impromptu questions to give you opportunity to prepare your thoughts – but never forget to come back to pupils with an answer to their question.

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If introducing the subject in assembly you may want to check with teachers first whether there is anyone who may be more adversely affected – especially those pupils who may have family and friends living in the affected regions. In these cases it might be better for the class teacher to raise the issue first.

Being aware

If a discussion is planned then careful consideration can be given to the background, experience and SEN of the class. If you have families who are refugees and have fled conflict themselves you need to reflect on how events and discussions might impact on them in a very direct and personal way. We may not be aware of all the pupils who have had experiences of violence in their lives and we should be vigilant for other cues that might indicate that children are uncomfortable or feeling anxious. You may find two recent *Headteacher Update* articles useful, one focused on welcoming refugees to our schools (2022a), an another specifically about welcoming children fleeing the Ukrainian conflict (2022b).

Listen first

A good starting point is to find out what your pupils already know. This is important because they might have misconceptions that you can then address. They are likely to have gleaned snippets of information from different sources and younger children may have no concept of where the conflict is actually taking place. They may, for example, believe it to be a much closer threat than it really is.

In these cases, it can be beneficial to actually look at where the countries are without negating the disastrous impact on those living there. However, once again, do be aware of children in the class who might have family living in or close to the war zone and who could find this information more worrying than consoling.

What do you want to know?

Following on from hearing what they do know, you might ask pupils "what do you want to know?" rather than a leading question such as "what's worrying you?". Dealing with the facts can be more reassuring than talking about worries at this stage. As Dr Thornton points out in her article: "A focus on knowledge can be empowering, a focus on fear is not."

She adds: "The advantages are clear: by focusing on what the young want to 'know' rather than what they 'fear', we may direct the conversation away from overwhelming anxieties and toward a more manageable matter-of-fact."

She points out that letting pupils lead the discussion with their questions helps to keep the conversation age-appropriate. Different ages can have very different worries. A very young child might be more anxious about losing their toys than the prospect of dying. It is easy to assume that our concerns are theirs. Remaining calm and providing thoughtful and balanced responses is what is important.

Difficult questions

So, if they can't and shouldn't be protected from all that is happening, how do we deal with the inevitable questions? To begin with, children will come at us with very different types of question depending on their actual understanding of events.

Honesty is important. Don't give false reassurance however tempting it might be to do so. Children come to us to make sense of the world and if we try to cover up the facts and this turns out to be wrong then they will lose their trust in us and turn to other sources for their answers.

When a difficult question is asked it is better to say that nobody knows than to make false promises. Alternatively, when you simply don't know the answer you might suggest that you will get back to them or even search the answer out together.

Your response will change according to the children's age. With very young children your main focus is likely to be on reassuring them of their own safety and security. With older children you can provide accurate information and research further questions alongside them.

Show that you are open to talking about the subject but acknowledge that you don't have all the answers. Acknowledging uncertainty is more important than pretending you know.

You can promote fact-finding, discuss how we can identify trusted sources and introduce and explain important concepts such as

> **"Different ages can have very different worries. A very young child might be more anxious about losing their toys than the prospect of dying. It is easy to assume that our concerns are theirs."**

misinformation and propaganda. Remember, at all times you must respond robustly to hate speech.

Talk about the good

Consider highlighting the strengths and qualities people show in these difficult times – stories of kindness can help mitigate the images of cruelty and destruction that young people might be seeing. It is important that children know that many people are trying to improve the situation. Focus on these helpers. Remind them that there are many adults working to keep people safe.

School routines

Encourage children to focus on the now – we don't know what will happen in the future but in the present this is how things are. With very young children this approach can work particularly well. As children get older, encourage them to consider what really matters in their life and what their fundamental values are.

Help pupils to see what they are in control of rather than what they're not. A sense of routine and order is vital. Schools represent a predictable environment. Maintaining the rules and the clear structure of the school day and the classroom helps pupils to focus on the present and reassures them of normality.

Those most affected

As mentioned, some pupils in your school may have family and friends in war-torn countries and this has particular implications not only because of their personal worries but also for how others in the school might view them.

Your school's anti-bullying policy and school values are important here to ensure that news coverage doesn't encourage negative reactions to particular communities.

You may even have pupils who might represent different sides of the conflict within the same friendship groups and classes. This can be particularly difficult especially when other pupils may make assumptions about their relationship or even take sides on their behalf.

Where you do have this situation in your school you might liaise with other members of the school community to find out the background to any tensions there might be between groups. This is not to get involved or to take sides, but simply to make sure you are fully informed.

Final thoughts

Dealing with the fall-out of conflict is not a tick-box exercise. You might want to pick up again on the subject as events unfold. Having established a foundation for discussion, teachers can build on this when there are further developments.

The same goes for your staff too. Having discussed your approach as a school you will want to return to the topic and consider whether new events may have an impact. Keep the door open for staff and pupils to feel able to discuss and share their thoughts on what continue to be major issues for our time. **hu**

• *Suzanne O'Connell is a freelance education writer and a former primary school headteacher. Read her previous articles for Headteacher Update via www.headteacher-update.com/authors/suzanne-oconnell*

Further information & resources

■ *Headteacher Update: Welcoming the refugees seeking sanctuary from war, 2022a: https://tinyurl.com/2hs2b2s8*
■ *Headteacher Update: Welcoming and supporting Ukrainian refugees in your school, 2022b: https://tinyurl.com/yk3njf8s*
■ *Thornton: How do we talk about Ukraine? Engaging with young people over the war, Headteacher Update, 2022: https://tinyurl.com/msnuzap3*

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Strategic financial planning explained

It is a tough time for leaders of financial planning in education. Specialist Julia Harnden sets out six ground rules and four tactics that you can use to ensure your school doesn't just survive – but thrives

The role of a school's financial leader is to make informed decisions that meet the needs of children and young people and are aligned with available resources. This is a huge challenge.

If you are tasked with leading strategic financial planning it can feel a bit like a constant fight for survival – always balancing the demands of financial sustainability with the strategic aims and success of the organisation.

Which strategies will support you in your leadership role, develop a culture of shared responsibility across the organisation, and help to pin down the "known unknowns" in budget planning?

One thing is clear – this is not a task that any one individual can do alone, it is a team game. As a leader of strategic financial planning there are a few ground rules and a range of tactics that you can use to give your organisation the best chance of thriving and not merely surviving.

Ground rules

Understand why strategic financial planning is important and communicate that to your team
A strategic view allows the leadership team to project a range of efficiencies for the future using the best information available at the time. Strategic financial planning is all about managing risk in a way that maximises opportunity while at the same time mitigating financial vulnerability. What is more, the process of strategic financial planning ensures that key financial information is not limited to one or two people in the organisation as this can present real risks.

Agree a team approach to strategic financial planning
There isn't a single correct approach, but generally speaking there are three key drivers in strategic financial planning.
■ The financial imperative to set a balanced budget.
■ Ofsted and accountability measures.
■ Stakeholder expectations.

Adopting an approach that is curriculum-led will allow consideration of all the above. Successful strategic financial planning requires contributions from both curriculum and finance teams. The approach must commit to educational success and financial security.

It is rather stating the obvious to say that a curriculum framework that meets the needs of your pupils will be at the heart of your decision-making, but nevertheless it is probably worth making the point for the purposes of transparency and a clear direction of travel.

Embedding an integrated curriculum and financial planning approach (which I wrote about in *SecEd*, *Headteacher Update*'s sister magazine, back in 2019) will support strategic financial planning, but it is not a panacea for financial security; it will deliver necessary metrics and inform decisions, but it cannot tell you what to do!

Those decisions must remain the responsibility of leaders who are best placed to properly understand organisational context and how to navigate an effective route to success.

Start with the end in view
To maximise the probability of success, start with the end in view. Key questions to consider in determining what that end view will look like are:
■ What are the outcomes that will be most important for strategic success?
■ Given that these outcomes will be our priorities, where should resources go?
■ How can we test these resource allocation strategies quickly and efficiently?

Look backwards and forwards
Use data to highlight trends and use trends to drive strategy. Consider all available relevant data on organisational performance, across both curriculum and finance. The two are inextricably linked but are too often considered in silos. An unfortunate consequence of the silo approach is time wasted in adversarial conversations about what can or cannot be achieved.

The antidote to this is working together using information that is both useful and necessary to curriculum and finance leads and using a language that everyone can understand. One way of doing this is to simply consider the link between curriculum and funding. Ask yourselves:
■ How many teachers do you need to deliver the curriculum the school would like, both now and over the next three years?
■ How many teachers can the school afford now and over the next three years?

These considerations are two sides of the same coin and if you can't afford the number of teachers then you need to discuss what the options might be.

Don't forget about total cost of ownership
The total cost of ownership – or TCO – is the overall cost of a product or

service throughout its life cycle. These costs must be adequately accounted for in your budget in future years. A well planned but tight budget can easily be derailed by the omission of on-going maintenance or licensing costs associated to a one-off capital investment in previous years.

Scenario plan using an options appraisal approach
Medium and long-term scenario-planning allows your organisation to be proactive and in control rather than reactive. Dealing with problems caused by poor financial planning is time-consuming, results in diverting senior leaders away from focusing on teaching and learning, and is often expensive.

Accept that there are always things that you don't know. You can only use the best information that is available to you, and for the rest you will need to make sensible assumptions. Assumptions should be evidenced and revisited regularly as more information is confirmed.

Setting assumptions cannot be the responsibility of one person. This is both unfair and unrealistic. You will need expertise and experience from all aspects of school life to arrive at and agree well-articulated assumptions.

A medium or long-term strategic plan will include a number of different options or scenarios. Use an options appraisal process to test out each one. Your context will determine the full set of success criteria, but as a rule of thumb each scenario should at least deliver the following:
- Sustainable curriculum (enough teachers).
- Effective contact and non-contact time (must include staff wellbeing as a consideration).
- Sufficient support staff and curriculum resources.
- Safe and well-maintained buildings.

Tactics
There are also a few tactics that you can employ to help ensure you stay on course.

Build the governance meeting schedule around the budget planning cycle and accounting submission deadlines
The budget planning cycle must work so that it supports the governing board to fulfil its financial accountability responsibilities. There are also a number of financial compliance deadlines that must be met across the funding year. Encourage governing boards to set a meeting schedule that works to constructively support this work rather than constrain it.

Apply the acid test to all expenditure decisions
Every line of expenditure must directly or indirectly support teaching and learning and/or compliance. If not, the follow-up question must be: "Why are we doing this?"

Keep curriculum and finance leads talking to each other
Regular stress tests of the current budget and viability of scenarios will require knowledge of the financial position, staff deployment, and curriculum viability. A good working relationship between staff in these roles creates synergy and mitigates common barriers to financial sustainability, including poor internal controls and a lack of regular scrutiny of key performance indicators, sustaining a curriculum against the odds and expenditure on non-essentials.

Don't sweat the small stuff
Work with your business manager and finance team. Your role is to lead and not do the leg-work. Instead, have regular time-limited monitoring meetings to run through a previously agreed set of key performance indicators that provide you with the information you need at an appropriate level of detail.

Final thoughts
The disciplined allocation of resources and continuous monitoring and review of financial strategies will enable your school to thrive in an uncertain landscape. Know the ground rules of strategic financial planning and set a course for financial sustainability. **hu**

• *Julia Harnden is a funding specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders.*

Further information & resources
- *Harnden: Integrated curriculum financial planning, SecEd, 2019: http://tinyurl.com/mpz344xb*

Tackling extremism: Advice and best practice

Updated Prevent Duty guidance is in place with a greater focus on particular areas, not least tackling extremist ideology. Elizabeth Rose takes a fresh look at best practice in safeguarding against extremism

The Prevent Duty (Home Office, 2015) has long been a core part of safeguarding work in schools. Formed as one of the four strands of the government's anti-terrorism CONTEST strategy in 2003 in response to the threat posed by Islamist terrorism, it has been a key responsibility for schools to work to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism for many years.

The original approach has been adapted and extended over time and the most recent review into the strategy – the *Independent Review of Prevent* – was published last February (Home Office, 2023).

This review put forward 32 recommendations to address a range of issues with the Prevent strategy and to further strengthen the national approach to the threat of terrorism.

As part of the response to the review, the statutory Prevent Duty guidance for "specified authorities" was updated in September 2023 and became statutory on December 31 (DfE, 2023; Home Office, 2023). While this guidance doesn't confer new statutory responsibilities on schools, it brings Prevent back to the forefront of safeguarding discussions.

The global context, recent conflict in the Middle East and the rise in hate crimes against minority groups have also highlighted the on-going requirement for schools to balance promoting tolerance and cohesion, sensitively addressing questions and opinions about global matters, supporting children with vulnerabilities, protecting them from harm and robustly responding where there are concerns about radicalisation, and extremism.

These issues are challenging for all agencies and can be especially challenging in schools, where all elements of this may be happening simultaneously. While there is no simple solution to these issues, there are a number of things that schools can – and in some cases must – do to ensure that they are meeting safeguarding requirements and keeping children safe.

Understand the guidance and assess risk

It is essential that safeguarding leads and senior leaders read and understand the Prevent Duty statutory guidance. According to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, schools have a duty to "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" and there are several updated documents and tools available alongside the main guidance to support this, including an updated Prevent risk assessment template (see further information).

The guidance is clear that schools should:

- Perform a risk assessment which assesses how their learners or staff may be at risk of being radicalised into terrorism, including online.
- Develop an action plan to address risks identified.

Settings can use the government's suggested proforma or one may be provided by the local authority that better reflects local priorities and risks. It is important to address this point and implement a risk assessment if there is not one in place already. It is essential that schools understand both the local and national context in relation to radicalisation and extremism to be able to effectively develop this risk-assessment.

Training

It is important that schools have a robust approach to Prevent training. Different roles require different approaches but Prevent training should form part of school induction processes for new staff and be part of the annual training calendar.

- Designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) should complete specific training that includes information about extremist and terrorist ideologies, how to make referrals, and how to work with Channel panels. It is recommended that DSLs complete Prevent training at least every two years and it is important to be aware of changing and emerging risks in-between.
- Staff should be trained at least annually in radicalisation risks, spotting the signs of radicalisation, and how to report concerns. As well as being alert to violent extremism staff should also be aware of, to quote the Prevent Duty guidance, "non-violent extremism, including certain divisive or intolerant narratives which can reasonably be linked to terrorism".
- Governors should be trained at induction and regularly thereafter so that they are aware of their responsibilities in relation to Prevent.
- Training for all groups should include factors which may make individuals more "susceptible" to radicalisation.

The quality and reliability of training can vary. Schools should critically engage with training providers and their offers to ensure that they are suitable and meet the needs of the setting's context. The Prevent Duty guidance includes a number of quality-assured providers and local authorities should be able to advise further.

Policy

School safeguarding policies should be regularly updated and should reflect the school's approach to Prevent. A separate policy is not required

as Prevent should be seen as part of the setting's wider safeguarding approach.

The guidance is clear that schools should work closely with their safeguarding partners to enable them to have an up-to-date awareness of risk and threat posed and have a good understanding of the latest developments in best practice. Policies should reflect local Prevent arrangements too.

There should also be an "external speakers" policy and process in place to effectively vet and quality-assure any outside providers coming in to school to deliver training, education opportunities, performances, mentoring or other services. Staff should have an awareness of this and a robust process should be in place for any external speaker that may be commissioned.

Policies should always include the processes for raising any concerns about radicalisation and extremism.

Promoting tolerance and cohesion

The Prevent Duty guidance contains specific information for schools about "reducing permissive environments". This is part of the approach to tackling extremist ideologies as well as the threat of violence. Schools may approach this in many ways, some of which are directly discussed in the document, and this should include:

- Ensuring that there are suitable security systems and filtering and monitoring programs in place to ensure that IT systems are not being used to access or share extremist content.
- Ensuring that anyone working in, with or on behalf of the school has been subject the appropriate level of checks prior to employment or engagement.
- Promoting tolerance, community cohesion and respect – especially in relation to protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010.
- Delivering a suitable and effective safeguarding curriculum that builds resilience to support in managing risk and seeking support.
- Providing safe spaces for children to discuss ideas and ask questions, with well-trained staff who are able to respond and manage this in a safe way.

- Promoting leadership and democracy through school structures.
- In all settings, but particularly in further and higher education settings, balancing legal duties in terms of both securing freedom of speech and protecting learner and staff welfare.

Final thoughts

Although the legal duties on schools remain the same, the content of the guidance now has a greater focus on particular areas – especially the idea of tackling extremist ideology. It recognises that schools are ideally placed to both tackle and respond to radicalisation risks and concerns, and considering school approaches to Prevent through the prism of this guidance will support in ensuring both compliance and developing best practice in order to keep children – and others – safe. **hu**

• *Elizabeth Rose is an independent safeguarding consultant and director of So Safeguarding. She is a former designated safeguarding lead. Visit www.sosafeguarding.co.uk and follow her on X (Twitter) @sosafeguarding. Read her previous articles for Headteacher Update via www.headteacher-update.com/authors/elizabeth-rose*

Further information & resources

- *DfE: Guidance: The Prevent Duty: Safeguarding learners vulnerable to radicalisation, last updated September 2023: https://tinyurl.com/34tpu7nz*
- *DfE: Guidance: Prevent Duty: Risk assessment templates, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/5e39wkra*
- *Educate Against Hate: A DfE and Home Office website bringing together government advice and resources to help safeguard students from radicalisation: www.educateagainsthate.com*
- *Educate Against Hate: Prevent duty guidance update: A briefing for schools and early years providers, DfE & Home Office, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/2sc7ef36*
- *Home Office: Statutory guidance: Prevent duty guidance: England and Wales, 2015 (updated 2023): https://tinyurl.com/4derst9y*
- *Home Office: Independent Review of Prevent, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/2w97733b*

Ofsted inspection: Nine lessons learnt

Based on his experience of four Ofsted inspections during 2023, Paul K Ainsworth sets out nine lessons learnt to help school leaders navigate the inspection process successfully

On the front page of this edition, I offer eight practical suggestions to help school leaders tackle the pressure and anxiety that Ofsted inspection can so often cause.

I have been directly involved in almost 40 inspections over the years including four inspections during 2023. In this article, I want to offer some more general advice from across these experiences to help your school thrive when Ofsted calls.

1, Prep the phone call

The first thing I do with leaders I am supporting is to help them prepare for the phone call. There are scripts available (search on social media) which are well worth a look. You can then prepare for the questions that you may be asked and ensure that you understand all the terms that may be used.

When a school is telephoned by the Ofsted duty desk to notify them of inspection, they are asked in that call or in a subsequent brief one from the lead inspector when they would like the pre-inspection call.

I always use that window before the call takes place to arrange who will be present and to go through that script so that leaders can feel more confident. A short overview of the call is given in paragraph 102 of Ofsted's inspection handbook.

2, Track the pastoral data

In paragraph 106 of the handbook is a list of information which schools are required to share with inspectors on the morning of the inspection, including records and information about behaviour and attendance.

I would strongly urge all schools to track the statistics on these on a weekly basis. It does not have to be burdensome – just keep running totals of bullying, discriminatory and prejudiced behaviour, sexualised behaviours, and any restrictive physical interventions.

The pastoral recording software which many primary schools use is great for recording incident and chronology but is not always as good at analysis. It can be very difficult to pull this information together quickly and I know of schools which have gotten into a mess during inspection when they have not had this information to hand.

It is also important that we have a consistent understanding of what sexualised behaviours look like in a primary setting.

3, The school is the trust and the trust is the school

One of the largest changes I have seen is the way that inspectors are now prepared to engage with trust leaders. They are happy for us to be present during the phone call and to take part in any inspection activities with school leaders. This is vastly different from the past where you almost had to fight to support your school leaders. This can be so useful in primary schools where leadership teams are smaller.

4, Prep middle leaders

It is vital to spend time working with middle leaders so that they are prepared for conversations with inspectors, whether that is around the element of the curriculum they lead or the behaviour, attendance, or personal development responsibilities they may have. Again make use of the scripts that are available on social media to sit down and have coaching conversations with them so that we can all present our school at its best.

5, Who can provide wider support?

One of the issues during inspection is that leaders may be tied up having meetings with inspectors which means the routine presence that we provide during lesson time and non-lesson time disappears.

Are there some colleagues who may be able to help you with these routines while you are tied up? In the MAT world, it can be good to have colleagues from the wider MAT who understand your behaviour routines and can walk those corridors for you.

Or maybe there are recently retired staff who are prepared to help you in such circumstances, or perhaps part-time staff can be available. Again, try and be prepared as your Ofsted window approaches so you have an idea of who may be available and can keep them in the loop.

6, Assurances from alternate education providers

The use of alternative provision can rapidly turn into a rabbit warren if you are not prepared – or even if a colleague unintentionally misphrases something.

So have records to hand of when you have seen or spoken to those pupils who may be using alternative provision. Have details of their attendance and any issues that they may be having. Have letters of

assurances from providers about their safeguarding policies. In primary schools we make less use of alternative provision so it is even more important that we have this information to hand when required. And remember, if your local authority has a behaviour outreach service, perhaps utilising placements in specialised provisions, then this is still alternative provision.

7, Plan deep dives in advance

This links with point 4 on preparing middle leaders. Have an idea of which subjects you will be encouraging inspectors to deep dive. Think about what activities the children may be engaged in on those inspection days.

In a small primary school, you need to try and share out the deep dives so that the same colleague is not always being spoken too.

Also think of your tactics so that these middle leaders can be seen teaching but are also able to take part in the learning walk. Perhaps start in that colleague's classroom and when the inspector is ready to continue the walk another colleague can take over the lesson.

8, Every Ofsted team is very different

There is no doubt that while many inspectors make considerable efforts to put school staff at their ease and reduce the huge stress and pressure that is felt during inspection, there are still some who do not have these soft skills and can seem either completely process driven or in the worst cases rude and intimidating.

If this is your experience, call it out. And remember, it is easier for a trust leader who is supporting a headteacher to make these kind of comments to inspectors. If you are concerned you can also call the duty desk.

9, There is nothing more dangerous than a colleague who has experienced one inspection

While all school leaders will be trying to learn everything they can from colleagues who have experience of a recent inspection, remember that just as every team is different, every inspection is different.

> **"It can be very difficult to pull this information together quickly and I know of schools which have gotten into a mess during inspection when they have not had this information to hand"**

Just because one colleague has been asked for something or indeed has not been asked for something, it does not mean the same will happen during this inspection.

Equally the way that leaders build relationships with inspectors can make the process feel different. So, either speak to a number of colleagues from different schools or speak to people who have experienced inspections in different schools.

Final thoughts

So, these are nine important points that I have learnt from inspection during 2023. We do not yet know exactly what 2024 will bring in the world of inspection but all we can do is ensure that we present our schools at their best while being aware that there will always be things that are out of our control. **hu**

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Removing the barriers to early intervention of SEN

When it comes to SEN, early diagnosis and intervention is crucial and yet our system is not set-up to facilitate this easily, with a number of barriers that need to be removed...

Helen Osgood

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"If we want the consistent identification of SEN to take place in the early years, we need to properly train, fund and support the workforce. This is even more critical with the government's plans to expand funded childcare"

WHEN TRYING to meet the needs of a child with SEND, the earlier help can be given the better the outcome – early diagnosis is key.

The problem quite simply, however, is that too often diagnosis does not happen early. Or at least not early enough.

Of course, it is true that it can be difficult to identify some types of SEN and learning difficulties before formal schooling begins, dyslexia being a case in point.

However, it is important, nevertheless, that wherever possible intervention begins early – ideally within the first three years of a child's life – and continues as needed.

If we wait until a child is at school, the optimal window of opportunity has passed and, while subsequent intervention will still be effective, it will not be as successful as it could have been and will be more expensive the longer it is delayed.

As early years lecturer Hannah McCormack wrote in a recent article (2023): "There is an overwhelming acknowledgement of the benefits of early intervention on the outcomes of children with SEND being recognised and embedded within policies and legislation.

"However, despite this commitment, in practice early intervention is not available or accessible for the majority of families across England.

"The availability of SEND services and programmes are inconsistent, with a 'postcode lottery' often attached to them of who is able to access them."

This places our early years workforce on the frontline, but this workforce is often not trained to spot the subtle presentation of many learning difficulties. We need to support and up-skill them to know what signs to look out for.

However, given the current level of funding offered to early years provision and the minimal wages paid to staff, it is difficult to see how this can be expected of them.

If we want the consistent identification of SEN to take place in the early years, we need to properly train, fund and support the workforce. This is even more critical with the government's plans to expand funded childcare to those aged nine months and over.

The current SEND Code of Practice recognises the importance of early intervention and the proposed *SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan* pushes this even more into the spotlight.

And put simply, early intervention works. The Timpson Review in 2019 noted that a child with (a particular type of) SEN was more likely to be permanently excluded from school compared to a child having no SEN.

And this gets worse the further a pupil moves through the school system – there is a direct relationship between SEN and permanent exclusion, often because of inaccurate SEN identification or inadequate intervention.

The problem is, there are not enough professionals to make the assessments and there is little to no money to fund a much-needed expansion of the system.

Indeed, I have heard of schools speaking to professionals hundreds of miles away in Scotland in order to secure professional advice.

Overworked and underfunded specialist services like educational psychologists have resorted to industrial action to try and address some of the issues, but there is no more money available, and accessing existing funding is a convoluted business.

Unlike mainstream funding, SEND funding isn't delegated according to the number of pupils in a school. It is determined using the age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU), the number of pupils accessing free school meals, the number of pupils with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs), not to mention a host of other determiners.

Once funding is secured, it is paid in arrears and schools have to fund the first £6,000 of support out of their own already stretched budgets anyway.

And even if funding is available, the level of support is stymied by the availability of professionals as already mentioned.

To combat this, some schools and multi-academy trusts have begun to recruit their own SEND teams. These can often offer vital early identification and can be key in arranging internal support for both the child and the school, which can in-turn keep children in school.

However, SEND teams are often generalists and not as experienced as specialists coming from health and social care teams. Furthermore, SEND teams are not necessarily linked into the wider local support teams that pupils may need, including vital access to specialist provision for if things go wrong.

The stress of waiting for support is unbelievable for both the pupil and their families and schools are doing everything they can to fill in the gaps. But despite our best efforts the gaps are widening and the waiting lists are getting longer.

We want to see early intervention to support pupils, parents and teachers. We want to see early, accurate identification of SEN so that the right support can be put in place in a timely fashion.

But this comes at a cost. A cost which has to be met by government. It is not fair to leave it to the primary or even the secondary schools.

Children with SEN need to be supported from as early as possible and this means doing whatever it takes to ensure that identification happens in the early years. hu

Further information

- *McCormack: Early intervention: The gap between policy and practice, The SEND Network, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/5cue6223*
- *Timpson: Timpson Review of School Exclusion, DfE, 2019: https://tinyurl.com/5d7rz79w*

Retention. Funding. Ofsted. A perfect storm is brewing

New research breaks down the multiple factors that are contributing to the crisis in staff wellbeing for teachers and leaders in our schools. There is much to do to address these challenges

THE CHALLENGES facing school leaders have been encapsulated in the results of our latest state of the nation workload and wellbeing survey (NAHT, 2023).

It paints a bleak picture of the unacceptable toll school leadership is taking on our members and their mental health and wellbeing.

Based upon the responses of nearly 1,900 school leaders during the autumn term, our *Crisis Point* report highlights real concerns over wellbeing, workload, Ofsted inspection, and pay. It is little surprise that, taken together, these issues are fuelling a growing recruitment and retention crisis.

Overall, 49% of school leaders said needed professional mental health or wellbeing support, 72% said the job had harmed their mental health in the last year, 79% said it had caused them increased worry, fear, or stress, and 58% said it had affected their physical health.

What have things come to when this is the price of school leadership? It is not normal or acceptable and it is extremely worrying – both on a human level and because these issues are driving the recruitment and retention challenges.

If schools do not have the workforce they need the workload and pressure faced by existing staff may be still more intolerable. It's a vicious cycle.

Teacher recruitment is a big issue. Analysis of the figures for 2023/24 show that despite the primary school target being cut by 21% this year by the government – a decision that has never been fully explained – recruitment still fell 4% short of target (DfE, 2023).

Our survey also shines a light on retention difficulties and the factors contributing to them. It found that 51% of school leaders are considering leaving the profession within the next three years for reasons besides retirement. Of these, 88% identified the impact of the role upon their wellbeing as a factor, with significant numbers citing workload pressures (83%), feeling helpless or overwhelmed in offering pupils pastoral support (61%), pay (53%), and a lack of professional recognition (51%).

Similar reasons are identified by 61% of assistant and deputy heads who say they do not aspire to headship, up from 53% in 2021.

Concerns about personal wellbeing were cited as a deterrent to headship by 91% while 81% blame Ofsted inspections.

For the first time, our survey found that a majority of school leaders (57%) would not recommend school leadership as a career goal, an increase of 21% compared to 2021.

Workload pressures emerge as a common thread when looking at the factors which make leadership unsustainable. Meeting the needs of pupils with SEND, Ofsted pressures, and balancing school budgets were the three factors most frequently blamed for contributing to workload.

Talks between the government and education unions aimed at tackling excessive workload, agreed as part of the resolution to our industrial dispute last year, are on-going (*Headteacher Update*, 2023). Any proposals agreed must be the beginning of further action to address unsustainable levels of workload. We want workload considerations to inform all future decisions on school policy.

We also need to see action on Ofsted inspection and funding pressures, which themselves add to workload, as well as on pay.

On Ofsted, there is a growing consensus that fundamental reform of inspection and accountability measures, including an end to single-word inspection grades, is necessary. This was powerfully reinforced when the inquest into the death of headteacher Ruth Perry concluded that the inspection of her school had likely contributed to her suicide.

The coroner's report identified a number of areas of concern about Ofsted's practices, underlining the urgent need for reform.

We are committed to engaging in serious talks with the government and new Ofsted chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver on the way forward.

In terms of funding, calls for an additional £1.7bn to cover rising school costs in 2024/25 fell on deaf ears in the Autumn Statement. So too did our appeal for urgent investment to fix the under-funded SEND system, and for long-term investment to ensure all school buildings are fit-for-purpose.

As things stand, schools face having to make more really unpalatable budget decisions this year.

We are also urging government to do more to value staff. We want the government to invest in pay and reform the pay structure – 72% of school leaders said that pay should maintain its value against inflation and the same proportion felt that remuneration should better reflect the responsibilities of leadership.

Valuing our members is also about empowering them. We want fully funded support to be guaranteed whenever staff are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

Working in this profession can and should always be a rewarding experience. But without decisive action, I fear more dedicated professionals will be forced to leave schools for their own health, and that replacing them will prove increasingly difficult.

A general election is due this year. This represents an opportunity for all political parties to provide the profession with some real hope.

It is a chance for politicians to show that they will commit to the reforms needed to address the challenges facing schools and their staff and ensure school leaders have the tools they need to do their jobs effectively.

It is also a chance to change how those in power talk about the dedicated professionals who have devoted their lives to teaching. **hu**

Further information
- *DfE: Academic year 2023/24: Initial Teacher Training Census, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/yfmn7tr6*
- *Headteacher Update: Taskforce targets five-hour teacher workload reduction in next three years, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/pz9bery2*
- *NAHT: Crisis Point, 2023: http://tinyurl.com/ymtszcbp*

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"A general election is due this year. This represents an opportunity for all political parties to provide the profession with some real hope"

Top 10 tips for... When you don't have a school library

Almost 1 in 7 primary schools do not have a dedicated school library. Suzanne O'Connell offers 10 ideas for how we can still give pupils a library provision even with no dedicated library space

Research from the Primary School Library Alliance (2022) tells us that across the UK 1 in 7 state primary schools (14%) have no library provision, equating to 2,900 schools. If your setting is not able to have a dedicated library space, here are 10 ideas to keep books and reading high-profile nonetheless.

1, Classroom libraries

Without the luxury of a dedicated library space, a popular option is to find a corner of each classroom to designate as your library. The danger is that it becomes a corner that is ignored with a selection of books that is rarely refreshed. But less could be more.

Rather than over-populating your book corners, keep them sparse but regularly refreshed. If possible, keep books in storage ready to circulate. Take suggestions from pupils for books that you might stock. Arrange the books in a similar way to how you would in a library – by author surname, for example. Children should still be encouraged to use a method for borrowing and returning books from their class corner.

Your book corner should be warm and welcoming with a bean bag or scatter cushions or perhaps a rug. If there is a display board use it in the same way as you would a library display. If not, consider having book-focused murals painted on the wall instead.

2, Topic books

Where library space is limited then linking your book provision to your topics becomes even more important. Each topic should, ideally, have a book box that accompanies it. These are then brought out for classroom display while the topic is being taught.

3, Trips to the local library

Visits to the local library are essential if you don't have a dedicated library space. Perhaps your local library is also prepared to come and visit you, bringing a selection of books with them? Also, does your local secondary school have a library? If so, then this can be a particularly beneficial trip for your year 5s and 6s. Likewise, invite the secondary school librarian to visit and bring some books to talk through how they are used at secondary level. In more rural areas you might find access to a peripatetic library that travels between villages/schools and offers support with things like research skills.

4, Neighbouring schools

If you are part of a trust or work closely with neighbouring schools, you might be able to collaborate in ensuring that you have a good joint library collection that can be shared. Or perhaps if your partner school has a library then groups of your pupils could use it on a rota basis.

5, Book deliveries!

Whatever library skills you would have introduced to children in a regular library must still be taught nonetheless. This means circulating resources between classrooms. For example, a selection of reference books is unlikely to be accommodated realistically as a permanent fixture of your classroom book corners, but could be delivered to classrooms ready to support relevant topics or research work.

6, Activities and events

The majority of activities that relate to celebrating books and reading are still available to you whether you have a library or not. Inviting in local businesses or even authors, paired reading projects, book weeks, book fairs and reading clubs are all options for raising the profile of reading. Could you appoint someone as your school librarian to lead on these activities even though there is no physical library? This person could also take on the role of checking book provision in different classrooms, finding new titles, and allocating budget to replenish stock. They could research ways of promoting reading and could appoint pupil monitors for each classroom, too.

Image: Adobe Stock

7, Multi-purpose areas

Is there an area that could double up as a library space? Perhaps even where a small number of library shelves could be wheeled in and out as required? At the end of break or lunch time is your school hall available? Look creatively at your corners and corridors. Is there anywhere you could put up a wall-mounted book rack? Do you have a space in reception for a book stand? Be as creative as space and budget allows. I know one school that turned an unused outside toilet block into a "reading stable" complete with hay bales to sit on and read.

8, Displays in shared areas

A shared area display board can become a book focus and draw together your school community in discussion. Use the board to create competitions such as "name the silhouette" of book characters or display the first lines of some popular books for pupils to name. A world map showing the location of some well-known stories can get pupils talking or how about a "match the teacher (or pupils) with their favourite book" challenge. The display board can be the responsibility of an individual or can rotate around classes.

9, Wall art

If you are worried about maintaining a display or simply don't have one available – what about using murals on the wall to remind pupils of books they might have read, characters they have encountered or are yet to meet. Painting book spines on the wall can't replace real books, but it is a reminder about their importance and can stimulate discussion.

10, Passion is important

What is most important is that your pupils develop a passion for books. Books in assembly, in classrooms during wet lunch times, for taking home from the class library, and being celebrated at every opportunity – this is possible whatever your school facilities look like.

Further information & resources

■ *Primary School Library Alliance: Working together towards a library in every primary school, 2022: https://tinyurl.com/mr492y5n*

Top 10 tips for… When you do have a school library

Many children do not own a single book at home, making school libraries all the more vital. Suzanne O'Connell offers 10 ideas to boost your school's library space

More than 1 in 12 children in the UK do not have a single book of their own at home, rising to as many as 1 in 8 disadvantaged pupils and as many as 1 in 5 pupils aged 5 to 8, according to National Literacy Trust research (Picton & Clark, 2023).

As such, making your school library enticing has never been more important. Here are 10 tips for taking a fresh look at your library and ensuring it is a hub within your school.

1, Create the right environment

School libraries should ooze warmth and colour and make pupils want to snuggle up with a book. Scatter cushions, bean bags, and places to relax as well as study promote reading as a delight rather than a chore. If you have the luxury of a large open space, you might even invest in something like a reading tent where pupils can sit and read.

Are your books clearly labelled and easy to find? Do children know where the different sections are? A wall subject index is useful for them to refer to along with a bird's-eye view of the library with colour-coding.

Signs and labels should be clear and attractive. Put the number before the description to make it easier for children to follow. Remember to have plenty of front-facing books that tempt children to pick them up.

2, Find the right people

Once you have established a welcoming space, you need the right people to manage it. Of course, having a dedicated school librarian is the ideal. Where this is not possible, it is important that there is a named person with a passion for reading who has the time required to take on the role. They could be supported by a teaching assistant; you might even look for volunteers in the local community. Someone needs to be championing your library – keeping displays fresh. Your librarian should also have a list of current themes being studied in classrooms so that they can make available relevant books.

3, Getting pupils involved

Keeping the library tidy is a popular role for pupil monitors but they must be treated with the importance they deserve. Monitors need to be properly inducted and trained in book care and organisation. Be careful how they are selected. What does the choice tell others about the people who are interested in books in your school? Also, involve your pupils in choosing books for the library. Perhaps they can be encouraged to recommend books they have read at home.

The library is the perfect environment for paired reading activities between children of different age groups. Consider children coming in 10 minutes early from the playground. It doesn't require a great chunk of time and can be hugely rewarding for all participants.

4, A diverse book collection

The importance of having a library stock that is diverse and inclusive goes without saying. Review your book collection and ensure it is representative. Check-out *Headteacher Update*'s recent article advising on diverse book titles that could be purchased (2022). Of course this is just as important for classroom book corners in schools without a dedicated library space.

5, Budget

Tired and tatty books are not going to appeal to your pupils. You need to find a way of allocating an annual budget that enables you to replenish, restore, and sift out books that are not doing your library any favours.

If you take part in a parent book-buying scheme then you may be able to save some money from this for new stock. PTAs are also generally sympathetic to the need to keep the library shelves stocked, but they will expect the school to show a budget commitment too. Hosting book fairs can be another way of raising money and are a popular Book Week event.

6, It's not just Book Week

It is beneficial to have a week where the profile of books and reading is raised even higher. However, you should of course aim to make books a focus every week of the year. To this end, a list of literacy teaching and school events is published by the National Literacy Trust (see further information). Elsewhere, author and poet visits bring books to life and demystify the people behind the books. You might not be able to entice the big names (still give it a go), but local authors can still bring insight into the writing process and may have an entertaining story to tell.

7, Teach library skills

When and how are children taught how to use the library? Woven into your curriculum, your pupils need to be:
- Investigating information sources (when a book was published, who published it, who is the author, what do we know about them?).
- Distinguishing different categories – fiction, non-fiction, reference…
- Fluent in alphabetical order – how quickly can they find a book?
- Taking care of the library – respecting books.
- Understanding the Dewey Decimal Classification system.
- Understanding and using the library management system.
- Developing independent library skills

Produce your own "Guide to the library". This might include print-outs of the main subjects and their Dewey numbers.

8, Timetabling

Do you timetable library time or is the library open as and when pupils and their teachers need it? Unfortunately, for many primary schools library-use is shared with other activities. What is vital is that your library is used and enjoyed. Work out just how much time pupils have to browse and borrow books. Is there a way you can increase this? Consider scheduling times before and after school or at lunch and break times.

9, Different media

Is your library a place just for books? Including audio books shows an appreciation that different people have different preferences when it comes to literature. Do you keep magazines, comics and newspapers in the library? What else could encourage pupils to set foot in the library?

10, Change and challenge

When was the last time that your library displays were changed? Do you have a theme which means that books are highlighted and given shelf time? Consider having a challenge board with tasks and questions for pupils. How quickly can they find a named book? Where would they find the answer to this question? Who was the author of this title? Interactive activities such as quizzes and competitions can get children talking and help make your library a focal point of the school. hu

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Further information & resources

- *Headteacher Update: Twenty books to diversify your school library stock, 2022: https://tinyurl.com/tb279vy9*
- *NLT: Literacy teaching & school events: https://tinyurl.com/yyapyw3e*
- *Picton & Clark: Book ownership in 2023, NLT, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/f3dh237r*

Supporting children with SEMH needs

Why are primary schools seeing more social, emotional and mental health needs in their pupils and what can we do about it? In this Best Practice Focus, *Ali Williams* looks at how we can support these vulnerable children to make progress and thrive. He looks at school culture, building relationships, behaviour, managing crises, family engagement and more. He offers practical ideas as well as 20 self-evaluation questions for primary school leaders

Social, emotional, and mental health needs

Social, emotional, and mental health needs (SEMH) refer to a broad array of SEN based on a child's difficulty regulating emotions and behaviour. The term was created by the 2014 *SEND Code of Practice* and replaced the use of "social emotional behaviour difficulties".

The change was designed to encapsulate the direct correlation between mental health problems and the way they can be communicated through behaviour and actions (for a useful overview, see Routledge, 2021). Children with SEMH can show signs of:
- Disruptive or anti-social behaviour.
- Crises or tantrums.
- Frustration and uncooperative behaviour.
- Anger or verbal and physical threats/aggression.
- Being depressed or withdrawn.
- Anxiety and self-harm.

There is no one thing that causes SEMH and each child's needs and their development of SEMH will be different. Life experiences can play a significant role, in particular the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Depending on how you define them, ACEs are thought to affect, to a lesser or greater degree, almost half the UK population (YoungMinds, 2018). More tellingly for our purposes, 9% are thought to have experienced at least four different ACEs (Bellis et al, 2014).

The mental health charity YoungMinds defines ACEs as: "Highly stressful and potentially traumatic events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. They can be a single event or prolonged threats to and breaches of the young person's safety, security, trust, or bodily integrity." (YoungMinds, 2018).

According to the Robertson Trust (2023), the toxic stress caused by childhood trauma can affect healthy brain development. ACEs can lead to an inability to recognise and manage different emotions alongside an increased chance of developing mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression.

It is also widely accepted that attachment difficulties can lead to the development of SEMH needs (Wright et al, 2023). It is thought that children with such needs are often slower to reach key developmental milestones with play and learning. Furthermore, the Wright et al (2023) study discusses the correlation between attachment difficulties and severe family adversity (financial difficulties, domestic violence, parental substance misuse and ill-health) as well as previous trauma for the caregivers – thus highlighting the impact SEMH can have on families for generations.

Elsewhere, children with neuro-developmental needs such as autism and ADHD or other learning needs may also present with SEMH, especially if their primary SEN is missed or unmet.

What is clear is that SEMH needs arise from many different factors. This highlights why managing SEMH in schools and understanding the "need" and the "behaviour" is becoming increasingly challenging and is leading to higher numbers of SEMH pupils requiring specialist support.

Indeed, between 2021/22 and 2022/23, the number of children with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) or on SEN Support with SEMH as their primary need increased from 258,000 to 284,000 (DfE, 2023).

Increasing SEMH
We know that SEMH needs are increasing, but why?

Covid
In 2017, NHS research concluded that 12.1% of 7 to 16-year-olds had a probable mental health condition. In 2023, the same study judged that this figure has now risen to 20.3%. For pupils aged 8, 9, and 10, the figure is 15.7% (see *Headteacher Update*, 2023).

This would suggest that Covid has had a negative impact on the mental health of our pupils. Of course, it isn't that simple. A number of studies, including the NHS research, has found that although there was a negative impact reported by some of the population, others reported a positive influence.

What is clear, however, is that children with diagnosed SEN or SEMH were affected disproportionately by the Covid lockdowns (Ofsted, 2021).

Panchal et al (2021) reported that pupils with neuro-developmental disorders (autism, ADHD) had a higher prevalence of emotional symptoms following lockdowns than children without

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(42% vs 15%). Furthermore, children with ADHD showed inflated conduct problems and children with autism displayed decreased pro-social behaviours.

These children already had a diagnosis of SEN/SEMH prior to the pandemic, but the impact of their needs not being fully or properly met for a substantial period of time caused an increase in severity.

It would be reasonable to say that children who may have been ably supported in mainstream education prior to Covid now require more specialist support.

As this problem affected our whole population it is no wonder that there is now unprecedented demand being placed on external agencies such as CAMHS. If these services aren't easily available then needs continue to worsen and children, families and schools are left unsupported for longer.

For example, 403,000 children are currently on the waiting list to be seen by a consultant paediatrician and 18,000 have been waiting for more than a year (RCPCH, 2023).

Headteacher Update reported recently (2022) that there has been a 54% increase in the number of under-18s undergoing mental health treatment or waiting to start care – from 272,000 in 2020 to 420,000 in February 2022. At the end of June 2023, this figure had reached 432,000 (NHS, 2023).

Cost of living
I do not need to tell you that the cost of living crisis is having a negative impact on disadvantaged families. Official figures state that 4.2 million children are living in relative poverty (household income below 60% of the median after housing costs). This is 29% of all UK children. Of these, 2.7 million are living in "deep poverty" – families below 50% of the median. Furthermore, 21% of children who live in relative

poverty are also living in food insecure households (DWP, 2023).

There is much research showing links between living in poverty and the mental health and wellbeing of children. One study found that by the age of 11 children living in poverty are four times more likely to develop mental health problems (Morrison Gutman et al, 2015).

While family economic circumstances and parental mental wellbeing have the greatest impact on children in their early years (Joyce et al, 2022), there is significant evidence connecting poverty, deprivation, and economic inequality to the mental and physical health of young people of all ages (Morrison Gutman et al, 2015).

There is also growing evidence, according to the Robertson Trust, of an association between deprivation and ACEs and that the risk factors "cluster together in the lives of the most disadvantaged young people" (2023).

Given the lived experiences of our children over the past few years, is it any surprise that there is an increase in SEMH?

Early identification and misdiagnosis
I wrote last year in *Headteacher Update* about SEMH in key stage 1, which I believe go largely unseen (Williams, 2023a). I analysed Department for Education (DfE) data for different areas of need across key stages in the last three academic years, comparing the percentages of children with autism, SEMH, and speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN).

The data is clear: SEMH is not diagnosed early and yet by the end of primary school it is the most prevalent need.

So what is happening? Does SEMH suddenly appear in key stage 2? Do we misdiagnose in key stage 1? Do assessments for identifying

SEMH work less well in key stage 1? Or are we slow to see the signs?

I think the truth is that SEMH is prevalent in key stage 1 but is simply easier to spot in key stage 2.

We typically associate SEMH with indicators such as an ADHD diagnosis or aggressive behaviours. Of course, we see these indicators in key stage 1, but they are less common.

Missing these needs at an early age inevitably leads to inappropriate interventions and therefore an escalation of need. This issue is acknowledged in the SEND Green Paper (DfE, 2022), which states that the current SEND framework is built around a cycle of late intervention.

Supporting SEMH pupils
Over the past few years, I have been fortunate to achieve some success with SEMH provision. Every one had culture and relationships at its heart.

Behaviour and relationships
Schools aren't made up of pupils who simply "behave". Pupils must want to behave; they need to invest in the people asking them to. This only happens through positive relationships.

SEMHs are often communicated through behaviour – it is the sign of an unmet need (Bates, 2021). As practitioners it is our job to work out what is really being said. What does the chair being thrown tell us? What is the refusal first thing in the morning saying? What is actually being said when they tell us to "fuck off"?

As special school head Sarah Barlow said when she wrote in these pages: "I believe that SEMH behaviour is mostly about seeking a relationship with adults through attention – so let us make it positive attention." (Barlow, 2019).

Building positive relationships takes time. It takes time because

relationships are built on a foundation of trust. When we have trust we can be honest and open. For vulnerable pupils this is integral to their success in school. With our most vulnerable it is the key to unlocking academic success. Adults are no different. We work harder for those who invest in us, those who give us their time, who are kind, caring and listen.

I often hear the phrase "you should respect adults" – but respect is earned through how we conduct ourselves and how we treat those around us. In my experience, vulnerable/SEMH pupils value this more than any others. Often they lack role models to show them what respect and positive interactions look like. It is our responsibility to be those role models and build those relationships.

And it is more powerful if these relationships come through a whole-school culture...

School culture
"If you answer the 'why', then the 'what', the 'how' will soon follow." (Humphrey & Hughes, 2021).

I think it is easier to craft culture within a special school environment. Staff have made a conscious choice to work with SEMH; there is motivation to support the children – that is their "why". We see this in schools all the time. There are always teachers who have a passion for dealing with SEMH or behaviour.

However, SEMH is increasingly prevalent. There is a greater need for all teachers in all schools – especially in disadvantaged areas – to become experts. This cannot happen without a meaningful "why". When we interview for new staff for our provisions it is the first question we ask. We are looking for someone who shows commitment to the same values and beliefs that we share, especially when supporting challenging behaviour.

When we have their "why", we have their "purpose" and a shared purpose creates "commitment" (Grant et al, 2007). Communicating our shared "why" is vital to creating this culture and maintaining this commitment: "When a team's members know why they are doing something, beyond mere personal gain, they perform at a higher level." (Humphrey & Hughes, 2021). ➤

> ❝ *The data is clear: SEMH is not diagnosed early and yet by the end of primary school it is the most prevalent need* ❞

Within schools we talk a lot about values – they are often plastered on our website and painted on walls. But are these lived? "Values must be seen, not just written," (Whittaker, 2021) and this ultimately comes from the leadership. The values in your school should be what drives your school forward, what determines staff and pupil behaviour. So what values do we need to support SEMH and respond to challenging behaviour?

Kindness

The most important value to have when working with children with SEMH and our most vulnerable in schools is kindness.

Dr Karen Treisman (2020) tells us that "every interaction is an intervention". Every interaction can be positive or negative, making a positive difference or hindering a pupil's progress. As such, the quality of those interactions is vital – they simply must be kind.

In his book *The Kindness Principle* (2021), Dave Whittaker tells us: "Kindness can mean being tough and fair – exposing frailties and weaknesses but doing it with warmth and compassion. To remain kind in difficult and challenging environments takes courage and strength."

Unconditional positive regard

Whittaker also speaks about "unconditional positive regard", an approach that is credited to psychologist Stanley Standal (1954) and which states that for a person to "grow" they need an environment with acceptance, genuineness, empathy, and openness.

I have seen first-hand the positive impact that unconditional positive regard can have on school culture and, more importantly, pupils. *The Kindness Principle* explores this concept at length and is worth reading.

The approach has been misconstrued as being "soft". But this is to misunderstand – we can hold the same high expectations in a way that also attempts to understand behaviour while building strong, meaningful relationships in the process. The four aspects of unconditional positive regard help to break this down further.

Acceptance: Every child needs to feel part of something. To achieve a feeling of acceptance we have focused on our language and interactions. When we see challenging behaviour it is easy to become frustrated, but shifting the focus to what is being communicated and letting the child know you care helps to break down barriers: "I can see you are angry, but I care about you, and I want to help." We back this up with our actions – restorative conversations, playing their games to help them know you care, greeting them in the morning with a smile. This leads us to...

Genuineness: This is heavily linked to our purpose and our "why". If you genuinely want to help children with SEMH then your kindness and desire to understand their behaviour will feel genuine.

This must be modelled by leaders. As a leader, be genuine in your interactions, be real, be more than a head or a deputy to these children. If you say you will play football with them at lunch, don't let them down. If you say you'll get new pencils for their classroom, do it. If you say you care and want to understand their behaviour, find a way to do this.

While trying to understand a pupil's behaviour it is important to show...

Empathy: Whittaker (2021) talks about not feeling sympathy for

This recent episode of the Headteacher Update Podcast takes a practical look at how we can support our most vulnerable pupils, including looked after children and those with trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): **https://tinyurl.com/3nvj6p96**

children but using empathy to put yourself in their shoes.
● How would you behave with that level of trauma?
● How would you behave if the classroom felt that overwhelming?
● What if you struggled to retain focus for long periods of time?

Think about how you would want to be treated. I am not saying this is easy. Dealing with SEMH and challenging behaviour can be difficult and there will be days when you don't want to "be kind" – but unconditional positive regard means that we always try to be our ideal self, even when it is difficult.

Openness: This links with the idea of being genuine. Being real. Share things about yourself with pupils. Children with SEMH and those with ACEs need you to be more than a teacher; they need you to be personable and relatable. Be honest with your team, too, when things are getting tough and more support is needed. If those around you have the same approach then this will enhance your practice. It is easier to achieve all this if everyone else around you is living it as well. This is why culture is so important. I am passionate that these ideas are the bedrock for supporting SEMH whether in a specialist setting or a mainstream classroom.

Motivation

So a whole-school or classroom culture based around values, kindness and relationships is vital, but considering motivation for the child is also key if they are to succeed without reliance on adults.

As such, the ideas and practices of self-determination theory should be considered by schools, including how these can be used to support growth beyond the school walls.

Self-determination theory grew from the ideas of Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000). It states that people tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfilment: "Self-determination theory suggests that people can become self-determined when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled." (See Cherry, 2022)

Therefore, if our school culture supports the SEMH of children, then focused work around motivation could unlock the

potential to take these children further.

Deci and Ryan (1985) believe that people are naturally directed towards growth. Moreover, their theory focuses less on external rewards (money, prizes) and instead on internal motivation. In order for the theory to work people need:
● **Autonomy**: To feel in control of their own behaviours and goals.
● **Competence**: To gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills.
● **Connection or relatedness**: To experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people.

These things won't happen automatically and require a culture of support and growth. Some will be beyond primary-aged children, but there is a reason for my mentioning them here.

I believe schools focus too much on extrinsic motivation for children with SEMH. I have certainly been guilty of this myself – we have achieved success with children while they are with us but their behaviour dips in the community or after leaving.

We have conditioned children to behave because if they do we will reward them. Deci and Ryan (1985)
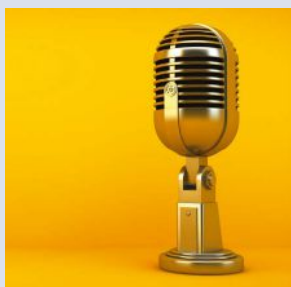
believe that as the behaviour becomes increasingly controlled by external rewards, people begin to feel less in control of their behaviour and intrinsic motivation is diminished.

If we instead focus on helping children achieve the three aspects of self-determination theory, we would unlock a power of motivation that goes beyond "reward time".

So how can schools achieve this? One theory is that removing time or points goals for good behaviour would go some way to promoting intrinsic motivation.

For example, lots of schools will reward children at the end of the day for having a good day. This often means children complete the tasks because they want the reward and not because they want to learn.

So what if we praised and rewarded moments of success? For example, if children were surprised with rewards at random times when they showed a thirst for learning – this might reinforce the ideas of intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, using targeted praise and specific language would support children's understanding of what they had done well. Instead of "well done for completing the work", we could say "I know you found it difficult but you persevered and accepted guidance to help you – well done".

As practitioners we can then begin to change the thinking of our pupils. This wouldn't happen overnight and would need to be something that is driven across the school as part of its culture.

In one of our primary SEMH provisions, we have begun to implement these ideas and have been surprised with the results. Children have begun to recognise "learning behaviours" as these were being rewarded.

My view is that this helps them to understand "how and why to behave". Whether children at this age can fully develop the ideas of self-determination theory remains to be seen, but ensuring we cover ideas of autonomy, competence, and connection is vital.

Tracking progress

Another element linked to school culture is how we track progress. In my experience, there is often a correlation between a pupil's SEMH need and lower attainment – often due to the impact their behaviour has on accessing lessons. This can be a vicious cycle as some needs are often linked to perceived low self-worth around academic ability.

However, what if we stopped focusing on just academic progress when we assess impact? We put so much pressure on achieving grades even when there are barriers to learning that it can take away from the often more important progress being made by the pupil in other areas.

One approach I am proud of is moving away from comparing everyone and instead focusing on the individual child. I know this is harder in mainstream education, but bear with me. Howard Gardner, a developmental psychologist, spent his life focusing on these ideas. He posed a theory that there are many forms of intelligence and rephrased the question: "How clever are you?" into "How are you clever?"

When I read his work (Gardner, 1983) it changed the way we looked at data for children with SEMH and we decided to track other aspects of progress rather than just academic attainment.

So now teacher assessments are being completed using a variety of tracking systems and considering areas including:
- Attitudes to learning (A2L).
- Academic attainment.
- Attendance.
- Incidents of behaviour.

In addition, we have adapted the McSherry (2001) reintegration scale to monitor A2L and behaviour. This allows us to report progress clearly on "How are you clever?". If our provision is effective then we will see improvements with attendance, attitudes to learning, and a reduction in behaviour incidents.

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that a pupil's English or maths ability will have made similar progress, but it is still a vitally important metric for these children. It certainly helps when engaging with families. Parents of children with SEMH can often have a negative view of school, especially if their child's behaviour isn't good or parents' evenings are not a positive experience.

But using this approach, we can report on what is going well with the whole child rather than just within the usual parameters. Parents have certainly responded well to this approach.

Family support

We have also looked at the role that home life can play in causing or exacerbating SEMH. It is imperative that we build relationships with the family if we want to understand a pupil's behaviour and show them genuine empathy. This helps us to understand what we are dealing with but also gives us the best chance of "changing the narrative".

Dealing with SEMH in schools is hard enough and it will be hard at home too, so we need to ensure that families have access to support and guidance.

We have always prioritised honest and open lines of communication with these parents and families. You are likely going to need to report negative behaviour, so a good relationship is vital. It is even more important to report good behaviour and progress too. This will boost the family's view of school (and their child's ability), making difficult conversations easier over time.

Building a good relationship will allow you to understand the family dynamic and ascertain where the SEMH need arises from. Are there ACEs? Is attachment an issue? This information is vital in ensuring the right provision is put in place.

If the right provision is put in place, then the children will make progress both academically and with managing their SEMH. This will in turn have a positive impact on their home life and the view of others towards them. In doing so you have helped change the narrative of the family.

How can you do this?

Even though this *Best Practice Focus* stretches to almost 5,000 words, it remains a whistlestop tour of how I have gone about supporting children with SEMH in both specialist and mainstream provisions. But allow me to conclude with few practical ideas.

Get in there early!

If we identify SEMH in key stage 1 then we have a greater chance to support the child more effectively. Look for factors such as poor attendance, known ACEs, reading ages, and other diagnosed SEN. See my article on undiagnosed SEMH (Williams, 2023a).

Stages of Crisis

A few years ago, someone showed me the Stages of Crisis model from Team Teach and it changed my entire response to behaviour.

Six Stages of Crisis

Primary   Secondary   Tertiary   ...within holistic positive behavioural support approach

Crisis
Possible need for restrictive physical intervention appropriate for the pupil

Recovery
Need for coordinated letting go. Support and reassurance

Defensive/ Escalation
Need for diversion, reassurance, clear limits, boundaries, and choices

Depression
Need for observation, support, and monitoring – recovery and repair

Anxiety/Trigger
Need for diversion, support, and reassurance

Restoration
Reflect
Repair
Reconnect

Stage 1   Stage 2   Stage 3   Stage 4   Stage 5   Stage 6

Risk Restraint Reduction   Risk Reduction   Risk Restraint Reduction

I have now implemented approaches to behaviour based off this model across several settings and have also written about this work previously in *Headteacher Update* (Williams, 2023b).

The model (see figure 1) breaks down behaviour into a clear visual map with six steps and helps us to place kindness and care at the heart of staff responses to incidents. It is based on the idea that behaviour doesn't just appear – there are triggers, such as anxiety, that cause responses.

The model shows how it builds and like a volcano "erupts" with crisis behaviour. Often adults in schools see the "big" behaviour – or stage 3 crisis behaviour to cite the model – and immediately respond with "big" sanctions.

Consequences are important and they are an integral part of managing behaviour, but if a pupil is showing crisis behaviours then consequences at that moment are that last thing a pupil needs.

Schools are well on their way to understanding behaviour better and supporting children. Lots of schools do this well. For me Stages of Crisis has given a clear model to highlight how behaviour often works and to give staff the rationale to adopt a restorative, kind, child-centred approach.

Consequences
You might think that I am against consequences and sanctions – I am not at all. Indeed, I think these are vital for dealing with SEMH communicated through behaviour.

However, consequences need to be tight and clear. Children with SEMH must understand where they stand and what kinds of behaviour are not acceptable and why.

Consequences should also be used as an opportunity to restore relationships following incidents – what can we do to prevent it from happening again? Being proactive with vulnerable pupils will help us achieve powerful relationships and to keeps things consistent.

Use sanctions that are small but that happen (Dix, 2017). If pupils know a sanction will definitely happen, they will respond better to it although may still need support to do it. If you ask them to stay in at break-time for five minutes, use that time to talk to them about their behaviour and their reason

Figure 1: The Stages of Crisis model changes our responses to behaviour incidents. Illustration adapted from the original Team Teach Six Stages of a Crisis model and reproduced with kind permission of Team Teach (see Williams, 2023b).

why; ask them what you can do to help; tell them and show them that you care.

We created behaviour plans that have broken down consequences according to the behaviour shown. This has taken the subjectivity and inconsistencies away. This approach also means that staff-pupil relationships are protected to some degree because the ownership is on the child – i.e. pupils do not feel they are being targeted by the teacher.

After a period of "testing the boundaries", we have seen these plans become effective. Children are now clear about individual expectations and staff support them to understand the impact of their behaviour when things do not go right.

Self-evaluation questions
I would love to write a list of instructions to follow for SEMH children. However, you and I both know that this wouldn't work. What is required changes all the time because the children change all the time.

What I can do is finish with some questions and thoughts for you to reflect on and discuss in your school. I have seen all of these ideas work and am proud of the impact on vulnerable, hard-to-reach children.

Teachers

A lot of what I have spoken about will be best implemented by leaders. As you will have understood, culture is the biggest winner for SEMH. As a teacher you cannot change whole-school culture, but you can change your classroom culture.

- Is your classroom focused around conforming to expectations or is it focused on understanding behaviour as communication?
- Are you building positive relationships with their families?
- If you are teaching in a school with high levels of SEMH, why have you chosen to work in that school? Does your "why" as a teacher fit with what the children need?
- Are you communicating your "why" through your every interaction?

To answer this last question myself, my "why" as a classroom teacher was ensuring that all my pupils made "their" progress and that they felt part of something. This didn't mean that everyone got to age-related expectations, but it did mean that all pupils felt like they belonged, felt accepted, and they made the progress that was right for them.

Leaders

As leaders your role in this is, of course, bigger and so the list of review and reflection questions is longer. Here are 20 questions to discuss across key areas:

Culture
1. What's the school's "why"?
2. Are these values seen or just written?
3. Are you confident that all staff know these values?
4. Are children's SEMH at the heart of everything you do?

Relationships
5. How do staff communicate with children? Is this how you would want your own child to be communicated with?
6. Do children feel accepted? How do you know?
7. Are staff genuine with their interactions?
8. Do staff see behaviour as communication? How do you support staff to be consistent with this?
9. Are behaviour consequences clear and meaningful?
10. Do restorative conversations happen consistently?

Motivation
11. Do children understand what "good" behaviour looks like?
12. Is good behaviour rewarded? Are values rewarded?
13. Are "good" moments communicated with parents as frequently as "bad" moments?

Individual child
14. What is their need?
15. What do their Stages of Crisis look like?
16. How can that behaviour be supported?
17. "How are they clever?" Do they know this? Do their parents know this?
18. What is the current goal for this pupil, including their academic and wider progress?

Family
19. How do the family cope? What is their need? Do they feel supported?
20. Is the family supporting the school? Is the family clear on the current goals?

Final thoughts

Working with children who have SEMH is a privilege. You have the opportunity to change a life, transform a family, and open doors that are currently closed.

There is a quote from Alan Turing that perhaps sums it up best: "Sometimes it is the people no one imagines anything of who do the things that no one can imagine."

hu

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EQUALITY IN PLAY

Universal Designs for Inclusive Playgrounds

KOMPAN Let's play

Children with disabilities have less than 50% chance of accessing playgrounds. Play between children with disabilities and typically developing children support the areas of self-efficiency, tolerance, and empathy in both user groups.

ACORN PARK SEN SCHOOL — VIEW OUR VIDEO CASE STUDY

ST NICHOLAS SEN SCHOOL — VIEW OUR VIDEO CASE STUDY

"The children's behaviour has improved. They are a lot more entertained and their play has been a lot more imaginative. There is now a lot less negative behaviour. It has been a success. It has been pain free working with KOMPAN." Katie Goodwin, Head Teacher, St Nicholas School

Tic disorders in school

Tourette Syndrome or other tic disorders can affect the learning and wellbeing of children and young people. Dr Pooky Knightsmith looks at how they manifest and how schools can support pupils

Tics are involuntary, sudden movements or sounds that individuals with Tourette Syndrome or other tic disorders experience. While tics vary widely in form and intensity, they can present unique challenges for children.

Tourettes Action UK estimates that Tourette Syndrome in particular affects one school child in 100 and that more than 300,000 children and adults in the UK live with the condition.

Tourette Syndrome is more prevalent in boys and it is thought that approximately half of children with a diagnosis will see a significant reduction in their symptoms as they approach adulthood.

In this article, let's explore what tics are, how they impact pupils, and practical ways educators can provide support.

What are tics?

Tics are classified into two main types: motor tics and vocal tics. Motor tics involve physical movements such as:

- Shoulder shrugging.
- Blinking, nose-wrinkling, grimacing.
- Lip-biting.
- Touching people or things.
- Jerking, banging.

Vocal tics, meanwhile, are auditory in their nature and include actions such as:

- Throat-clearing.
- Humming.
- Sniffing, snorting.
- Squealing or shouting.
- Repeating words.

Tics can be simple or complex and their frequency may change over time. Individuals with tics often experience a build-up of tension before the tic occurs, followed by a sense of relief afterwards.

Tics are involuntary and unintentional. A child cannot simply choose to control them. Pressure to repress tics, be it from the child themselves or an expectation from those around them, can lead to a worsening of tics and/or an increase in other anxiety-driven responses or behaviours. Tics tend to get worse if they are focused on.

How can tics affect pupils?

Common challenges that children with tics may face include distraction and potential disruption in the classroom, social stigma and possible teasing or bullying from peers, anxiety and stress related to tic suppression, fatigue due to the effort required to manage tics, as well as reduced school engagement or attendance as a result.

Can tics be treated?

Tics can appear and disappear quickly, but if they persist over time and are having an impact on a child's ability to engage with and enjoy everyday life it is worth seeking support from your GP, mental health support team or even CAMHS.

While there is no cure for tic disorders, various strategies can help manage and minimise their impact. And at the end of the article, I include a link to some excellent charities from whom you can seek further information and support.

- Habit Reversal Therapy: This therapeutic approach focuses on teaching intentional movements that act as a "counterforce" to tics. By engaging in these intentional movements, the occurrence of tics at the same time is hindered.
- Comprehensive Behavioural Intervention for Tics: CBIT involves a collection of behavioural techniques designed to impart skills that effectively reduce the frequency and intensity of tics.
- Exposure with Response Prevention: This method is aimed at helping individuals, become accustomed to the uncomfortable sensations typically experienced just before a tic with the goal of preventing the tic from manifesting.

Practical support in school

There are practical ways schools and educators can support pupils with tics:

- **Open communication:** Foster open communication between school and home to ensure a consistent approach to support.
- **Bullying awareness:** Be vigilant for potential bullying related to tics and take steps to address and prevent it.
- **Educate peers:** Educating pupils about tics can promote understanding and empathy.
- **Avoiding public attention:** Be mindful of situations that might draw attention to the pupil's tics, such as public speaking or unexpected class activities.
- **Teacher CPD:** Run a short session to educate staff about tic disorders, fostering a more understanding and supportive teaching environment.
- **Quiet spaces:** Designate quiet spaces where pupils can retreat if they need a break to manage their tics.
- **Classroom routine and predictability:** Maintain consistent routines to minimise surprises, which can trigger anxiety and exacerbate tics.
- **Visual schedules:** Provide visual schedules outlining daily activities to enhance predictability and reduce stress.
- **Regular check-ins:** Schedule regular check-ins with the child to assess their wellbeing and to address any emerging concerns promptly.
- **Role-play responses:** Use play, role-play or social scripts with the pupil and their peers to explore common scenarios and responses that feel comfortable and constructive when their tics arise or are mentioned.
- **Flexible assessment methods:** Consider alternative assessment methods to accommodate the pupil's unique needs, ensuring fair evaluation, e.g. if a pupil would struggle with a public oral presentation could it be recorded or delivered one-to-one?
- **Tic-friendly classroom seating:** Allow the pupil to choose a seat where they feel most comfortable; this might mean away from the gaze of others or away from tic trigger sources.
- **Sensory tools:** Provide discreet sensory tools, such as stress balls or fidget spinners, to help the pupil self-regulate and redirect their focus.
- **Communication cards:** Enable the pupil to express their needs or indicate when they require a break without verbalising it.
- **Flexible testing arrangements:** Offer flexibility in testing arrangements, such as extended time or a quiet room.
- **Classroom buddies:** Pair the child with a "classroom buddy" who can provide additional support during challenging situations or act as a friendly presence.
- **Digital note-taking options:** Allow the use of digital devices for note-taking to accommodate pupils who may struggle with handwriting due to motor tics.
- **Quiet transition times:** Implement quiet transition times between activities to reduce sensory overload and potential triggers for tics.
- **Self-advocacy training:** Provide guidance and support for the pupil to develop self-advocacy skills, empowering them to communicate their needs and preferences effectively. **hu**

• Dr Pooky Knightsmith is a passionate ambassador for mental health, wellbeing and PSHE. Her work is backed up both by a PhD in child and adolescent mental health and her own lived experience of PTSD, anorexia, self-harm, anxiety and depression. Follow her on X (Twitter) @PookyH and visit www.pookyknightsmith.com. Find her previous articles and podcast/webinar appearances for Headteacher Update via www.headteacher-update.com/authors/dr-pooky-knightsmith

Further information & resources

- *Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children: Tourette syndrome information pack: https://tinyurl.com/35hhps7k*
- *Tourettes Action UK: www.tourettes-action.org.uk*
- *Tourette Syndrome Association of Australia: https://tsaoai.wildapricot.org*

Inclusion:
A tale of five rooms

Sir Alexander Fleming Primary has won the Nasen Award for Primary Provision of the Year and at the heart of its success are five rooms designed to meet the diverse needs of pupils. Lisa Pigg explains

Sitting through another teaching conference and the same questions come up for the keynote speaker: "How do schools provide for children beyond the curriculum to support them socially, emotionally and mentally?"

I sit in these conferences and feel like I have imposter syndrome because I believe that our school does this well.

Five years ago, I walked into Sir Alexander Fleming in Telford and was shown to my "desk" in an office of four designated safeguarding leads in what is now our "Rainbow Room". I was an aspiring SENCO, taking over the reins.

My imposter syndrome eased somewhat when Sir Alexander Fleming was named Primary Provision of the Year in the 2023 Nasen Awards. So what is it that I think makes our provision effective? Well, it is a tale of five rooms...

Patch

Our nurture provision is themed around a farm worker who lives and nurtures vegetables and baby animals.

In Patch we offer areas such as role play, reading corners, and sensory areas with the aim to help pupils develop their resilience and independence while building a sense of achievement and growing relationships and friendships within the school community. Children get involved in outdoor learning sessions and PE sessions with their class too.

What's more, Patch is not just here to serve our children. We recently supported two children with complex needs while the local authority found specialist provision places. We always change and adapt to the needs of our children. There is not one year when Patch looks the same as the last.

The Den

In The Den we offer a safe, calm and nurturing space to give our children the coping strategies to move onto the next step, whatever that may be. The Den caters for children in key stage 2 and is run by a nurture lead and assistant.

Each child has four sessions a week in The Den. The children that come in the morning will carry on with their curriculum-based work, but in a smaller and quieter environment with the sessions supporting those who may be falling behind in their work as well as those who may need stretching academically too.

The children in the morning are offered a social breakfast, where they work together to make their own breakfast, supporting independence while learning about kitchen safety and hygiene.

Those that come to The Den in the afternoon, who would have already completed their core subject work in the morning, take part in curriculum-based activities. For example, this term we are learning about Victorian times and so the children have designed their own gown for Queen Victoria, baked Victoria sponge cakes, and used charcoal to draw a traction engine.

Children also get to pick a game for us all to play. This encourages the child to decide independently. I love it when we play set games. I think they are extremely beneficial as it teaches children about winning and losing and how we should cope in each scenario.

The Hive

The Hive is our SEND classroom base for children who are working significantly below their peers. Children who work in here will either have an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) or high needs funding from the local authority.

We have a full-time qualified and experienced teacher and a teaching assistant who is experienced in working with children with speech and language difficulties, advanced drawing, and who is ELSA-trained (emotional literacy support assistant).

The room can fit up to 10 children and we work on building their independence and confidence of having a go at work that is suitably adapted to their academic ability.

In the morning Hive sessions, we teach English, maths, reading and phonics along with any recommendations from the child's learning support advisory teacher reports, such as non-verbal reasoning skills, and targets on their EHCPs. The children return to their classrooms in the afternoons where they take part in adapted foundation subjects.

In the afternoons, the Hive turns into a targeted intervention room

for groups that are finding areas of the curriculum challenging but can still access their own year group's work in the mornings. Here we provide pre-teaching or post-teaching to secure understanding.

Some may say that having a class of 10 children would be amazing. It is certainly challenging, rewarding and exhausting all at the same time and most days feels like a class of 30.

TLC

Our TLC room is somewhere our children love visiting, even if they have never had a session there. It is run by our inclusion support assistant who has a first-class degree in psychology and is currently training as a psychotherapist – we are very lucky to have her.

She runs different sessions such as Lego therapy, sand therapy and interventions that teach skills for anger management, communication of emotions, and other interventions that are aimed primarily at improving the inclusion of children with challenging behaviour or personal concerns.

Here we can support children who have difficulties in forming relationships and children with autism by teaching friendship skills and running activities that are designed to help them understand and manage anxiety.

We always use a relatable story that explains anxiety in an age-appropriate manner, allowing children to grasp how it impacts their lives and offering practical tools and strategies to empower children in handling anxiety effectively, promoting relaxation, positive thinking, and problem-solving skills.

This is not an exhaustive list either. Our weekly inclusion meetings with the attendance and senior leadership teams may also highlight something that we could offer that is better suited to the needs of the child to support them in our school to have a successful and happy journey.

And if children aren't quite ready to take part in these interventions, if they are too dysregulated, they can use our calm room space that also turns into a soft playroom should we need it.

And I can't forget two members of staff that our children absolutely adore – Bella and her little sister Honey, our dogs!

Rainbow Room

You may think our rainbow room is just that, a brightly coloured room, but it is so much more. The room itself provides a space for children to reflect, read a book, have an informal chat with a member of staff, or offers somewhere to retreat to should a busy, stimulating classroom become too much.

Outside of the four walls, it is a walking bus/minibus service helping children to get to school together with a team of staff supporting children and their families with securing school places and signposting to external agencies that offer housing and food crisis support.

Our headteacher even visits our local Aldi to collect surplus food which is placed outside the school for all to benefit from.

You may ask: how are we able to provide all this – how is this funded? Initially, we started with a Fairshare funding grant from our local authority. We have also applied to education charities for donations and we're always looking on social media for donations of equipment – we managed to get some tables, chairs and soft furnishings from a local charity that were surplus to their requirements. We also have a very innovative and creative business manager who loves a fundraising event!

Final thoughts

All of our staff and children work hard to make sure that we follow our school values in all that we do.
- Safe: Keeping ourselves and others safe in school and the community.
- Respect: Having the nurturing skills to respect ourselves and families.
- Brave: Overcoming barriers and difficult challenges.
- Pride: Proud of what we achieve.
- Success: Achieving high standards and believing that anything is possible.

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• *Lisa Pigg is assistant headteacher, inclusion team leader (SENDCO), deputy designated safeguarding lead, and EAL lead at Sir Alexander Fleming Primary School in Telford. Sir Alexander Fleming won the Primary Provision of the Year award at the 2023 Nasen Awards. For more information on the awards, visit https://nasen.org.uk/awards*

Workload reduction ideas

Teacher workload continues to drive record numbers to quit the chalkface. We need government action, but what can schools do in the meantime to help ease the burden for staff? Helen Osgood advises

Last year, a record number of teachers – 44,000 – left the profession, with an increasing number leaving for reasons other than retirement (DfE, 2023; see also *Headteacher Update* 2023a). Workload is undoubtedly the biggest reason teachers leave. A TeacherTapp survey in November (2023a) concluded that: "For those actively considering leaving teaching, the changes needed to retain them primarily relate to workload and remuneration. Workload reduction, notably in terms of hours, is the most common request."

When asked what they were spending too much time on, 29% of teachers in the survey said there were too many data drops, while 27% said they spent too much time marking.

Further research has identified nine priority areas for workload reduction, with feedback, marking, assessment, lesson-planning and preparation all high on the list (Martin et al, 2023; see also *Headteacher Update*, 2023b). The picture for support staff is more complicated, but like teachers, they are unhappy with workload, pay and conditions, stress, and anxiety.

All this begins to explain why gaps are appearing nationwide in teaching and non-teaching roles.

"Having a directed time calendar or only having one mandatory after-school meeting each week can show employees that you recognise they have a life outside of work"

What can we do?

There are things that are beyond the remit of schools and need government action. But while the demands placed on schools increase, there are things we can do to make things better for our staff…

Wellbeing

According to Education Support's 2023 Teacher Wellbeing Index, wellbeing has reached its lowest level in five years. It finds that around a third of teachers are experiencing burn-out, more than half have difficulty sleeping, and almost four in five say they are stressed. The same research finds that 63% of support staff are also stressed at work (see *Headteacher Update*, 2023c).

Working in schools is full on. From the moment you walk through the door, there are demands placed on you from colleagues, parents, carers, and external agencies, not to mention the children you're there for. But when it crosses the line to be all-encompassing and causing distress staff can often struggle to know where to turn.

We are trained as teachers to put children first, but school leaders also need to have regard for their employees, so it is a good idea for leaders to be trained in "soft" leadership skills. It is also good practice for schools to have wellbeing policies that reflect the reality of employees' lives. For example, having a directed time calendar or only having one mandatory after-school meeting each week can show employees that you recognise they have a life outside of work.

Timetables and schedules

The timetable can also be a major source of concern. Start by putting staff first and identifying each teacher's maximum teaching load. This could be affected by key stage, subject, class size and ability, as well as other duties staff hold. Then consider other constraints such as restricted staffing in some areas of the curriculum, room or other limitations such as PE facilities, and part-time staff requirements.

No matter who has the ultimate responsibility for completion of the timetable, is there a way we can make timetable construction a collaborative task to some degree. There will always be compromises, but if the staff get to contribute then this will help everyone to understand how the system works.

We have been recommending the government considers increasing PPA time to 20%, but there's no reason to wait. Noel Baker School in Derby has seen huge positives for staff wellbeing by reducing the teaching burden, leading to fewer staff absences and less reliance on supply cover.

Another TeacherTapp survey (2023b) followed this up by asking if teachers would prefer a 10% pay rise or a 10% reduction in teaching load. The results showed that 43% would take the reduced workload, including 45% of the female respondents (compared to 36% of the men). This approach would certainly support those who have caring responsibilities, especially if that time could be taken flexibly off-site.

Flexible working

Staff who work in schools are professionals and so don't suddenly stop working the moment they walk out the door. Almost all will continue working at home, including part-time staff – arguably, they work more hours outside the classroom (proportionally) than full-time colleagues.

Part-time working is one of the most common flexible arrangements (Harland et al, 2023). Some school leaders believe this is more expensive, inconvenient, and disruptive for pupils – but this is not necessarily the case and if implemented well these approaches will benefit staff and pupils.

Many teachers looking for part-time work are fully qualified and experienced. Because of the reduced teaching load, they can be easier to timetable, enabling flexibilities for colleagues.

Some part-time staff can be flexible and may help out even on non-working days (although this can never be an expectation of course).

Typically, part-time staff are less stressed and will have more time for lesson preparation. They may even be able to offer to cover classes or help with trips and visits.

There is a lot of advice about enabling flexible working out there, not least the recent Harland et al research report, cited above, which offered 10 enablers for flexible working (see Headteacher Update, 2023b). **hu**

• Helen Osgood is national officer for education and early years with Community Union. Read her previous articles for Headteacher Update via www.headteacher-update.com/authors/helen-osgood

Further information & resources

- *DfE: Reporting year 2022: School workforce in England, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/2p83ysu4*
- *Education Support: Teacher Wellbeing Index 2023: https://tinyurl.com/bdz7hrmz*
- *Harland, Bradley & Worth: Understanding the factors that support the recruitment and retention of teachers, EEF, NFER, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/ye24ew5s*
- *Headteacher Update: Backlash over DfE spin as record 40,000 teachers quit the chalkface, 2023a: https://tinyurl.com/mwjh46jh*
- *Headteacher Update: Teacher retention: 10 flexible working enablers, 9 workload priorities, and 3 leadership actions, 2023b: https://tinyurl.com/425pa7db*
- *Headteacher Update: Burn-out, stress, exhaustion, insomnia: Stark warning from Teacher Wellbeing Index, 2023c: https://tinyurl.com/vctk4w3d*
- *Martin et al: Supporting the recruitment and retention of teachers in schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils, EEF, NFER, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/3p2ncpdn*
- *TeacherTapp: What would make you stay in teaching? 2023a: https://tinyurl.com/4cmc2sxj*
- *TeacherTapp: Pay vs PPA, enjoying work, & Pupil Premium changes, 2023b: https://tinyurl.com/yf9f26mn*

Adaptive teaching or differentiation?

For years we have spoken about differentiation in the classroom. But now everyone is talking about adaptive teaching. Confused? Sara Alston reminds us that it ain't what you call it, but the way that you do it

In education over the years many trends and buzzwords have come and gone. One of the latest of these is the move from "differentiation" to "adaptive teaching".

The need to "adapt" our teaching for different students was cited in the Teachers' Standards way back in 2011 – Standard 5 states: "Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils." (DfE, 2011)

And yet a best practice article 10 years later in our sister magazine *SecEd – Adaptive teaching explained: What, why and how* (Bromley, 2021) – has garnered tens of thousands of page views and still appears regularly in the magazine's top 10 most read online articles.

While adaptive teaching is rightly regarded as an alternative to "traditional" forms of differentiation – which was often translated simply as giving different tasks to different students – making adaptations in this way is not new.

Is adaptive teaching not what differentiation should have been about all along? Indeed, that very same Teachers' Standard adds that teachers need to "know when and how to differentiate appropriately, using approaches which enable pupils to be taught effectively".

Many would argue that differentiation became something it should not have been. The shift in language to adaptive teaching perhaps helps get us away from some bad practice and to focus on what it should have been all along.

A rose by any other name...

Increasingly, the word differentiation has been made to carry a lot of baggage. It has become associated in teachers' minds with excessive workload and, frankly, poor practice.

Fear of Ofsted and others wanting to see evidence that differentiation was happening has led over the years to monstrosities such as three-layer planning, multiple worksheets, static ability groups, and low fixed expectations for all.

Many "more able" children learnt to hide their abilities and skills because it simply meant that they were expected to complete more work than their peers.

Meanwhile, the "less able" were quickly disheartened because they knew there was no chance of "catching up" to their peers or accessing more stimulating learning.

This never was and is not what differentiation should be about. Indeed, the 2019 Early Career Framework, which also advocates adaptive teaching, states: "Adaptive teaching is less likely to be valuable if it causes the teacher to artificially create distinct tasks for different groups of pupils or to set lower expectations for particular pupils."

In the 2021 *SecEd* article cited above, the author states: "Whereas traditional differentiation focuses on individual students or small groups of students, adaptive teaching focuses on the whole class."

He adds: "Unlike traditional forms of differentiation which can perpetuate attainment gaps by capping opportunities and aspirations, adaptive teaching promotes high achievement for all."

In our book, *The Inclusive Classroom: A new approach to differentiation* (Bloomsbury, 2021), Daniel Sobel and I argue for a "needs-based" approach to SEN and inclusion, focusing on children's strengths and needs over any diagnosis.

We felt that the focus on labelling SEN penalised the many children unable to obtain diagnoses due to waiting lists or because they did not neatly fit into a single category. It also treated all children who did have a particular diagnosis as a homogenous group with the same needs.

This led to a deficit model of SEN that emphasised what children could not do and which ignored their individual strengths and needs. This can mean that a diagnosis reduces rather than adds to our understanding of individuals, obscures their needs, and inhibits our ability to respond to them appropriately. Needs not diagnosis is

a theme I have written about previously in *Headteacher Update* (see Alston, 2021).

Differentiation driven by SEN

This deficit model of SEN has also played its part in differentiation becoming driven by a response to SEN (and to a lesser extent Pupil Premium). At worst, this approach ignores that excellent practice for those vulnerable groups is excellent practice for all.

As we argue in our book, in order to be successful inclusion needs to take less time, cost less, and be less stressful. It needs to be part of daily practice for all children, not a bolt-on marked by a separate box on a planning sheet for the few.

Children are not fixed: all have their strengths and needs and these will vary with time. Just because a child is in a "more able" group does not mean that they won't struggle and need support in certain areas or at particular times.

Equally a child in the "less able" group will have strengths. They may, for example, excel at number work but struggle with shape work or vice-versa. Which group should they go in? Should the child who has wonderful ideas and a beautiful turn of phrase but who struggles with spelling and handwriting be placed in the top set and excluded from support for those areas or a lower set and denied the opportunities to extend their skills?

Unfortunately, poor differentiation negatively impacts children across the skills spectrum, particularly in secondary schools where ability in English or maths often leads to setting for a whole range of other subjects.

Core principles of adaptive teaching

In *The Inclusive Classroom*, the techniques and approaches we discuss focus on small tweaks and adaptations throughout each of the five phases of the lesson, all within a framework of quality first teaching – I have written about these lessons phases in a recent article (Alston, 2022). They are:
- Entering the classroom and preparing to learn.
- Delivering instructions and whole-class engagement.
- Individuals working as a class.
- Group working.
- The last five minutes.

These adaptations are about knowing your pupils, including their individual strengths and needs, and responding with small adjustments and modification to promote inclusion, engagement, and learning. This is based on chunking the lesson and the use of on-going formative assessment – key elements of adaptive teaching.

Although, as with differentiation, there are differing versions of adaptive teaching, I would include the following core principles:
- Adapting planning prior to the lesson.
- Adjusting practice during the lesson.
- Anticipating barriers and planning to address them.
- Using on-going (formative) assessment.
- "In-the-moment" adaptations.
- Effective use of scaffolding
- Effective use of teaching assistants (again, see my 2022 article).

Rejecting one-size-fits-all

Effective adaptive teaching is based on a move away from a set approach to teaching and towards a recognition that children need varying levels of support and differing adaptations at different points of the lesson.

To some extent this is being recognised in many local authorities by the rise of Ordinarily Available Provision guidance. This concept is grounded in the SEND Code of Practice and sets out expectations about provision and practice in mainstream schools for students with SEND when it comes to quality first teaching (the universal offer) and the graduated approach (targeted support).

While this kind of guidance acts as a useful reminder that quality first teaching includes tweaks, adaptations and differentiation within the ordinary delivery of lessons, it misses the subtlety that lies between what should be part of quality first teaching (adaptive teaching and differentiation) and what is SEND provision.

Let's consider an example

Providing a visual timetable for a class should be part of everyday provision. Adaptive teaching will decide how this is presented for the class – pictures, a written list, a combination of the two – and how the information within each lesson is broken down.

Within the ordinarily available differentiation or adaptive teaching there will be some children who need an individual timetable because they are doing different things to the majority or because they struggle to see themselves as part of the larger group.

However, there will be others who need adult support, at an individual or very small group level, to break the timetable down still further, to understand when and how to transition from one part of the lesson to the next, and to manage their anxieties about such changes.

The amount and level of support needed marks the difference between "ordinarily available", which includes differentiation/adaptive teaching, and the requirement for additional SEND provision.

A question of language?

To my mind, there is a danger that disputes about the language of differentiation, adaptive teaching or even "ordinarily available" are going to obscure the needs of the children. Further, it can distract from the recognition that effective teaching should be rooted in an understanding that not all children are the same and their needs vary between subjects and within areas in the same subject. Additionally, children are impacted by their experiences before they enter the classroom and their awareness of what may happen after they leave.

Ultimately, effective differentiation and adaptive teaching are based in small tweaks and adaptations throughout the lesson. It also includes adapting the planning before anyone enters the room, taking account of the needs of the group of children who will be in the lesson, what they learnt previously, and how best to move their learning on.

This will include some group or individual support for those who need it and communication with any teaching assistants and support staff so they understand the learning and how to support it.

The five phases of the lesson with small tweaks and adaptations made at each stage to support and promote learning are not static but require an on-going response to meet the individual and group needs throughout the lesson.

Some will need to be in place as standard lesson after lesson, some will be implemented as "in the moment" adaptations, but the majority of these will be "ordinarily available" to all the children in the room in response to their needs at that time.

Final thoughts

Whether we call it differentiation, adaptive teaching or even ordinarily available provision, our teaching must respond to the learning needs of the children in front of us. We need to move away from the "steamroller" one-size-fits-all lesson planning and delivery that requires every lesson be taught exactly in accordance with the plan (or even the script) regardless of the needs or learning of the children.

The best definition of the difference between equality and equity I know is that equality is providing everyone with a pair of shoes, while equity is providing everyone with a pair of shoes that fits. We need to use differentiation, adaptive teaching and all the other techniques we have available to us to ensure we identify and respond to children's needs so that they are able to learn effectively within a supportive, inclusive environment. hu

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Further information & resources
- *Alston: Needs not diagnosis, Headteacher Update, 2021: https://tinyurl.com/3cr9c6hr*
- *Alston: Inclusion: How to plan lessons with your teaching assistant, Headteacher Update, 2022: https://tinyurl.com/4nbycnwy*
- *Bromley: Adaptive teaching explained: What, why and how, SecEd, 2021: https://tinyurl.com/25ccd5cv*
- *DfE: Teachers' Standards, 2011: https://tinyurl.com/mt9cn58v*
- *Sobel & Alston: The Inclusive Classroom; A new approach to differentiation, Bloomsbury Education, 2021.*

Where I went wrong with my lesson observations

A former MAT senior leader and a former Ofsted inspector, Matt Tiplin explains why he believes that the traditional way lessons have usually been observed falls short for teachers and their pupils

Understanding what went well and what didn't in a lesson is mission critical to school improvement. It helps teachers develop their teaching which in turn improves children's outcomes.

Lesson observations are meant to be the tool to enable this process – to help teachers improve their practice. But instead, observations too often add to the pressure many teachers already feel. Even experienced teachers' nerves ratchet up when their turn under the microscope arrives.

As my own experience attests, carrying out a lesson observation can be stressful for senior leaders too. I carried out many when I was a senior leader. Over the years I have learnt that if we want to use lesson observations as a training opportunity then there is room for improvement. So, where do lesson observations go wrong?

Over-complicating things

As a senior leader who wore multiple hats, I often found my goals and motivations for the lesson observation didn't always align with those of the teacher. They could inadvertently morph into a way to find evidence to support wider school performance objectives. This could then make it difficult to provide meaningful feedback to the teacher.

For example, a school-wide priority might be to improve teacher questioning, but this is not an individual target for the teacher being observed as they don't need support to refine their practice.

However, knowing that this is a school-wide priority, the teacher wants to demonstrate their proficiency and so runs a great Q&A session during the observation. As such, any training opportunity the observation could have provided or identified in another equally vital area is lost.

If the purpose of the lesson observation is to also double up as an end of year performance review this can further complicate the picture.

And of course, a teacher who knows their pay and progression is linked to the observation is more likely to "play it safe" and deliver a lesson to reflect their strengths and not an area they want to refine.

In this case, the lesson observation is not fulfilling its intended purpose as a genuine opportunity for the teacher's development.

Lesson observations can serve a fundamentally critical purpose, but I learnt in time that everyone needs to be clear about what that is. A conversation before the observation to agree what exactly both your roles are and what you are coming to observe is important. One or two objectives is the sweet spot. Any more and confusion sets in.

There is value in encouraging teachers to take a more active role in their own development too. Can you agree the objectives together? Can they also evaluate their own performance against the objectives you have agreed?

Making assumptions

An enduring criticism of lesson observations is that they can't truly capture what they are meant to be seeing – namely, learning.

As educationalist Professor Dylan Wiliam (2023) has observed: "One of the enduring myths in education is that we know good teaching when we see it."

Prof Wiliam cites evidence showing that even school leaders are unable to accurately gauge what effective teaching looks like, including those trained in lesson observation.

What happens instead is that the person observing the lesson, me included, looks for what we believe are proxies for learning. A show of hands could be one, as we can assume this shows that lots of the pupils have understood the question, but if the same question is asked and observed in next week's lesson this might not be the case.

Or we might assume that an SEN pupil who is looking out of the window is not engaged in the lesson, when they might well be but simply need a visual diversion to be able to actively listen at the same time.

And consider this scenario: a pupil is asked to read aloud a passage about the First World War, which they do brilliantly. An assumption could be made about the child's understanding of the key concepts based on their performance. If a senior leader makes the same assumption – that being able to read the passage fluently was the appropriate indicator to measure the pupil's understanding – a false proxy could be reinforced which may potentially lead to suboptimal results.

It could be that gaps in the child's knowledge of the topic may only become apparent later, when they complete a piece of work designed to examine their understanding of the subject in more depth.

I spent some years as an Ofsted inspector and it taught me that sometimes how we observe is informed by our own experiences and opinions and this can drive well-meaning but fundamentally incorrect lesson observation agendas and narratives, too.

As observers we therefore need to be aware of bringing our own experience of teaching a year group, class, or subject and inadvertently using it as a benchmark to assess how the teacher is conducting a lesson.

For example, we might prefer group work, but the teacher, knowing the dynamics of the class, understands that this is not the right approach to take. As observers it is important to acknowledge the teacher's direct experience with their class.

> ## "One of the enduring myths in education is that we know good teaching when we see it"

Structuring the lesson observation incorrectly

Traditional lesson observations are often infrequent and as such are not compatible with assessing how effectively a teacher delivers the curriculum.

Teachers don't tend to plan standalone lessons, but instead plan a sequence of lessons incorporating different activities from week to week to build on children's knowledge.

But if an observation takes place during lesson one at the start of the topic, where it is appropriate the teacher takes a low-level introductory approach, it could lead the observer to falsely conclude that the teacher is not challenging pupils enough. If they observe lesson six, they may reach another conclusion.

This represents two typical challenges: one being the insight of the observer and the second being the construction of the curriculum.

> ## "I learnt after some time that for an observer, things are rarely ever as they seem. I have certainly observed lessons that didn't appear to go well, but the teacher still got great results at the end of the year. And vice-versa"

Making judgements of teaching practice based on a moment in time can set the greyhounds running in the wrong direction. I learnt as a senior leader to consider the individual needs of different teachers, pupil groups, and classroom dynamics over time to make lesson observations more effective.

The snapshot approach to lesson observations doesn't work, as no two lessons, days or cohorts of pupils are the same.

Also, if a one-off lesson observation leaves a teacher feeling rated, checked up on, or judged, they can end up demotivated and discouraged. A school where supported and informed self-reflection is encouraged instead can encourage teachers to feel more empowered and in control over their own personal development.

If you focus on supporting teachers' reflections and improvement then what senior leaders hope to evaluate through the process will come naturally.

The Hawthorne Effect

A key aim of traditional observations is to gather a valid set of evidence that can be used to inform a view on what's likely to happen when there isn't an observer in the room. But lesson observations often fall victim to the Hawthorne Effect, where an observer in the room influences the way people behave.

A few years back, the *Guardian*'s secret teacher described how his normally engaged and enthusiastic year 9 pupils were intimidated by the presence of their head of year observing the class, which left the teacher unable to drag his pupils out of their "self-imposed mutism" so the planned discussion and paired work was "dead in the water" (*Guardian*, 2013).

I learnt after some time that for an observer, things are rarely ever as they seem. I have certainly observed lessons that didn't appear to go well, but the teacher still got great results at the end of the year. And vice-versa, there were times when the observation itself uncovered some great teaching, but the end of year results didn't match expectations.

If we want authentic teaching and learning to occur, then we need to stop observing lessons in the way they have typically been observed up until now.

The current format assumes that just because one lesson has gone well, or not gone well, that all the other lessons being taught are likely to go the same way. But teaching is dynamic, and the way lessons are routinely observed largely overlooks this.

As I have found from my own experience, observing a lesson in isolation is not a great way to identify effective learning or improve teaching practice. Smaller and more frequent sessions reduce the likelihood of false learning proxies and gives observers a much better picture of the overall quality of the teaching and learning that takes place.

That is why I believe it is time to consider alternative approaches to traditional lesson observations that empower teachers and drive genuine improvement.   hu

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Further information & resources
■ *Guardian: Secret teacher: schools have got lesson observations all wrong, 2013: https://tinyurl.com/4ah7pauy*
■ *Wiliam: Teacher quality: What it is, why it matters, and how to get more of it, Impact, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/5n7rp52h*

Ofsted subject reports: Music, PE, geography

Ofsted's in-depth subject reports continue to be published. Suzanne O'Connell considers reports into music, PE and geography, highlighting the key criticisms and findings relevant to primary education

Ofsted continues to publish its subject reports. We have already seen the results of its investigations into science, maths and history. Now the speed of publication has picked up. Three reports, published last term, tackled music, PE and geography.

Each report covers primary and secondary education and builds on subject research reviews already published by Ofsted (see below for a link to all the documents). They are essential reading for subject leaders as they give us an indication of current Ofsted thinking and include examples of what the authors consider to be good practice. However, it is made clear that the reports do not represent a tick-list of what schools should and shouldn't be doing.

Regularly mentioned in these reports is the overarching importance of building on and developing prior knowledge. Inspectors consider it good practice prioritising the methodical build-up of procedural as well as substantive knowledge over time. An additional theme in the music, PE and geography reports is the importance of depth over breadth. All three reports are critical of schools which have tried to cover too many instruments, sports or too much ground without ensuring that pupils have the background skills needed.

The music report

The trend of catchy report titles continues with a report entitled *Striking the right note*. This is the follow up to the research review published in 2021 and a National Music Education Plan (DfE, 2022).

A strength for many schools was singing and the weakest area, in the view of inspectors, was composition. There were glimpses of "passionate" music provision successfully delivered but, overall, the report presents a picture of a patchy music curriculum: "We found a thriving and strong musical culture in around a quarter of the primary schools we visited."

The report is critical of pupils having "shallow encounters" with too many instruments. Praise is given to those schools where leaders understood that getting better at an instrument takes time and the number of instruments pupils were learning was reduced.

Most schools were using commercially published schemes that covered the national curriculum. Teachers found these to be beneficial due to their own lack of subject knowledge and confidence. Non-specialists were delivering the curriculum in more than two-thirds of the primary schools visited. CPD tended to focus on how to carry out the school's adopted scheme rather than developing teacher expertise.

Modelling and musical demonstration is important as pupils often do not have enough to draw on themselves and inexperienced teachers find this difficult. Leaders and teachers did not always understand the procedural and declarative knowledge needed to make progress in music.

Assessment was a weak area of music education, according to the report, with only half of schools engaged in summative assessment. Where assessment was in place it tended to focus on what had been covered rather than what had been learned. Only half of schools offered extra-curricular opportunities.

Local music hubs were supportive in helping pupils to learn to play an instrument, but links had been ended in some cases due to budget pressures.

Recommendations for schools

- Ensure there are end-points in performance, composition and listening work and that the knowledge and skills needed to reach these are set out.

- Ensure on-going feedback is provided to pupils.
- Ensure the curriculum builds, incrementally, pupils' knowledge of the technical and constructive aspects of music.
- Ensure teachers routinely demonstrate what high-quality musical responses sound like and the processes for achieving those outcomes.
- Seek the support of local music hubs and other sources of expertise.
- Support subject leaders to develop the curriculum.
- Continuously develop teachers' subject knowledge.
- Make sure that all pupils can develop their musical talents and interests through extra-curricular activities, instrumental and vocal lessons.

The PE report

The last Ofsted report into PE was issued in 2012. More than a decade on and this report, entitled *Levelling the playing field*, is based on findings from 25 primary schools and 25 secondary school visited between November 2022 and June 2023.

Most primary schools teach PE for two hours a week and it is recognised that in most cases schools are aiming to give pupils experience of a wide range of sports or physical activities.

However, the report is critical of this: "This means that, for many pupils, the curriculum design does not give them the time they need to build knowledge and develop relative fluency before moving on to a new activity that requires prior learning."

Many schools do not match the ambition of the national curriculum, with limited opportunities for dance and OAA (outdoor adventurous activities).

Football featured in nearly every curriculum as part of teaching pupils about attack and defence. The average number of sports and physical activities that pupils were exposed to within an academic year was 10.

Pupils lacked the foundational knowledge needed for the next stage and there were significant gaps in motor confidence. Inspectors gave a thumbs up, however, for extra-curricular provision although said that schools did not sufficiently monitor attendance at these or check for inclusion.

There was insufficient attention to addressing misconceptions and gaps in knowledge and this was particularly the case when it came to pupils with SEND. A better use of assessment could help address these issues: "Pupils' verbal recall of what they had learned in PE lessons was inconsistent," the report adds.

Rules, strategies and tactics were strong when it came to invasion games but limited in relation to other activities. And not enough was being done to identify and support weaker swimmers who may not have other opportunities to learn to swim.

In many schools where lessons involved competition, inspectors said they lacked a clear purpose and there was a tendency for pupils not to have sufficient skills to participate fully as there were too many unfamiliar features.

Weakness in assessment practice included:
- Not setting out clearly what pupils were expected to know.
- Being focused on enjoyment.
- Assessment information not being used in subsequent teaching.

Although school leaders were clear about the importance of PE this was not always translated into practice. Many staff felt they lacked equipment and facilities.

Recommendations for schools

- Ensure what pupils need to know is carefully sequenced and taught – particularly when it comes to swimming and water safety, dance and OAA.
- Ensure what pupils need to know is clearly defined and use this information to support planning and assessment.
- Ensure there is greater emphasis on developing confidence – securing prior learning first before moving on. This could mean reducing the number of sports included.
- Ensure they improve support for the teaching of SEND pupils.
- Ensure there is challenge and gaps in knowledge and misconceptions are addressed.
- Ensure all pupils have the knowledge to participate well in competitions.
- Ensure there is better use of assessment information.
- Ensure monitoring and evaluation focus on the quality of what pupils know and can do.

The geography report

The geography subject report, *Getting our bearings*, builds on the geography research review published in 2021. The report points out that there have been improvements to the geography curriculum in most schools but there are difficulties ensuring that content builds on previous topics.

There was wide variation in the amount of time dedicated by schools to geography: "When schools combined history and geography into a topic, history usually took precedence, and little geography was taught."

> ## "Regularly mentioned in these reports is the overarching importance of building on and developing prior knowledge"

The subject of "Place", the report indicates, was often poorly planned resulting in a narrow and simplistic view. Some pupils made sweeping generalisations and misconceptions passed on by parents were not being addressed.

The national curriculum directs primary schools to study a region in the UK, a region in a European country, and a region in North or South America. Most schools did not identify a region but taught about the entire country which created problems in covering important concepts.

Many schools were teaching beyond the national curriculum including countries in Africa. This then created some difficulties for secondary schools in terms of building on geographical knowledge rather than repeating content. Schools were introducing pupils to ambitious and specialist language.

School leaders needed to look at the aims of the national curriculum to help them decide what to teach about a topic. The report is critical where content was chosen simply because it linked in with another subject, as this meant that it become nothing more than "isolated facts about a range of places or topics".

Fieldwork was underdeveloped in almost all schools with field trips replacing geographical fieldwork. Pupils might go out of schools on a visit but did not carry out geographical work. The report said that fieldwork needs to be built into the curriculum and does not always mean pupils going out of school. For example, they can collect data from their classroom or school grounds.

Recommendations for schools

- Consider how pupils will build on knowledge over a series of topics and apply what they have learnt.
- Make sure pupils learn about the same places at different times and in different contexts.
- Plan procedural knowledge in the same way as substantive knowledge.
- Teach pupils about fieldwork.
- Plan transition between key stages to avoid repetition.
- Identify likely misconceptions in each topic.
- Ensure pupils have opportunities to apply what they have been taught.
- Consider the prior knowledge that pupils need for different classroom activities.
- Inform summative judgements with reliable and accurate assessment.
- Ensure that enough time is given to geography.
- Support subject leaders in having a better understanding of geography's curriculum concepts.
- Provide time, resources and CPD for fieldwork.

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Further information & resources

- *DfE: The power of music to change lives: A national plan for music education, 2022: https://tinyurl.com/3vdrv2wc*
- *Ofsted: Access all of Ofsted's research reviews and the subject reports published so far: http://tinyurl.com/2htdndfz*

Considering common problems with EHCPs

Problems during the education, health and care assessment process or within EHCPs themselves can affect pupils and their schools. Specialist education lawyer Nabil Dance considers some common issues and how we might respond as school leaders

Primary schools encounter a variety of challenges throughout a pupil's education, such as a child being refused an assessment for an Education, Health, and Care Plan or indeed being refused an EHCP itself.

There can also be deficiencies in particular EHCPs which can have a profound impact on a pupil's educational progress.

I have experience of advising primary schools and in this article I would like to outline some examples of these scenarios and highlight potential solutions.

Problem 1: Vague requirements

Be wary of vague or ambiguous references in an EHCP that undermine the pupil's special educational provision.

For example, a common problem we have seen with local authorities over the years is being too vague, for example including a requirement such as "regular access to speech and language therapy" or indeed just "access to speech and language therapy".

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) states in paragraphs 9.68 and 9.69: "In all cases, EHCPs must specify the special educational provision required to meet each of the child or young person's special educational needs. The provision should enable the outcomes to be achieved.

"The (special educational provision required by the child or the young person) must be detailed and specific and should normally be quantified, for example, in terms of the type, hours and frequency of support and level of expertise, including where this support is secured through a Personal Budget."

There have been instances of local authorities incorrectly insisting that this duty to specify and quantify special educational provision no longer exists. This is illustrated in recent summaries of appeal cases published by the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA, 2020). The summary states: "This case confirmed that where detail can reasonably be provided in an EHCP, it should be. Even where there is need for flexibility (to meet the child or young person's needs) in an EHCP, the duty remains on local authorities to specify."

Where appropriate, professionals can be encouraged by schools and parents to establish in writing that (a) the need for the provision exists, and (b) a certain level of detail or specificity is required – for instance, two sessions of 20 minutes of one-to-one therapy to be delivered by an experienced and qualified speech and language therapist per week.

However, a lack of this particular data cannot be a lawful justification for vague wording in a plan where the local authority is unable to prove that flexibility is required for that provision.

Problem 2: Out-of-date information

Do not tolerate out-of-date information in an EHCP. I was once engaged by a maintained special school to review the legality of their pupil's statements of SEN under the former system.

I was shocked to see that some of the statements referred to needs and provision from appendices produced four academic years ago with data that was clearly out-of-date.

After carefully reviewing those particular pupil files, no recent expert data had been produced by any party. This rendered the annual review process worthless as the local authority evidently had failed to take into account the school's current views about the pupil's contemporary needs.

With this particular experience in mind, out-of-date information should not be tolerated if it no longer reflects the pupil's needs and the special educational provision they require.

This principle remains the same under the EHCP model. The headteacher and governors in this case were under the impression that they were powerless to do anything, which was, and still remains, incorrect in a legal sense.

My reasoning is simply that out-of-date information can no longer be considered accurate – and if it is inaccurate, it does not satisfy the following requirement of the code as stated in paragraph 9.69: "All of the child or young person's identified special educational needs must be specified."

Close and strategic coordination with parents, including sharing all relevant information, and providing detailed written input for the EHCP review process, will minimise the extent of any damage where this scenario occurs.

Problem 3: Limited school input

Many senior school managers have expressed concerns to me over the years that the local authority has limited the school's input during the assessment stage or during the creation of the EHCP.

However, the code clarifies in paragraph 9.61: "In preparing the EHCP the local authority must consider how best to achieve the outcomes sought for the child or young person. The local authority must take into account the evidence received as part of the EHCP needs assessment."

It continues (paragraph 9.62): "The advice and information gathered during the EHC needs assessment must be attached (in appendices). There should be a list of this advice and information."

Image: Adobe Stock

And it also states (paragraph 9.69): "The advice and information gathered during the EHC needs assessment must be set out in appendices to the EHCP. There should be a list of this advice and information."

Using these guidelines, I would contend that the local authority must consider, list, and attach all written input from the child's current school.

While the local authority may supply you with, for instance, a small pro-forma document to complete for the school's input, there is nothing stopping you from submitting further information.

In the event that the local authority does not reference your key points in the draft EHCP, the parents can use your input to formally challenge the local authority's position throughout the life-cycle of the legal process, which I will elaborate on below.

Do not allow local authorities to circumnavigate your school's input.

Parental partnership and coordination

I would suggest encouraging parents to obtain independent expert reports (where necessary) that can be used throughout the EHC assessment and plan process, particularly where you believe that this may help to clarify the extent of the pupil's needs and what special educational provision is required. This extends to the plan review process.

Parents should be made aware that they can appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (SEND) at key stages throughout the local authority's procedure where a dispute arises, in particular the refusal to:
- Carry out an EHC assessment.
- Reassess the pupil's needs.
- Create an EHCP.
- List the special educational support in the EHCP requested by the parents.
- Continue maintaining a plan (i.e. revoking it).
- Name the parent's preferred school placement in the EHCP.

Parents are often given a period of time, typically two weeks, to make representations to the local authority. These durations represent invaluable opportunities to submit independent expert reports or further material produced by the school.

I have written previously for *Headteacher Update* outlining advice for schools on preparing for and attending the SEND Tribunal (Dance, 2023a).

I have also written an article which lists various sources of information, support, and advice pertaining to SEN and related areas, which you can pass on to your parents and carers if you wish to do so (Dance, 2023b).

Final thoughts

All of these mechanisms and strategies can potentially help families and schools to minimise the potential difficulties that can be experienced throughout the EHC assessment and EHCP procedures. These measures can simultaneously ensure that the pupil receives the support that he or she ultimately requires in school.

Strategic planning between a pupil's current school, parents, and independent experts with experience of supporting the pupil is a powerful combination: do not underestimate the true value of your input.

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Further information & resources
- *Dance: The SEND Tribunal, Headteacher Update, 2023a: https://tinyurl.com/5ft2dmru*
- *Dance: Information, resources and support for your school's families, Headteacher Update, 2023b: https://tinyurl.com/4zb8zd5j*
- *DfE: SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, 2014: http://tinyurl.com/4wyca6z6*
- *DfE: Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs*
- *HM Courts and Tribunals Service: First Tier SEND Tribunal: https://tinyurl.com/4vzubx2u*
- *IPSEA: Case summaries: Worcestershire County Council v SE and London Borough of Redbridge v HO (SEN), 2020: https://tinyurl.com/bdz4sekk*

Spotting and supporting pupils with hearing issues

It is estimated that as many as 1 in 5 children will have a hearing deficit, affecting their education and development. Suzanne O'Connell looks at spotting the signs and supporting these pupils

Hearing loss in childhood is common and can affect almost one in five children – with the majority developing problems during childhood rather than having problems from birth. In fact, hearing loss is much more prevalent in 6 to 11-year-olds than most current estimates (Moore et al, 2020).

Even when cases are mild, it can have a profound impact on speech, language, developmental and educational outcomes (Lieu et al, 2020; Moore et al, 2020). As such, speed in spotting and diagnosing problems as well as making necessary adjustments is crucial.

Deafness is not a learning disability. There is no reason why a child with any level of hearing loss cannot achieve as highly as their peers. However, the reality is that their educational outcomes do often suffer – with the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) telling us that for several years now deaf children (including those with hearing deficits) have achieved an average of a GCSE grade lower than all children.

Maintaining expectations and ensuring that the child has the technical aids, support and school backing to reach the outcomes they deserve is crucial.

Recognising there is a problem

All school staff should be made aware of the signs to look out for. Glue ear, in particular, is a very common condition in young children. If it remains undiagnosed then children can lose out on important educational milestones. Children who are experiencing some form of hearing loss may:
- Not respond when their name is called.
- Constantly ask for speech to be repeated.
- Be slow to follow instructions.
- Watch lips closely when you speak.
- Speak too loudly or quietly.
- Demonstrate delayed speech and communication development.
- Mishear or mispronounce words.
- Make minimal contributions in class.
- Seem startled when people come into their line of vision.

Pupils with hearing deficits may become increasingly withdrawn and frustration can begin to affect their behaviour. They may prefer to watch others carry out a class activity before attempting to do it themselves and background noise is likely to have a notable impact upon them.

Slight hearing loss can be particularly hard to diagnose because in a one-to-one environment pupils may respond easily to questions and may only be affected when more distant to the speaker and in larger groups.

Working with families

In most cases, family members will have noticed differences and may already be working with health professionals. To others it may come as a surprise. Where this is the case then schools should suggest that the GP is contacted for a referral to the local audiology clinic for a hearing test. Many cases may be simply resolved once spotted and referred for medical intervention.

A hearing test might also be one of the checks for children referred for other reasons, such as those being supported by a speech and language therapist or educational psychologist. It can be beneficial for schools to keep a diary of their concerns and their observations to share with professionals and support a diagnosis.

Once a diagnosis is reached it is important that families remain positive about educational outcomes and that they are engaged and involved in their child's education, including clubs and school community.

In-school screening

A recent *Headteacher Update* webinar (still available to watch – see

Image: Adobe Stock

further information) offered advice on identifying and supporting pupils with mild or moderate vision and hearing loss.

The webinar features Discovery Primary Academy in Peterborough, which has already used technology to screen all of its 550 pupils for vision deficits and is planning to screen for hearing deficits this academic year. Headteacher Michelle Siequien told the webinar: "If we can identify these barriers particularly at a young age then we can ensure these children get the provision and the checks that they need and encourage home to do that."

The webinar also features advice from Dr Sebastian Hendricks, a consultant in paediatric audiovestibular medicine at Great Ormond Street Hospital. He told us that Covid has led to more hearing problems going undiagnosed.

Ms Siequien added: "One of the difficulties at primary level, particularly with the younger children, is that they are not aware themselves that there is a difficulty. It can be down to teachers and parents picking up on that and that in itself is quite challenging in a very busy classroom. By screening you are eliminating those issues which lead to children struggling with reading, not being able to pick up phonics, their speech can be quite poor, there's a lack vocabulary, and they can disengage with the class."

Involving professionals

A teacher of the deaf may be available to provide advice and guidance. They can also deliver training for members of staff and help you evaluate the learning environment. Where particular situations arise, such as external exam time, they can provide the specialist information you need.

You may also be able to access support from a speech and language therapist who will focus on how well the child's speech, language and communication skills are developing. Your SENCO should be closely involved with coordinating any additional external support and work in partnership with other health and education specialists.

In the classroom

Once the diagnosis is made there are many ways in which the class teacher can manage the classroom and their delivery to help the child, whatever their level of hearing loss.

Most children do not want to be singled out as being different and putting some of these adjustments into place can help their level of understanding without drawing attention to it. For example, having

their attention before starting to talk, speaking clearly, and making sure that the child can see your face. Visual aids such as word mats, writing frames and prompt sheets in literacy can help and are beneficial for other children too.

Standing in front of a window or other light source can make your expression more difficult to read and teachers should ensure that instructions are given before turning out lights to watch a video.

Teaching assistant and peer support can be used to help ensure a deaf child has really understood the instructions and they might repeat and clarify when they have not. This is especially important during PE and playground activities.

When more is needed

Personal hearing technology might include hearing aids, cochlear implants and bone conduction aids. Whatever is used, a member of staff needs to be trained to monitor that it is working effectively and to support others in its use. Having an aid does not mean that the child's hearing will be the same as for others and additional adjustments should still be made.

If there is no use of a cochlear implant or hearing aid then a pupil might use sign-language as their main means of communication. A teaching assistant should have at least a Level 3 British Sign Language qualification or equivalent for pupils who need signed support. BSL for these pupils may be their first language.

Lip-reading is also beneficial but children differ in the extent to which they are able to learn and apply the skill. Radio aids can help to reduce background noise and assist in combination with other technology. They include a microphone that the teacher speaks into and the voice is directly transmitted to a receiver attached to the pupil's hearing technology.

A whole school issue

There is a key role for senior and site management. Background noise is a particular problem for deaf children including those with mild hearing loss. There are a number of measures that can be taken to reduce the impact this has on pupils. Even plumbing sounds can be a problem aside from the more obvious issues of noisy corridors or indeed things like schools being cited under flight paths or in high traffic areas. The NDCS has a "preliminary noise survey document" and a "pupil survey document" to help schools assess their listening environment (see further information).

Although some recommendations might be expensive – changing ceiling tiles or adding absorbent wall panels – others might be applied at minimum cost, for example, adding rubber compression seals to doors.

Ideally, you should aim to include more significant improvements in your on-going refurbishment schedule – if you are lucky enough to have one. Replacing windows, for example, can help save on energy costs as well as improve sound insulation.

Consider how the child with hearing difficulties is supported in other parts of the school, not only the classroom. Are all staff aware of their particular needs and the best ways of addressing them? You might also establish a "quiet zone" where pupils can go with their friends to communicate without background noise at playtimes and lunchtimes.

Deaf awareness week can be built into your annual calendar of events and the issues surrounding hearing loss should be incorporated into the curriculum.   hu

• *Suzanne O'Connell is a freelance education writer and a former primary school headteacher. Read her previous articles for Headteacher Update via www.headteacher-update.com/authors/suzanne-oconnell*

Further information & resources

- *Headteacher Update Webinar: Identifying and supporting pupils with vision and hearing problems, 2023: https://tinyurl.com/58zd55e2*
- *Lieu et al: Hearing Loss in Children: A Review, JAMA, 2020: https://tinyurl.com/238xatru*
- *Moore, Zobay & Ferguson: Minimal and mild hearing loss in children: Association with auditory perception, cognition, and communication problems, Ear Hear, 2020: https://tinyurl.com/5n8ntmf7*
- *NDCS: Information to support the education and learning of deaf children, including resources and proformas: https://tinyurl.com/2h63j3aa*

The Superpower of Looking

A free visual literacy skills programme has been launched aimed at helping pupils to navigate the image-saturated modern world. The Superpower of Looking has been created by charity Art UK and is a response to the millions of images that now bombard us online and in the physical world.

The programme's free resources aim to empower pupils to critically observe, analyse, question and interpret images and communicate with confidence. This includes bespoke films, teacher training videos, a lesson toolkit, and access to Art UK's digital database of artworks with more than 300,000 pieces of work by more than 500,000 artists. Pilot work in 70 schools found that the programme helped to boost pupils' confidence, visual literacy skills, and critical thinking.

- *www.artuk.org/learn/the-superpower-of-looking*

SEND CPD in 20 minutes

More free-to-access SEND CPD units have been made available as part of the Universal Services programme funded by the Department for Education. They are part of a series of 20 units that will be released over the course of the programme to help practitioners explore some of the most common barriers to learning in classrooms.

Themes covered in the new units, which take around 20 minutes each to complete, include Understanding executive function, Memory for learning, Developing skills for mathematics, and Person-centred working. They have been made available on the Whole-School SEND website, which is hosted by Nasen. To date, 18 units have been released including:
- Creating an emotionally safe environment
- Identifying/supporting speech, language, communication needs
- Understanding behaviour as communication
- Promoting mental wellbeing in your setting
- Understanding anxiety

- *www.wholeschoolsend.org.uk/page/online-cpd-units*

Vision and hearing problems

Vision and hearing problems are common among children and can act as a significant barrier to educational and social development. This *Headteacher Update* webinar, available to watch back for free, considers the prevalence of these problems, how we can identify emerging problems, their potential impact on children's development, and how we can support pupils in school. The discussion is hosted by *Headteacher Update* editor Pete Henshaw and features clinical experts and school leaders. The webinar is relevant to professionals working in primary or secondary settings, including senior leadership team members, the SENCO and wider SEND team, and inclusion and pastoral/welfare leads.

- *www.headteacher-update.com/content/webinars/watch-back-identifying-and-supporting-pupils-with-vision-and-hearing-problems*

How to create a comic

The Beano and the BBC have collaborated to create lesson resources for primary schools focused on comic creation. They offer a step-by-step guide to help children to make their own comic – from creating characters to constructing worlds and developing stories. Three classroom videos produced with Beano Studios introduce children to visualising characters as stick people, creating a story mountain, and building a soundscape. The resources are hosted on BBC Teach.

- *www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/english-ks2-beano-how-to-create-a-comic/zr7rdnb*

Interactive RSE lessons

The Family Planning Association has developed *Growing up with Yasmine and Tom.*
- Interactive online RSE teaching
- DfE-compliant
- Designed by teachers for teachers

Animation, sound and touch-screen activities bring Yasmine and Tom to life and age-appropriate lessons help them to cover the full curriculum, including relationships, families, friendships, diversity, the body, online and offline safety, and much more. Discover peace of mind and a safe pair of hands so children can learn and grow.

- *The Family Planning Association has been supporting health and sex education for 90 years. For a free trial, visit www.fpa.org.uk*

School Safeguarding Shorts

NSPCC Learning has launched a series of School Safeguarding Shorts, consisting of monthly virtual sessions covering a range of topics relating to child protection in schools and featuring NSPCC experts. The sessions cost £20 a time and will take place via Zoom for 60 to 90 minutes at the end of a school day (from 4pm). Upcoming sessions include: Anti-racist practice in education (January 25), Safer recruitment (February 7), Child safety online (March 5), Cost of living crisis (April 25).

- *https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/events/schools-safeguarding-update*

Safer Internet Day 2024

The UK Safer Internet Centre has created online safety resources to support teachers in the run-up to this year's Safer Internet Day.

Taking place on February 6, the theme of this year's Safer Internet Day is change – with the resources on offer focused on "managing influence" and "navigating change" online.

Available resources include assembly and lesson plans as well as activities and things to send home to support families. Many of the resources can be embedded into lessons and are tailored for all ages, including specific resources for children aged 3 to 7 and 7 to 11.

Themes include children's perspective on new and emerging technology, using the internet to make change for the better, the changes pupils want to see online, and the things that can influence and change the way children think, feel and act online and offline.

- *https://saferinternet.org.uk/blog/free-safer-internet-day-2024-education-resources-now-live*

Water Smart Schools Accreditation

The Royal Life Saving Society UK has developed the Water Smart Schools Accreditation to facilitate classroom-based water safety education. The initiative has been designed to help pupils develop water safety skills in the classroom environment, in recognition of the fact that not all schools can access pool-based safety education.

Drowning is one of the leading causes of child trauma-related deaths in the UK but is largely avoidable through education and positive experiences around water. However, access to swimming tuition and water safety education differs across the UK and there is often disparity for those from low-income and ethnically diverse families. Data from the 2022 Active Lives survey shows that only a third of children from disadvantaged families are able swim 25 metres unaided, compared to three-quarters of children from high-income families.

- *Schools interested in becoming a Water Smart School can email education@rlss.org.uk or visit www.rlss.org.uk*

Shakespeare Week 2024

SHAKESPEARE WEEK will mark its 10th anniversary when it takes place from March 18 to 24.

The event is organised by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and is aimed specifically at primary school pupils.

It seeks to bring the playwright and his works to life, offering a positive first experience of Shakespeare for children.

In the run-up to and during the week there are a number of events being planned by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's 12 regional hubs, as well as a celebratory event and free activities in the playwright's home of Stratford-upon-Avon.

Teachers can also access free digital resources to use during the week, including lessons plans and ideas. There will be digital broadcasts of special events during the week too.

Sally Maddison, headteacher of Sir John Sherbrooke Junior School in Nottingham, which takes part in the annual celebrations, said: "When I first discovered Shakespeare Week, I wasn't really into Shakespeare, but thought I'd give it a try with my class using the resources. I was blown away by the reaction of the children. These were inner city nine-year-olds, who struggled with behaviour and engagement and yet when it came to engaging with Henry V and the resources, they couldn't get enough.

"After seeing the impact Shakespeare Week had on a single class, I rolled it out across the whole school, with children as young as three engaging with Shakespeare. People think Shakespeare is for the elite or for older teenagers – so many people underestimate younger children and the power Shakespeare can have on them."

Teachers can register their interest online in receiving the free Shakespeare Week resources. As part of the celebrations, schools can also request their free copy of the Children's Folio, which includes all 36 plays in Shakespeare's original First Folio in an abridged format.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is an independent charity that cares for Shakespeare heritage in his home town of Stratford-upon-Avon. As well as Shakespeare Week, the charity runs a number of learning initiatives throughout the year and publishes free digital resources. **hu**

Image: Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Bard times: Pupils taking part in a launch event for last year's Shakespeare Week. This year's celebration is March 18 to 24

Further information & resources

- *For more details about Shakespeare Week 2024, and to register for free resources, visit www.shakespeareweek.org.uk*
- *Shakespeare Birthplace Trust: www.shakespeare.org.uk/education/*
- *For more information on the Children's Folio, go to www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespeares-plays-a-first-folio-for-children*

Schools Allergy Code published

A NEW Schools Allergy Code has been launched to help protect pupils who suffer from potentially fatal allergies.

Food allergies will affect one or two children in an average class of 30, but there is little guidance on managing these and inconsistent practice across schools.

The code has been published through a collaboration between the Benedict Blythe Foundation, the national charity the Allergy Team, and the Independent Schools' Bursars Association.

The code of practice is a free resource and offers a checklist for schools, covering areas such as awareness, emergency response protocol, training, and school policies.

Schools that want to demonstrate their commitment to good allergy management can also apply to join a register held by the Allergy Team. For this, they will be assessed and awarded a trust mark if they meet the criteria set out in the code.

Benedict Blythe was five-years-old when he died in 2021 following an allergic reaction at school. An inquest is still to take place to establish what happened. Between 2013 and 2019, the number of hospital admissions for children caused by anaphylaxis rose by 72% in England, while the rate of food allergies worldwide has increased from 3% of the population in 1960 to 7% in 2018.

Children can be allergic to a range of foods and cow's milk is now the most common single cause of fatal anaphylaxis among children aged under-15. Overall, it is thought that up to 8% of UK children have a food allergy and in 2017 three children died following allergic reactions at school. And, of course, reactions can take place anywhere on the school grounds – not just in the canteen.

Benedict's mother Helen said: "Too many children with allergies face unacceptable levels of risk at school, somewhere they should feel safe and protected. I have spoken to countless parents and carers whose children have suffered allergic reactions or near-misses at school. I hope this new code will ensure schools interrogate their own processes, improve their understanding of allergies, and know how to respond in an emergency."

Sarah Knight, founder of the Allergy Team, added: "Knowing that a school meets the criteria set out in the Schools Allergy Code will give parents huge confidence when choosing a school for a child with allergies." **hu**

Further information & resources

- *For details and to access the Schools Allergy Code, visit https://theallergyteam.com/schools-allergy-code/*

Image: Adobe Stock

Shining a spotlight on our vital supply staff

As school leaders, we must support the wellbeing of our teaching and support staff, but how often do you think about the wellbeing of any supply staff you may hire? Emily Kenneally discusses…

Mental health and wellbeing should be a priority for the entire school community, extending beyond pupils and regular teaching staff to encompass everyone involved in the educational process.

However, we know in practice that the valuable contribution of supply staff can be overlooked when time is at a premium and there are multiple priorities to juggle.

This may leave supply staff feeling under-appreciated or under-valued, affecting their mental health, levels of motivation, or even having an impact on their ability to effectively support pupils.

In this article I would like to offer schools some suggestions on ways to support supply staff, looking at what we should do to help them stay mentally well in our school setting.

> **"Leaders making time to check-in with supply staff at the start of the day and letting them know they are there for them can go a long way to easing any concerns"**

It may be that your school is implementing some of these practices already, but if not don't be alarmed – you are making a start by simply assessing your approach.

Make psychological safety a priority
Psychological safety is vital for the wellbeing of all school staff. It is about staff being able to reduce their stress, feeling valued, having open and honest discussions, being able to say "no" without fear of retribution, and ultimately being able to do their jobs well.

It is important in contexts where there is frequent change, where workloads are high, and where good team dynamics can make a huge difference to people's performance.

Creating a culture of psychological safety requires approaches and activities that involve and have an impact on every staff member, including supply staff.

Being a leader who creates a psychologically safe work environment is about how you act, what sort of relationships you build, and being honest. Education Support has published a short online guide and audit tool focused on how to build psychological safety in schools – a link is provided at the end of this article.

So, in this context how can schools best support the mental wellbeing of supply staff?

Work/life balance
Promote a healthy work/life balance – even if it is just for one day! Supply staff are only human. There is only so much they can do in the time they have. And we know a number of education professionals choose to go into supply work in order to improve their work/life balance.

Has a finish time each day been agreed? Are all staff encouraged to stick to it? What about taking their entire lunch break? The reality is if supply staff are to look after and provide the best learning experience for pupils, they have to spend time refuelling and looking after their health and wellbeing too.

Role-model wellbeing behaviour
School leaders and colleagues can support supply staff in maintaining a healthy work/life balance by role-modelling healthy working practices such as leaving work on time, taking allocated breaks, and working within their contracted hours.

If mental and emotional health become a priority to leaders – and they are able to role-model that behaviour – it can quickly spread throughout the school community.

Take time to check-in
Coming into a new environment can be daunting, even for the most experienced education professional. Leaders making time to check-in with supply staff at the start of the day and letting them know they are there for them can help ease their mind. Colleagues simply introducing themselves and asking about their day can make a difference.

Celebrate achievements
Sharing and celebrating any positive achievements or comments (however big or small) with supply staff can have a positive impact on their wellbeing. Knowing they are making a difference in the lives of pupils and that colleagues recognise and appreciate their efforts is important and makes it more likely they will want to return to your school in the future.

Signpost to Education Support
A simple way to show supply staff that your school is serious about their mental health is by signposting to Education Support services as soon as they arrive.

Education Support is a UK charity dedicated to supporting the mental health of everyone working in education – including supply staff. This includes our website, which offers a range of free guides, videos and a wellbeing toolkit for supply staff. We also have our helpline. Teachers do not need to be in crisis to talk with qualified counsellors about anything they are experiencing.

Final thoughts
Following these steps will not only help better support all colleagues at your school, it will make it more likely that great supply staff will return next time cover is needed.

It will also impact the reputation of your school in the wider community, potentially making you a more attractive employer to new recruits in the future.   hu

• Emily Kenneally is the content and media manager at Education Support, a UK charity dedicated to improving the mental health and wellbeing of the education workforce. For previous Headteacher Update articles from Education Support, visit www.headteacher-update.com/authors/education-support-uk

Further information & resources
- ■ Education Support offers help or advice on any issue facing those working in education. Contact the free 24-hour helpline on 08000 562 561 or www.educationsupport.org.uk
- ■ Education Support: At the moment, supply staff in Wales can sign up to peer support groups at no cost to them. They will join a community of other supply staff in Wales to talk about the challenges unique to their role: www.educationsupport.org.uk/peer-support
- ■ Education Support: Psychological Safety Guide: https://tinyurl.com/3bnsuzv5

Introducing apetito! Proudly Pre-prepared: A revolutionary new catering option for schools

Rupert Weber, Head of Education at apetito looks at the choices that schools face when it comes to ensuring excellence in their mealtime provision.

"In-house? Or contracted out? It's one of the biggest dilemmas facing schools today when it comes to their meals provision. There's no 'right' or 'wrong' answer but apetito now offer a new and innovative school meals solution that is proving to be an attractive choice for many schools.

"apetito's revolutionary pre-prepared catering model helps schools deliver the control and flexibility of in-house catering but with complete simplicity that can't be achieved in traditional in-house kitchens.

"We help schools achieve full control of their menus and staff, whilst delivering exceptional meals and a flexible service that is easily adapted to suit every school's bespoke needs and helps to deliver strong uptake. We're already feeding over 10,000 pupils a day and like to think of ourselves as 'in-house made easy'.

"One of apetito's defining values is 'great food to be proud of' and we have an exceptional team of award-winning chefs to deliver on this promise.

"Before joining apetito, Head Development Chef, Phil Rimmer was the Head Chef of the AA Rosette Woolley Grange Hotel. Development Chef, Jethro Lawrence boasts a host of impressive accolades including former quarterfinalist on BBC's MasterChef: The Professionals and recently finalist of the prestigious National Chef of the Year competition, previously won by Gordon Ramsay. Matt Peters, the latest addition to apetito's ever-expanding chef talent is an experienced Pastry Chef, before joining apetito, he spent six years as Head Pastry Chef in the Michelin-starred restaurant at Lucknam Park Hotel.

"Against the backdrop of skilled labour shortages, utilising apetito's team of chefs rather than hiring them locally is proving highly desirable, helping schools overcome fruitless recruitment efforts for chefs.

"But it is not just apetito's Chefs who help develop our incredible range of dishes. Supporting them are a team of passionate Nutritionists and Dietitians who help to create every single recipe.

"We believe young minds need just the right fuel to learn - a favourite phrase at apetito is 'eat well, learn well'. Our Nutritionists and Dietitians play a key role ensuring new dishes meet the delicate nutritional and allergen requirements for children, so schools can be assured their pupils are getting exactly what they need. Our Education team even has its own dedicated Nutritionist to support schools with menu planning for children with complex dietary needs.

"With more than 200 meals and desserts to choose from, we cater for every dietary need, offering a vast selection of vegan, vegetarian and world foods aimed at broadening the culinary horizons of pupils by exposing them to dishes they wouldn't try at home.

"But as a service, we do more than provide great food. By partnering with apetito there are some significant advantages to be had, including for schools making commitments to sustainability.

"We're dedicated to working in an ethical and sustainable way and source high-quality ingredients from sustainable suppliers, such as Yorkshire Greens, who have one of the UK's only carbon-neutral vegetable processing and packing facilities and Dawn Meats, a leading producer of high-quality beef and lamb who are on a journey to net zero emission meat production.

"Food safety is also a huge benefit with our model. Every single batch of meals we make are tested by our on-site laboratories for harmful pathogens, so schools can have total confidence in the safety of our meals. Removing preparation from on-site kitchens also makes it infinitely easier for schools to achieve higher food hygiene ratings.

"Our meals are also tested to ensure nutritional standards meet their stated values. apetito even has a full range of meals that do not contain any of the 14 EU recognised allergens. Our free-from meals are thoroughly tested to ensure they are allergen free, so children with allergies can enjoy similar meals to their peers.

"Lastly, huge financial efficiencies are achieved through our model. Through a combination of leaner labour structures, smaller, simpler kitchens, and reduced utilities and food waste, apetito offer ultra-efficient financials.

"We deliver great quality, highly nutritious meals pupils love, whilst giving schools full control and flexibility over their catering."

Learn more about apetito's service: https://apetito.link/HU

Order here!

NEW! Teacher standing desk
Relax in a well-organised workspace

Teacher-friendly:
Variable storage options
and adjustable shelves.

Child-friendly:
Give your room a safe and
welcoming feel, with your
kit tidily locked away.

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