

ISA JOURNAL

ISSUE 37 | SUMMER 2026
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Money, childhood, and mental health

Staff wellbeing as an SEMH intervention

Preparing learners for the future

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Welcome

FROM THE CEO

RUDOLF ELIOTT LOCKHART



There are times when putting together an issue of The Journal feels like an act of curation, and this is one of them. The contributions that have come in from across the membership this summer cover ground that is, frankly, some of the most important our schools are navigating right now.

Much of it connects, even where it might not seem to at first glance. Tej Lander writes about what he calls “financial adultification” and the emotional weight that money places on children far younger than we might assume. Hannah Lovegrove Campion, our new Head of SEND, makes the case that the adults around our pupils carry their own emotional load too, and that how well we support our staff shapes what our students experience far more directly than we often acknowledge. Vanessa Mitchell asks whether our instinct to soften expectations for struggling pupils is sometimes precisely the wrong response. Three different starting points, but the same underlying question: what does genuine care for young people actually look like in practice?

That question runs through the issue in different forms. Ed Parkin describes how a Minecraft club became a national esports championship and a trip to Malta, Katie Lockwood sets out what specialist SEND schools must now become if they are to serve the young people who need them most, and Jane Kendrick shows what it looks like to take careers education seriously across the whole school from Reception upwards. Melanie Waller and Catherine Henderson unpack a case study of a therapy-informed and skills-focused approach to education for young people with autism, while ISA Head of Press, Philip Reynolds, explores how a school has taken an integrated approach to mental health, embedding it throughout all aspects of the school.

The sector outside our schools has not been quiet either. Business rates, VAT, UKVI compliance, and SEND reform undoubtedly remain at the forefront of your minds. Stuart Nicholson and Katherine Symonds-Moore offer a characteristically ISA response to one of those pressures: pick up the phone, talk to another member, use the network.

The focus on SEND in this issue comes as we digest the Government’s White Paper on SEND reform. At ISA we are proud of the work our schools do to support the national system for educating pupils with special needs: without

our schools the pressure on the state sector would be even more intense. Special needs provision within ISA schools is extremely broad. In some cases, this involves highly specialised provision to meet complex and overlapping needs. In other cases, it involves providing an environment that supports children experiencing difficulties with school attendance to re-engage with formal education. There is no single category of special needs. The independent special school sector has grown rapidly in recent years. This is because our sector has responded to the growing national demand for places for pupils with special needs. It is independence that has made it possible for these schools to be set up and to expand quickly to meet that need. This has been a huge benefit in helping to ensure that the needs of pupils across the country are met. Within these pages we are able to celebrate a small part of the fabulous work with pupils with special needs that is taking place in hundreds of ISA schools.

As always, there is much more: sport, arts, and a warm welcome to our new members. The ISA Awards are open again this summer too, with new categories this year that reflect the growing importance of specialist SEND provision across our membership. If something is missing that you think should be here, we would love to hear from you. The next issue turns its attention to edtech, and there has never been a better moment for that conversation. We hope you will be part of it.

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WRITE FOR THE JOURNAL:

If you would like to contribute an article to the ISA Journal, please contact journal@isaschools.org.uk with an outline of your topic. See our website for guidelines.



CONTENTS

- 6 From absence to achievement at LVS Oxford**
Melanie Waller, Executive Principal & Catherine Henderson-Dyer, Assistant Head
- 8 Money, childhood and mental health**
Tej Lander, Head of Norfolk House School
- 10 School News**
- 14 Staff Wellbeing as an SEMH Intervention**
Hannah Lovegrove Campion, ISA Head of SEND
- 18 From Minecraft Club to ISA tournament success**
Ed Parkin, Assistant Head at Ashley Manor Prep
- 20 Rethinking the independent specialist in a changing world**
Katie Lockwood, Head of Kirklees Academy
- 22 ISA Professional Development**
- 24 Benefitting from ISA Preferred Suppliers**
Stuart Nicholson, ISA Trustee
Katherine Symonds-Moore, Chair of Governors at Lumiar School
- 28 ISA Arts**
- 30 ISA Sport**
- 32 Rethinking SEMH in Independent Schools**
Dr Vanessa Mitchell, Vice Principal at Blanchelande College
- 34 How Holme Grange is growing its sustainability community**
Alex Glendinning, ISA Marketing & Events Assistant
- 35 Becoming a 'Tooled Up Education' School: Not just a product, but a proactive philosophy**
Dr Kathy Weston, CEO and Founder of Tooled Up Education
- 36 Developing skills for the future: A whole-school approach to careers week**
Jane Kendrick, School Lead for PSHE and Careers at Heathfield Knoll School
- 39 Welcome to New Members**
- 41 ISA Awards**
- 42 A head start for happiness**
Philip Reynolds, ISA Head of Press

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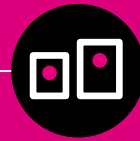
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MELANIE WALLER, EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL AT LVS OXFORD
CATHERINE HENDERSON-DYER, ASSISTANT HEAD AT LVS OXFORD

From absence to achievement at LVS Oxford

Across the UK, many autistic young people remain without suitable school placements, with some experiencing prolonged absence from education. Specialist provision is increasingly tasked not only with academic progress but with rebuilding confidence, communication, and connection. LVS Oxford, a specialist day school for autistic students aged 11–18, offers one example of how this can be achieved through a therapy-informed, skills-focused approach.

LVS Oxford sits just outside the city, surrounded by open fields and ancient parklands, neighbouring Blenheim Palace and the village of Woodstock. The school occupies the former Begbroke Priory, a Grade II listed building dating back to the 17th century, built with stone reclaimed from the ruins of Woodstock Palace. The grounds include outdoor gym areas, a polytunnel and greenhouse where students grow their own plants, and a yurt used for drama and games. It is here that students develop academic and vocational skills, build friendships, and become part of a community.

To truly understand the impact that LVS Oxford has on its students and their families, it is important to consider autism and the loneliness epidemic. As it is increasingly evident, we are currently in the midst of a growing SEND crisis. Across the UK, thousands of young autistic people are being left without appropriate school placements, many of whom have experienced school-based trauma after years of attempting mainstream education without adequate support. Parents are left to navigate long waiting lists with increasing uncertainty about what the future lies. There are few things more painful than your own child's loneliness. For the past ten years, LVS Oxford has been able to welcome students who have been out of school for months or even years and, through a tailored curriculum, therapy-integrated approaches and a restorative approach to behavior, re-engage them with education.

With growing demand for provisions such as LVS Oxford, the school opened its doors to support families still facing challenges and without a placement by hosting The Hub, a Signpost Autism event. The event brought together autism experts who shared their knowledge and guidance, while also providing parents with the opportunity to network and discuss their concerns about this often-daunting process.

The curriculum is designed with the students at the center, prioritising nurture and wellbeing to support young people's complex needs in their journey towards adulthood and independent living. Academic subjects

“Communication is not just about spoken words it is about understanding and being understood. For autistic young people, this may involve visuals, technology, movement, or other alternative forms of expression. When we recognise, respect and value everyone's unique communication style, we reduce anxiety, build confidence, and lay the foundations for independence and lifelong success.”

Melanie Waller, Executive Principal



are taught throughout, and the school offers GCSEs in English, English Literature, Maths, Science Double Awards, History and Geography. Year on year, our GCSE results have continued to improve, with 100% of our students achieving above their target grades. Last year, 88% of grades were achieved at A*–C, demonstrating the strong commitment and partnership between our students, parents, and staff. To offer qualifications for students who find this more traditional approach difficult, Functional Skills, Entry Levels and Asdan qualifications are also available.

According to recent UK data, only about 30 % of working-age autistic adults are in any form of paid employment — meaning roughly 70 % are not employed, one of the lowest employment rates of all disability groups in the country. Integral to LVS Oxford's practice, therefore, is teaching students preparation for the workplace, which is driven by the two curriculum pathways, Learning for Life (KS3) and Ready for Life (KS4): developing skills in Horticulture, Hospitality and Enterprise. A key part of this is the Enterprise Project. Twice annually the students hold Enterprise days where they sell their own produce to parents and carers. They run their own small business by taking part and organising every step: running their own

“ Students are exceptionally positive about the experience.

“I can try new things and feel proud of what I achieve”, “I can share ideas, work as part of a team, and help my friends”, “I can take responsibility and show how I can contribute to my community.” –

KS3 Students, Enterprise days 2025

plant nurseries (from seed to plant); helping with garden maintenance; advertising their produce and creating sales material such as price tags and décor for the stands; being sales assistants on the day and handling money. “Every penny our students earn through enterprise projects is reinvested back into their learning. Beyond profits, these projects teach them the value of money, the power of budgeting, and the confidence to make smart financial decisions skills that will stay with them for life.” Melanie Waller, Principal

One of LVS' many strengths is its exemplary work experience scheme. Students are given the opportunity to engage in work-based training either on site – working in the grounds, kitchen, or the school's community cafe – as well as work experience placements at a range of local businesses. Partnerships include Soho Farmhouse, Blenheim Palace, Fairytale Farm and Begbroke Playgroup.

‘Our approach to work experience is built around strong relationships, flexibility, and a real understanding of our students as individuals. We work closely with a range of local employers who value inclusion and are keen to support autistic young people in meaningful ways.’ Gayle Fox, Career Adviser/ Transitions & Work Experience Coordinator

Work-related learning prepares students for work, encouraging them to develop a more adult style of

THE FUTURE OF LVS OXFORD

LVS Oxford is embarking on an exciting phase of growth and expansion, with plans to increase student numbers while continuing to deliver high-quality provision. As our community grows, so too will the opportunities for work experience and enterprise learning, giving students practical, hands-on experience across a wide range of industries. We are committed to creating more work placement opportunities, from local businesses to in-house enterprises, including our upcoming student-run Airbnb and other enterprise projects. These initiatives help students develop essential life and employability skills, while providing real insight into the world of work, budgeting, and professional communication. Through this expansion, LVS Oxford will continue to invest in the futures of autistic young people, offering tailored education, meaningful experiences, and clear pathways to further education, apprenticeships, and employment. By combining growth with innovative, practical learning, we are shaping a school that equips every student with independence, confidence, and the skills to succeed in life.

thinking and the skills needed for achieving economic independence. Work experience also plays a crucial role in raising aspirations. Exposure to real workplaces helps students identify interests, talents, and possible career pathways, enabling them to set meaningful and realistic goals for the future. This sense of direction supports students to make informed choices about post-16 options and increases their confidence in applying to colleges and other provisions. By the time students reach key transition points, they are better prepared to articulate their strengths, advocate for their needs, and approach new environments with reduced anxiety. Every one of our students progresses to further education or a paid apprenticeship, reflecting our commitment to preparing young people for successful futures.

Catherine Henderson-Dyer, Assistant Head

As a recently appointed Assistant Head, I am delighted to be part of an all-female senior leadership team that nurtures development and promotion from within. Having worked at the school for the past five years, I have seen first-hand the many colleagues who have been supported with new opportunities and high-quality professional development, enabling them to grow in confidence and progress in their careers. It is both inspiring and empowering to work alongside such dedicated and forward-thinking colleagues, who are deeply committed to fostering a culture of collaboration, integrity, and continuous improvement.



Melanie Waller, Executive Principal

I have been part of LTC Education Group for five years and have had the privilege of supporting the continued growth and success of LVS Oxford. The Group also includes LVS Ascot, a mainstream private boarding school, and Hassocks, a specialist SEND school. Most recently, LTC Education Group have further strengthened their family of schools through the acquisition of Kennington School, a new SEND provision opening in September 2026, and Claires Court School, a respected private day school in Maidenhead. This expansion reflects the Group's clear and ambitious vision to deliver high-quality, diverse educational provision that responds to the evolving needs of students and families, while sharing expertise across both mainstream and specialist settings.





TEJ LANDER, HEAD OF NORFOLK HOUSE SCHOOL

Money, Childhood and Mental Health: The Challenge for Schools

In our schools, the language of SEMH infuses daily conversations. Teachers and leaders are often found helping pupils to navigate friendship issues, evaluating online risks, and witnessing the emotional consequences of growing up in the digital age.

However, we rarely ask a key question: what role does money play in the emotional lives of our pupils?

Consider some scenarios that may be taking place in your corridors or playgrounds: A Y5 boy becomes distressed because he's not allowed a gaming upgrade that his friends all have. A Y6 girl avoids a conversation about upcoming holidays, knowing her family can't afford to go abroad. A parent forwards you a screenshot of a DM sent to their child, which promises a chance to make 'easy money'. All reflect the realities facing children of prep-school age today.

In 2026, comprehensive SEMH provision must be built on several pillars. One that is – at best – 'under construction' in many schools, is the emotional dimension of financial literacy.

'FINANCIAL ADULTIFICATION': DEFINING THE PROBLEM

The term 'financial adultification' describes the premature immersion of children in financial pressures that were, until recently, solely the preserve of adults. It is what happens when children are drawn into adult-level financial decision-making before they are equipped for it.

This typically happens in three ways:

1. ALGORITHMIC PRESSURES

When we bought video games as children, game developers collected no behavioural data as we played, no payment card was stored, no peer visibility existed to encourage further spending. Today's games are the result of a multi-billion-dollar effort to maximise engagement and revenue. In-game currencies and 'loot boxes' are standard features. Virtual environments are engineered to reduce friction and make spending effortless. Decisions must be made at every turn, long before children have the tools to evaluate them.

The broader picture includes social media and influencer culture. Research by the Advertising Standards Authority (2020) found that children consistently struggle to identify paid-for content and sponsored posts, even when disclosure labels are visible. Financial 'advice' from unaccredited influencers (so-called 'finfluencers') reaches younger audiences through social diffusion, even when they do not have a smartphone.

2. STATUS VISIBILITY AND SOCIOECONOMIC COMPARISON

The communities we serve often include the highly affluent, alongside those making significant sacrifices to access independent education. The children of the latter must navigate the comparisons that arise when discussing holiday destinations or going on a 'play date' at the houses of the former.

Research published by the Sutton Trust (2017) found

that children in mixed-income school communities showed elevated anxiety responses when they perceived socioeconomic differences between themselves and peers. Those perceptions were particularly acute where consumption markers, e.g. clothing, technology, holiday destinations, were visible.

3. CRIMINAL TARGETING AND FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

The National Crime Agency and the FCA have both recently warned that children are increasingly being targeted by criminals. One example is 'money muling', a process by which children as young as ten are persuaded to pass money through their accounts in exchange for payment, unwittingly becoming part of a money-laundering operation. Phishing and 'smishing' (phishing via text) attempts also increasingly target school-age children, exploiting their relative inexperience.

These are the uncomfortable realities that today's prep school pupils often face. However, our schools can play a crucial role in equipping them to navigate such challenges successfully and confidently.

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

The case for addressing with pupils the emotional and 'mindset' elements around money goes beyond protecting them against scams. Research by the Money and Pensions Service (2019) concluded that financial habits and behaviour patterns are formed between the ages of three and seven. The prep years are therefore much more than a 'preamble' to our adult financial lives; they heavily influence the direction of travel later.

The stakes here are high: the Centre for Financial Capability's analysis (2021) found that low financial confidence is associated with reduced life satisfaction, greater anxiety, and poorer health. Simply put, we need to help establish pupils on a positive financial pathway, at an age when their attitudes can be most strongly influenced.

POLICY CHANGE AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR US

In November, the Curriculum and Assessment Review proposed making financial education mandatory in primary schools. However, the DfE's own Financial Education Evidence Review (2023) acknowledged that a similar policy in secondary has not reliably produced financially capable young adults. In many cases, 11-16 financial education is merely an addendum to the maths curriculum. Students become better bookkeepers, but their 'money mindsets' shift little.

We are in a strong position to do better. ISA schools have the potential to model a genuinely embedded approach; one that treats financial education as a strand across subjects with a strong SEMH component.

REFRAMING FINANCIAL EDUCATION - ACTIONABLE STEPS

A prep school financial education fit for today's challenges requires emotional literacy around money: noticing how

financial situations make us feel, moving from impulsivity to considered decision-making. It requires the ability to identify when spending is being encouraged. It requires a long-term perspective and an understanding that decisions compound over time, for better or worse.

For leaders who want to strengthen their school's approach, the following represent a practical starting point:

1. Incorporate the teaching of digital monetisation into your PSHE and/or computing provision. The NCA's *Cyber Choices* and *Think U Know* programmes provide free, school-facing resources as a starting point.
2. Bring at least one explicit unit of financial education into your PSHE or Citizenship programme at every key stage. The unit should include direct teaching about persuasive design (how many games and apps are built to encourage spending), emotional responses to financial situations (why we feel urgency, pausing before deciding), and the basics of long-term financial thinking (e.g. saving, budgeting, investing).
3. Run a parent workshop on today's digital financial landscape. Many are unaware of how deeply monetised their children's online environments are. Schools that have done this report that it consistently receives strong feedback: parents feel better informed and equipped.

PROTECTING CHILDHOOD WHILE BUILDING CAPABILITY

Today's children are unwitting participants in financialised environments that are unlike those any previous generation has grown up with. The need for a robust education around money – its emotional as well as purely factual sides – is greater than ever, and it should begin at an age where it has the best chance of taking root. Prep schools, particularly those with the flexibility and holistic outlook of the ISA, can be at the leading edge.

Tej Lander is the Head of Norfolk House School, a co-educational 2-11 prep school in Muswell Hill, north London. He has worked in teaching and senior leadership positions across the independent and maintained sectors, having entered the profession via

Teach First. Alongside his headship, Tej recently founded Tykeoons (tykeoons.co.uk), a money skills resource hub for primary and prep schools, designed to provide teachers with ready-made lessons on financial literacy, economics and enterprise.



School News

CELEBRATING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ACROSS THE ASSOCIATION

Here is a selection of exciting news that has been shared with us from across the ISA membership. Please share your school's news with us at comms@isaschools.org.uk or tag us on Instagram [@isaschools](https://www.instagram.com/isaschools) to potentially appear in future editions of the Journal, on the ISA website, or shared on social media.

RSPB BIG SCHOOLS' BIRDWATCH AT BRIDGEWATER SCHOOL



Bridgewater School (N)

This term, pupils across at Bridgewater School in Worsley have been enthusiastically taking part in this year's RSPB Big Schools' Birdwatch, developing a deeper understanding of nature while contributing to an important national wildlife project

In Early Years, the children were fully immersed in hands-on

birdwatching activities. Kindergarten pupils developed their fine motor skills by threading cereal hoops to create hanging bird feeders, while Reception children used scoops to carefully fill a variety of feeders with bird food. These feeders were then hung outside the classrooms, allowing the children to observe visiting birds throughout the day.

To support their learning, the children explored books and bird identification cards, helping them to recognise and name different species. They recorded their observations using ten frames, linking their learning to early mathematics and developing key observation and recording skills. There was great excitement when the children spotted robins and blue tits, and Reception also enjoyed learning a rhyme about magpies, eagerly sharing any sightings with their classmates. Some children even chose to complete the birdwatch challenge at home over the weekend, extending their learning beyond the classroom.

LEIGHTON PARK LAUNCHES LEITHS CULINARY SCHOOL COURSES

Leighton Park is delighted to announce a new relationship with Leiths Education from September 2026! Students will benefit from the delivery of the Leiths Education Courses for schools KS3 Programme and the Co-Curricular Cookery Programme, designed by the kitchens of one of the world's best-known brands.

"We are excited to be working with Leiths Culinary School and to be launching Leiths' KS3 Programme for all Year 9 students in September 2026." enthused Urvashi Cran, Food Tech Lead. "This course will allow students to develop core cookery skills through a structured programme that builds independence and confidence. Lessons will explore food choice, nutrition and global cuisines, while introducing pathways towards further study and future careers in food."



Leighton Park (LW)

"Leiths Culinary School certification provides our Year 9 students with a high-quality, externally supported programme that enhances learning, credibility, and progression opportunities. We are thrilled to have this connection with Leiths". added Alex Wallace, Deputy Head (Academic).

Our Year 8 students will also benefit from Leiths expertise with co-curricular cookery lessons delivered as an after-school hobby. Urvashi explained, "This course introduces students to a range of cookery skills and flavours from around the world. The recipes are fresh and appealing to younger students who have a passion for cookery. At the end of each course the students' newly developed technical skills will be recognised via a personalised Leiths' certificate."

Those in Year 7 can enjoy the 'LP Chocolate Factory' co-curricular hobby after school and Sixth Formers build on their Food Tech experience through 'Cooking for University', preparing them for the practicalities of life beyond school. As with the Food Preparation and Nutrition GCSE for Years 10 and 11, both activities are delivered by our Food Tech team and alongside the Leiths Education courses for schools for Years 8 and 9.

A CENTURY OF BEEHIVE

Beehive Preparatory School is so excited to be celebrating its centenary year in 2026. Since we first opened our doors on Beehive Lane back in 1926, the school has been a constant "heartbeat" in an ever-changing London



Beehive Preparatory School (LN)

landscape. While the world around Ilford has transformed over the last century, our commitment to being a unique, caring, and family-run school remains exactly the same.

For us, education has always been about more than just great results. We work hard to ensure our children don't just succeed academically, but also grow into curious lifelong learners and kind, responsible members of society. We want every child who walks through our doors to leave with the confidence and character to make a positive difference in the world.

As we look back on our rich history this summer, we are also looking ahead. We are incredibly proud of the legacy built over the past 100 years and we're dedicated to making sure Beehive stays a cornerstone of our community for the next century to come.

ADCOTE GIRLS LEAD HANDS-ON STEM INNOVATION DURING BRITISH SCIENCE WEEK

Adcote School for Girls has celebrated a highly engaging and intellectually rich British Science Week (6–15 March 2026), with students from Junior to Sixth Form immersing themselves in scientific discovery across genomics, engineering, environmental science, physics, and chemistry.

Reflecting the school's strong academic ethos and increasing uptake in STEM subjects, the week brought together curiosity, creativity, and real-world problem-solving through a series of interactive challenges and investigations.

Across all year groups, British Science Week at Adcote School highlighted the school's commitment to academic excellence and its growing strength in STEM education. The week provided pupils with opportunities to think critically, work collaboratively, and apply scientific principles to real-world challenges.

Head of Science, Mrs Walford, at Adcote School said: *"British Science Week is always a highlight of the academic calendar. It is inspiring to see students across all ages engage so enthusiastically with science, demonstrating*



Adcote School for Girls (M)

both intellectual curiosity and impressive problem-solving skills."

The week concluded with a shared sense of achievement and excitement, reinforcing Adcote's position as a school where scientific curiosity is actively encouraged and celebrated.

TRANSFORMING STEM LEARNING THROUGH THE NEW NATIONAL MICROBOTICS LEAGUE

STEM is fundamental to how children learn—developing critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills that underpin success across education and future careers.



Littlegarth School (E)

Littlegarth MicroBotics launches in Autumn 2026 as the UK's first national, termly robotics league for U11 and U14 pupils, using Micro:bits and robotics, designed to provide sustained, hands-on STEM engagement across the academic year.

Moving beyond one-off events, MicroBotics embeds learning over time, allowing pupils to experiment, iterate, and grow in confidence—mirroring real-world engineering.

With a low-cost, high-impact model, it offers schools an accessible way to deliver meaningful, future-focused STEM experiences and enrich co-curricular provision.

For more information, visit www.microbotics.org or contact Steve Pashby at Littlegarth School on 01206 262332

A NEW ERA FOR POLWHELE HOUSE SCHOOL

Polwhele House School is delighted to welcome **Mark Clutsom** as its new Headteacher. With more than 20 years of experience, including roles as Executive Head across multiple schools, Mr Clutsom brings a proven record of school improvement. His leadership is guided by a commitment to academic excellence, innovation and the core values that define the Polwhele community.



The school is transitioning to a **Community Interest Company (CIC)**. This unique structure ensures the school exists solely for the benefit of its students and staff. All profits are reinvested directly into the school, securing Polwhele's long-term independence and its future as a centre for educational excellence.

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to the former owners, Richard and Rosemary White, for their vision in founding Polwhele House School and for their dedicated service over many years. We wish them every happiness in their retirement.

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SEND Reform

Schools are facing increasing demands in relation to children with SEND and/or SEND requirements. This is unsurprising given the increase in awareness around the rights of individuals that may be considered disabled under the Equality Act 2010 (which is likely to include most, if not all pupils, listed on a school's SEND register). This increase in demand is seen both in respect of the needs of the pupils but also increased time discussing needs with parents and local authorities. Whilst historically most independent schools (save for specialist schools) may have faced limited exposure to these issues, this is changing, ranging from an increased interest in EHCP provision in an independent school environment, to increased scrutiny in relation to refusal of applications.

Often, schools and their leaders, are left balancing the needs of children with SEND, as well as maintaining support for the wider school community including other pupils and staff. This challenge is only likely to increase given the potential reforms to EHCP and SEND provision proposed by the government, that are currently under consultation. Whilst, at this stage, given the uncertainty over the changes that will be implemented, it would not be appropriate to comment in detail on the proposed changes, an immediate effect that schools will see is an increased awareness of rights (given the publicity over the changes).

Schools should pay specific regard to their obligations to children with SEND and clearly record challenges the pupil, staff and other pupils may be facing in relation to any potential issues. In particular, schools should be mindful as to whether or not they are able to provide the best and most suitable environment for a child with SEND be prepared to work collaboratively and with transparent and open communication with parents to ensure their approach cannot reasonably be challenged.



HANNAH LOVEGROVE CAMPION, ISA
HEAD OF SEND

Staff Wellbeing as an SEMH Intervention: Why Regulated Adults Create Regulated Schools



During a morning briefing, I had noticed that my own, unsettled start, shaped by a longer-than-usual commute, an urgent safeguarding call and staffing pressures, had subtly influenced my team. Colleagues were quieter, less attuned and solution-focused; and students across the site appeared more reactive than usual. In reflecting on this, I recognised a familiar truth: the emotional steadiness of leaders sets the tone for the entire school community for that day, week, month or term ahead.

In recent years, the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs of students have risen across both mainstream and specialist independent schools. Increasingly complex neurodiversity profiles, heightened anxiety following the pandemic and the intensifying pressures of academic and social life have created an environment in which many schools have found that emotional dysregulation is more visible than ever. While schools have responded with student facing interventions, including a deeper appreciation of mental health challenges, therapeutic input, counselling, nurture groups and behaviour support teams, one area remains largely underexplored: that the most powerful intervention for students' social, emotional and mental health needs could be in the emotional wellbeing of the adults around them.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AS CATALYSTS FOR RELATIONAL SEMH PRACTICE

This is where, I believe, that independent schools are uniquely placed to lead. With flexibility, smaller communities and the ability to shape culture intentionally, independent settings can embed staff wellbeing not as an additional element, but as a core SEMH strategy which directly improves outcomes for young people, regardless of need or learning differences.

Children and young people experiencing emotional distress do not dysregulate in isolation. Decades of neuroscience and attachment research¹ demonstrate that children and young people coregulate with the

EMOTIONALLY STABLE, WELL-SUPPORTED ADULTS HELP STUDENTS TO SETTLE, THINK AND LEARN.

adults around them. Emotionally stable, well-supported adults help students to settle, think and learn. In contrast, stressed, exhausted or overwhelmed staff inadvertently transmit dysregulation, even with the best intentions. Schools often pride themselves on strong pastoral systems, yet the wellbeing of the adults maintaining those systems can be overlooked. This pattern is well established in the literature: [national wellbeing reviews](#) highlight that when staff experience emotional strain, student behaviour, engagement and relationships with families are directly affected. In my own experience, reactive or punitive responses can inadvertently increase exclusions and escalate distress.

¹Barrett (2017): Emotions are not fixed reactions but are constructed from context and prediction; in schools, that means students learn how to feel from the emotional cues adults around them model.

(Porges (2017): Polyvagal theory explains why calm adult voice, face, and pace act as biological safety signals that settle students into learning ready states.

Porges (2023): Applied polyvagal practice shows that predictable, attuned relationships and reflective supervision create a "neuroception of safety" that reduces escalation and supports SEMH.

In specialist settings, particularly those supporting students with complex trauma, Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) or profound SEMH profile, this understanding is deeply embedded. Staff are trained not just in pedagogy, but in affective presence, nonverbal communication, trauma-informed practice and relational consistency. Often, these behaviours are nuanced and well-considered, leaving no stone unturned. These adults know how they breathe affects how students breathe; how their pace and tone of voice, stance, and body language



either alert or soothe. Calm adults create safe spaces for distressed children. When staff are emotionally resourced and professionally regulated, they become the school's most powerful therapeutic tool.

Students with emerging or established SEMH needs rely on predictable adult relationships. Regularity, calm boundaries and emotionally attuned interactions reduce stress and support executive functioning skills, which are often inconsistent in SEMH profiles. However, achieving relational consistency is impossible if staff are depleted, unsupported or carrying accumulated emotional residue from repeated challenging interactions.

THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF RELATIONAL WORK

Schools hold complex relational demands: long days, high expectations from families, pastoral duties outside traditional hours - particularly in schools with boarding facilities - and the emotional toll of supporting complex, and at times, unpredictable, student needs. Without structured wellbeing provisions, relational fatigue emerges. In practice, relational fatigue often presents in subtle but cumulative ways that can shape the wider emotional climate of a school. This can be presented as:

- short tempers or inconsistent expectations
- increased reliance on punitive responses rather than restorative conversations
- escalation cycles with dysregulated students
- staff absence and absenteeism
- a fragmenting of the community culture and dilution of shared values and ethos

IN PRACTICE, RELATIONAL FATIGUE OFTEN PRESENTS IN SUBTLE BUT CUMULATIVE WAYS THAT CAN SHAPE THE WIDER EMOTIONAL CLIMATE OF A SCHOOL.

These signs rarely reflect a lack of professionalism; rather, they highlight the emotional cost of sustained relational work in environments supporting complex SEMH needs. A whole school relational model depends on collectively regulated adults. Independent schools can adopt several highly effective, evidence informed, practical structures that support staff wellbeing and strengthen SEMH outcomes. These are often commonplace in special schools but underutilised in mainstream settings and the outcome is often a calmer, more reflective workforce.

BUILDING THE STRUCTURES; EMBEDDING THE PRACTICES

Clinical Style Supervision Models

In some specialist settings, staff undertake regular reflective supervision, much like professionals in social care or therapeutic disciplines. This provides a confidential space to:

- process challenging interactions
- reflect on students' emotional triggers
- explore their own responses and patterns
- stay grounded and relationally available

To translate the principles of reflective supervision into actionable structures, schools can adapt a range of approaches that fit their context, which can include:

- peer supervision
- pastoral supervision led by trained senior staff
- external supervisors on a termly, or otherwise agreed, basis
- group supervision for Teaching Assistants or Learning Support Assistants, tutors, pastoral staff or boarding staff

Each of these models provides a different route to the same aim: creating protected space for adults to process their work and remain emotionally available to students.

Reflective Practice Groups

Reflective practice groups encourage staff to step back, think about patterns of behaviour, and collaboratively problem solve. When implemented effectively, reflective practice groups offer several advantages that extend beyond individual problem-solving. They can:

- de-escalate a challenging situation before it turns into a crisis
- reduce staff blame and guilt
- improve understanding of trauma responses
- create aligned, relationally consistent teams
- strengthen a culture of curiosity over judgement; an essential mindset for SEMH work.

PROTECTED WELLBEING TIME

In many specialist settings, leaders understand that relational work is demanding. Many build in protected time or flexible workload adjustments after particularly challenging days, which supports staff in emotionally heavy roles. Both mainstream and special independent

schools can:

- timetable protected reflection time
- lighten non-essential workloads following significant incidents
- create calm, quiet and reflective for staff to decompress
- integrate wellbeing breaks into boarding rotas

I personally have always included a short debrief at the end of a school day. A moment of reflection, of offloading and discussing solutions so that no problem is taken home unresolved by staff. I shifted the end of the school day slightly earlier to protect this time for staff. On a Friday, we shared 'golden moments' which were the highlights of our working week, reminding us of all the valuable work we were doing and why we were doing it ahead of a well-deserved weekend reset.

EMOTIONAL COACHING FOR STAFF

Before staff can emotionally coach students, they need coaching themselves. Training in techniques such as recognising emotional triggers, naming feelings neutrally, slowing down interactions and modelling emotional repair empowers staff to respond rather than react. This practice protects students but also reduces the emotional load for staff. When I invested in training for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) with the intention of strengthening provision for students, it became evident that an unintended, yet highly beneficial outcome was the positive impact on staff themselves, illustrating how student focused interventions can indirectly strengthen the adult regulatory capacity within the school.

There is much learning to be had from special schools as they often operate as relational ecosystems. Training in trauma-informed practice, therapeutic engagement, and behaviour as communication is standard. Teams are cohesive: they reflect together, regulate together and maintain one another's emotional wellbeing, with an emphasis on shared language, shared strategies and shared recovery after difficult days. Mainstream independent schools can adopt these same principles by offering whole staff trauma training beyond those in pastoral roles, share debrief structures following high-stress events, provide opportunities for staff to practise coregulation techniques and adopt a leadership model of calm, containment and relational authority. Ultimately, these practices gain coherence through the culture shaped by school leaders, whose emotional presence sets the tone for the whole community.

LEADERSHIP AS THE ARCHITECT OF A SCHOOL'S EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

Headteachers are culture architects. For staff wellbeing to meaningfully contribute to the wider SEMH landscape, it can be helpful for schools to consider how it is supported both structurally and culturally. Senior leaders play a central role in shaping these conditions. By modelling emotionally literate leadership, recognising that SEMH

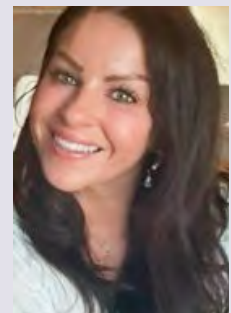
work requires resourcing and emotional-bandwidth, and creating permission for staff to seek help and decompress, leaders strengthen the conditions that enable staff to remain effective, resilient and relationally available. When leaders embed staff wellbeing into the architecture of the school - not as a supplementary component but as a core element of SEMH provision - students feel the benefit almost immediately. For leaders, the challenge often lies in balancing the demand to model calm relational authority with the realities and unpredictability of a school day.

To summarise, independent schools are uniquely positioned to lead the sector in innovative, relationally driven approaches to SEMH. By borrowing from the expertise of special schools, settings can transform the emotional landscape for both students and staff. The core idea is simple yet profound: When adults are prepared, regulated and supported, young people thrive. This invites us to consider what further structures, training, or cultural shifts are needed to sustain environments where regulated adults consistently shape thriving communities, while also challenging us to keep developing the adults at the heart of these environments so the impact can deepen over time.

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Hannah is the Head of SEND at ISA and an established leader in SEND education. She has extensive expertise across a broad spectrum of needs and a proven track record working in specialist and mainstream education nationally and locally. Hannah's work focuses on strategic improvement: by collaborating with leaders, practitioners, and wider stakeholders to enhance SEND provision, strengthen practice, and build capacity across education systems. Her leadership is driven by a commitment to ensuring high-quality and accessible support for all learners.





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ED PARKIN, ASSISTANT HEAD AT ASHLEY MANOR PREP

From Minecraft Club to ISA tournament success: Introducing esports at Ashley Manor Prep

At Ashley Manor Preparatory School in Cheltenham, opportunities often grow from the interests and enthusiasm of the children themselves. Our journey into esports is a good example of this. It did not begin as part of a grand initiative or carefully planned strategy, but more simply, through our popular Minecraft Club.

Ashley Manor Prep is a two-form entry preparatory school, and we are always looking for opportunities that engage children while building confidence, collaboration and curiosity. For several years, Minecraft Club has run as a weekly after-school activity and has remained very popular.

Children work together to build worlds, solve problems and share ideas. Spend a few minutes watching the club and it quickly becomes clear that this is far more than simply "playing a game". Children are constantly planning, communicating and adapting as they work together, demonstrating many of the same skills we aim to develop across the wider curriculum.

Within the club, different strengths naturally emerge. Some children take on leadership roles, helping others and explaining strategies. Others show creativity through ambitious builds, while some demonstrate real resilience

as they persist with complex challenges. The club provides a space where children can succeed in different ways and develop confidence, often without realising how much they are learning.

For many years, however, this remained an enrichment activity without any formal competitive pathway. That changed in the autumn term of 2025.

The introduction of the ISA Esports Competition provided the first opportunity for our children to experience structured competitive esports. What initially began as an opportunity for a small group of Year 6 children quickly grew into something that captured the attention of the wider school.

The competition used the 'Capture the Flag' format within Minecraft, transforming a familiar game into something far more strategic. Children who were used to building creatively suddenly needed to think tactically. Builders quickly became tacticians.

Each member of the team had a clear role. Some children focused on defending their base and protecting their flag, while others worked together to break through the opposition's defences. Success depended on careful

planning, communication and quick decision-making under pressure.

During the autumn term qualifying rounds, the team developed a strong sense of purpose. Sessions became more focused, with children discussing strategies, analysing their performances and reflecting on how they could improve. Just as importantly, the competition began to capture the imagination of the wider school community.

Younger year groups followed the team's progress with real interest. Conversations about matches and tactics began appearing in corridors and classrooms, and attendance at Minecraft Club increased as more children became curious about the competitive side of the game. The ISA competition, run in conjunction with Daigon Esports, had effectively introduced esports to Ashley Manor.

After successfully progressing through the weekly online rounds during the autumn term, the team qualified for the ISA National Esports Finals held at Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate in February. Travelling to York was an exciting experience for the children. What the children demonstrated throughout the day was exceptional. They communicated clearly, stayed calm under pressure and supported one another throughout every match. They faced incredibly strong opposition but worked hard to adapt to the challenges and worked together to find solutions. Their conduct and sportsmanship were excellent and reflected both their abilities and their character. Match by match, they progressed through the knockout stages and into the final.

When the team was announced as overall winners after a very close final, the sense of pride across the team and the wider school community was enormous. Yet perhaps the most important outcome was not simply the result itself. The competition had acted as a catalyst for introducing esports more widely across the school. Interest in competitive gaming as a structured activity had grown rapidly and given the children an opportunity that they may never have otherwise experienced.

An equally exciting outcome of the ISA victory was qualification for the School Esports World Championships, which will take place in Malta later this year. The opportunity to represent the school on an international stage is something the children are incredibly proud of and are eagerly looking forward to.

The success of the ISA programme has also opened further international opportunities. The Ashley Manor team have also since taken part in the ECIS Daigon Esports Competition 2026, organised by the Educational Collaborative for International Schools. Through this event, the children have competed against schools from countries including the United Kingdom, Kosovo, Germany and Malaysia and were delighted to achieve second place in the competition.

For the children involved, this has been a remarkable experience. Competing against schools from different parts of the world highlights the increasingly global nature of esports and allows children to connect and compete within a shared digital environment.

While the ISA success was an extraordinary moment, the broader impact across the school has been just as significant.

The team's journey has inspired younger children; many of whom now see esports as something they could aspire to themselves. Minecraft Club continues to grow, with children approaching it with even greater enthusiasm and purpose.

More importantly, the qualities demonstrated by the team — teamwork, resilience, communication and leadership — have become part of the wider conversation within the school.

Esports has provided another way for children to represent their school and experience success, allowing different strengths to be recognised and celebrated alongside more traditional academic and sporting achievements.

For schools considering esports, our experience suggests that success does not require a large programme or significant investment. What matters most is recognising the interests of children and providing a structured environment where those interests can develop into meaningful opportunities for teamwork, leadership and strategic thinking.

At Ashley Manor Prep, esports are now firmly part of that journey.



Ed Parkin, Assistant Head at Ashley Manor Prep

KATIE LOCKWOOD,
HEAD OF KIRKLEES ACADEMY

Rethinking the Independent Specialist in a Changing World

Independent specialist schools have long stood as vital sanctuaries of personalised provision—places where young people with complex needs receive support attuned to their cognitive, social, emotional and sensory profiles. Yet as we move towards 2030, the independent sector is undergoing fundamental transformation. Demand is quickly rising, legislation is shifting, political scrutiny is intensifying, and—most importantly—our learners' futures are changing faster than our educational systems.

To ensure these young people not only succeed but thrive in the world beyond school, specialist settings must brace for structural, pedagogical and cultural change.

Under Pressure and in Transition

The most significant shifts in the special needs landscape stem from the UK's forthcoming reforms to SEND provision. The 2026 Schools White Paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving marks the most ambitious redesign of SEN support since 2014. It addresses a system under “sustained pressure,” where EHCP waiting times exceed statutory limits and tribunal cases have hit record highs, with over 90% decided in favour of parents.

Key proposals¹ include:

- A shift towards inclusive mainstream practice supported by a tiered structure of universal, targeted, and specialist interventions with the emphasis on timely, time constrained, graduated support.
- Required SEND training for all teachers.
- A transition from EHCPs to digital Individual Support Plans from 2030, aiming for more agile, classroom embedded support.
- £4 billion in new investment, including an Inclusive Mainstream Fund and an Experts at Hand programme embedding specialists directly within settings.

For independent providers, these reforms bring both opportunity and challenge. They stand to play a crucial role in specialist and “Targeted Plus” tiers of support, yet new regulatory and funding expectations—particularly the requirement for local authorities to secure “reasonable” placement costs—require increased transparency, adaptability, and partnership building.



The pressures facing the sector are not abstract—they stem from substantial demographic and diagnostic shifts. As of 2024, 1.6 million pupils in England were identified with SEN, with the number of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) rising sharply year on year.

Teachers consistently report that both the volume and complexity of needs are increasing. A 2025 nationwide survey² found:

- 94% of teachers had more pupils with SEN/ALN/ASN in their classes.
- 95% reported needs that were more complex than five years earlier.
- Schools simultaneously employ fewer specialist staff, intensifying pressure on mainstream and specialist settings alike.

This reflects a landscape where independent specialists are no longer niche; they are critical pillars of the burdened national system.

Alongside rising demand, the independent sector faces heightened political attention. Spending on private SEN placements has risen dramatically—from £576 million in 2015–16 to a projected £1.8 billion in 2024–25³. Although the sector's expertise is indispensable, questions around sustainability and perceived profiteering continue to influence government discourse.

New funds to expand mainstream provision are welcome, but they may also reshape how young people are placed—potentially reducing future independent referrals while raising expectations for collaboration and cost effectiveness.

THE FUTURE WORKFORCE: A CALL TO REIMAGINE PREPARATION

The heart of this conversation, however, is not policy—it is learners. Preparing SEN learners for adulthood is perhaps the greatest unmet challenge of the current system.

Only 6% of SEND learners progress into meaningful employment, though 65% say they want a paid job⁴. This stark gap reflects not a lack of aspiration but a

chronic shortage of structured opportunities, employer engagement, personalised pathways, and confidence building interventions.

Research shows that early, positive contact with employers increases confidence, broadens horizons, and directly addresses misconceptions about disability and work. Programmes such as Inspiring the Future demonstrate that relatable role models—particularly professionals with disabilities—can transform self-belief in SEN learners.

Government guidance⁵ further emphasises the importance of early vocational profiling, from Year 9 onwards, to explore students' interests, strengths and realworld suitability for different career paths.

Emerging technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for SEN inclusion within future workplaces. Virtual reality initiatives help learners acquire employability skills in realistic, low stakes environments. These tools foster independence, enhance social communication, and accommodate diverse sensory needs—factors especially valuable for autistic and neurodivergent learners.

Industry created resources support schools in teaching key steps toward employment—from understanding job routes to planning personal transitions. These structured, scaffolded approaches help young people identify career stages; decisionpoints and the support networks needed for success.

WHAT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS MUST DO NEXT

To prepare SEN learners for a future defined by automation, fluid labour markets and increasing emphasis on digital competency, independent specialist schools must evolve in five key ways:

1. Embed Real Career Education into Core Curriculum

Career preparation cannot be an add-on or reserved for older students. It should be woven into personalised learning from early years onward, supported by vocational profiling and accessible employer engagement activities.

2. Forge Effective Partnerships with Employers

Linking with local and national businesses ensures students encounter realistic pathways into work. Schools should host structured employer-led workshops, digital encounters and supported placements—tools proven to increase confidence and aspiration.

3. Promote Assistive and Immersive Technologies

Adopting VR, adaptive software and personalised digital tools equips learners with both life skills and employability competencies. These technologies can simulate workplace tasks, provide experiential learning, and give students with anxiety or sensory barriers a safe environment to practise.

4. Strengthen Staff Training and Specialist Capacity

Mandatory SEND training across the workforce is a welcome reform, but independent schools must go further—cultivating expertise in neurodiversity, regulation strategies,

vocational pedagogy, and technology-assisted learning.

5. Champion Inclusive Narratives Across Society

Schools play a fundamental role in challenging stereotypes. Displaying positive role models, celebrating workplace success stories, and collaborating with supported employment services can create a culture where learners see employment as not only possible, but expected.

A SHARED MISSION FOR THE FUTURE

Independent specialist SEN schools stand at the intersection of rising need, ambitious reform, and growing societal expectation. The reforms of 2026 may reshape funding and structure, but the deeper imperative remains unchanged: to honour the potential and dignity of every young person.

The world our learners are entering is dynamic, digitised, and interconnected. Our responsibility is to ensure they are not merely prepared to navigate it but empowered to shape it.

Through courageous leadership, genuine partnership and unshakeable belief in the abilities of SEN learners, independent schools can help build a society where difference is not accommodated—but valued; where barriers are not lowered—but dismantled; and where every student is given the tools, the confidence and the opportunity to craft a purposeful, fulfilling future.

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03 June 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

Marketing and PR



Marketing and Admissions -
Maximising your output

04 June 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

Senior Leadership Pathway [SLP]



[LP/SLP] Leadership:

Releasing your inner leader

08 June 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

SEND



SEND: Processing styles and memory

15 June 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

Inspections



Inspections: The ISI Framework – an overview (9:30-12:30)

10 Jun 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

SEMH

PSHE – a different approach



12 June 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

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KATHERINE SYMONDS-MOORE, CHAIR OF GOVERNORS AT LUMIAR SCHOOL

Benefitting from ISA Preferred Suppliers and a responsive membership

No doubt the recent changes to business rates cost your school money. It certainly cost us at Lumiar School in Wiltshire and on our tight budget, it represented quite a hit.

Lumiar is a small school, although we've had a material change inspection recently and have just reached the dizzy heights of fifty pupils on roll. We've only been in existence for a few years, and we've had to be very nimble in the way we manage our finances to support our ambitions and our growth – and as our ambition is to change the entire UK educational landscape, we need every penny we can get!

Our fees are deliberately low, as our mission obliges us to operate on a similar budget to state schools. So, in addition to the unwelcome addition of VAT to fees, when our business rate discount was withdrawn there was the challenge of business rate costs jumping from £85pcm to £495pcm. For some schools that might well be a small amount, but in our context, it is a significant sum. In percentage terms, of course, your school might be affected to the same extent that we are and be equally concerned about the extra business rate costs.

What we didn't know, until approached out of the blue, was that we might be able to challenge the business rate assessment and save some of that unwelcome additional cost that brings no benefit to our schools or our pupils. As a small school, we don't yet have a bursar or business manager and currently it is committed governors who take on much of the financial planning.

What a pleasant surprise it was for Katherine, our Chair of Governors, to get a cold call from an accredited RICS surveyor about potentially significant savings on business rates. A lengthy call identified a potential refund of business rates possibly overpaid in the past and a reduction in our ongoing business rates bill. The total estimated savings was £9,500 over a couple of years, and all for a commission based on no win, no fee. The company followed up with a detailed email describing their "Ethical and Regulated approach", regulated by two professional bodies and adhering to strict rules of conduct. Their fee would be discounted from their normal rate, and they identified a list of schools whom they'd helped to save money.

How enticing! It took "enormous resource, in terms of both software development and staffing" to offer us this

service, but thanks to them we could anticipate “only 4-10 weeks for the monies to be refunded back into YOUR bank account, we will then send our invoice... on a completely no win no fee basis, our fee is 32.5%+vat of the savings we create”.

They also provided an explanation of the business rates system that Katherine might find “helpful for your finance team”... Oh, to be in the position of Lumiar School having a finance person let alone a finance team, but Katherine shared the information with Stuart, another governor who works alongside her to plan and manage the school’s finances. As she put it, “We’re currently getting 100% of nothing, and have 2/3 of several thousand pounds to gain if they succeed, so can you think of any reason not to give the go ahead?”

Stuart has been involved with ISA for many years and was interested not only to read the firm’s claims of money saving, but of having worked effectively with other ISA schools. Cue the response that so many of us know so well...“Contact ISA!”. In this case, it meant contacting friendly heads at Thomas’s Battersea and the OF Group to ask if they knew the firm that had contacted Katherine, as well as an email to Peter Woodroffe asking if the ISA preferred supplier, JMA Surveyors, that Stuart had spotted on the ISA website, might be able to offer this type of service too.

WITHIN 24 HOURS OF ACTING ON JMA’S ADVICE THE LUMIAR CHARITY WAS £4,600 RICHER AND OUR ONGOING RATE HAS BEEN TRIMMED BY 85%.

In true ISA fashion, answers arrived quickly. Whilst the firm looked to have all the right credentials, neither school could recall having worked with them. Peter, however, was confident that JMA would be able to help and would be likely to offer a discounted rate as an ISA preferred supplier.

Katherine forwarded our business rates query to JMA, who asked for a few additional details before pointing her to a form on our local authority website that she was quite capable of filling out herself. JMA charged us a grand total of nothing for this guidance. Within 24 hours of acting on JMA’s advice the Lumiar charity was £4,600 richer and our ongoing rate has been trimmed by 85%. A significant saving for us, of which we were about to give 1/3 to someone else!

Thanks to JMA, Lumiar will be able to move more quickly to change the UK educational landscape. Before too long we hope we’ll need professional surveyors and no surprises about whom we’ll approach first.

Thank you, ISA fellow heads; thank you, ISA HQ; and thank you, ISA preferred suppliers!



Stuart Nicholson, whilst enjoying three headships in ISA schools, served in ISA regional positions as well as on the National Executive and as the Association Chair. His ISA links continue as a governor at

Lumiar School, and as one of the ISA Independent Trustees. As a consultant, he maintains his 20-year mission to help schools understand regulations and stay compliant with inspections.

Katherine Symonds-Moor chairs the governing body of Lumiar School. She is a corporate sustainability consultant with two decades’ experience helping large organisations like Tesco, Coca-Cola and Greggs to address their social and



environmental impacts. She met Lumiar’s head, Claire Walker, in 2020 and immediately knew that she had found someone doing something very special. She moved both her children to the school and has been helping it to grow and thrive ever since.



Helping Schools Save:

A guide to delivering cost-effective school meals.

Inflation and rising food costs are creating unprecedented challenges in the education market - our innovative solution delivers exceptional meal quality, streamlined operations and significant cost savings.

We've created a free guide packed full of useful information and guidance on how to effectively manage and reduce the rising cost of school catering.

Sign up for access here:





Includes tips on how to
save 20%
on your catering.

Explore the benefits of
**Prepared Meal
Solutions.**

Discover how to tackle
Food Waste
and how we can help.

We've had the chance to enjoy some fantastic performances over the term across Drama, A Cappella, Shakespeare Monologue, and Musical Theatre. It's been great to see so much talent and enthusiasm on stage. Well done to everyone who took part, and a huge congratulations to all the winners. You can find the full results on our website.

COMPETITIONS NOW OPEN

MINIBEAST COMPETITION

DEADLINE: 20 May
Open to EYFS – KS2

SCRAPBOOK CHALLENGE

DEADLINE: 8 June
Open to all ages

TO STAY UP TO DATE WITH NEWSLETTERS AND COMPETITION REMINDERS, SUBSCRIBE TO OUR MAILING LISTS: TICK THE BOX FOR ARTS EMAILS IN YOUR ACCOUNT'S CONTACT PREFERENCE ON THE ISA WEBSITE.

Follow us on X and Instagram
@ISAartsUK for more updates.

X @ISAartsUK

Instagram isaartsuk



Lycée International de Londres
Winston Churchill (LN)

At the end of March, we held our first in-person STEM final, which was a really successful and enjoyable day. Students impressed us with their creativity, innovation and thoughtful ideas while presenting their projects. Some of the challenges included designing a paper rollercoaster that can support a marble (Years 3–4) and creating a toiletry item that is accessible for people with a disability (Years 7–9). If your school didn't take part this time, be sure to check out our website to learn more and get involved in the future.

Well done as well to everyone who entered the Easter Hat Competition—we received so many imaginative and colourful creations, and it was clear a lot of effort went into them.



Myddelton College (N)



Old Vicarage School (M)

ISA INCLUSIVE ARTS FESTIVAL PROJECT:

We are currently exploring the creation of an ISA Inclusive Arts Festival. A non-competitive and fully inclusive event designed specifically for students with SEND. Our vision is to create an environment where pupils can participate in a range of creative arts activities in a supportive and inspiring setting.

At this stage, we are gathering expressions of interest and ideas, and we greatly value your input on the current ISA Arts offer. If you have any feedback, please share your thoughts and suggestions with us to help us meet the needs of your students.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope this is something your school may be excited to be involved in.

COMIC STRIP 2026 COMPETITION

For this year’s comic strip competition, students explored a range of themes: *Animal Picnic* (Years 1–4), *Finding Courage* (Years 5–6), *Smart Social Media Use* (Years 7–9), and *Famous Figures* (Years 10–13). We were really impressed by the ideas and storytelling across all age groups.

Below are some of the winning entries, including work from Maryam D from Jameah Girls Academy (M) - first place Year 1-4 and Archie B from Holme Grange School (LW)- first place Year 7-9.



Archie B from Holme Grange School



Maryam D from Jameah Girls Academy (M)

For more information about all our events, including the ISA Arts Calendar for 2026-2027 year, please visit our website. If you have any questions, please contact: isaarts@isaschools.org.uk

NATIONAL EVENTS

SKIING

U9-U18 - Hemel Hempstead - 28 September 2026

FOOTBALL

U14/U16 - Boys - Nottingham- January 2027

U11/U13/U15 Boys - LVS Ascot - March 2027

U11 Boys - St George's Park - March 2027

U13 Girls - Lingfield College - 05 May 2026

U13 Girls - Dixie Grammar School - 06 May 2026

U11/U13/U15 Girls - LVS Ascot - September 2026

SAILING

U9-U18 - Draycote Water - 01 October 2026

ESPORTS

U9 - U16 - Remote Rounds and Final - Nov 2025 & Feb 2026

HOCKEY

U11 Girls - Lee Valley - 3 November 2026

U13 Girls - Lee Valley - 5 November 2026

U15 Girls - Lee Valley - 10 November 2026

U11 Boys - Lee Valley - 02 February 2027

U13 Boys - Lee Valley - 04 February 2027

U15 Boys - Lee Valley - 09 February 2027

RUGBY

U16 Boys Open - Westonbirt School - February 2027

U15 Boys - Market Bosworth - February 2027

U14 Boys - Venue TBC - February 2027

U18 Boys - Venue TBC - March 2027

U13 Boys - Venue TBC - March 2027

U12 Boys - Teddington - 16 March 2027

U14/U16 Girls - Teddington - March 2027

U10/U11 - Colchester - 06 November 2026

BADMINTON

U13/U15 - Nottingham- November 2026

U15/U17 - Nottingham- November 2026

SQUASH

U13/ U16 - Wycliffe College - 23 November 2026

SWIMMING

U9 - U18 - London Olympic Pool - 27 November 2026

TABLE TENNIS

U11/U13 - Nottingham- January 2027

U13/U15 - Nottingham- January 2027

Cross Country

National Finals - Himley Hall, Dudley - Feb/March 2027

NETBALL

U11 - King's High, Warwick - March 2027

U13 - King's High, Warwick - March 2027

U14 - Nottingham - March 2027

U16 - Nottingham - March 2027

U18 - Nottingham - March 2027

CLAY PIGEON

U13-U18 - Hartpury, Gloucestershire – 25 September 2026

TRIATHLON

U9-U18 - Ipswich High School- 01 May 2026

TENNIS

U13 - New Hall School, Chelmsford - 07 May 2026

U15 - New Hall School, Chelmsford - 08 May 2026

EQUESTRIAN

U9 - U18 - Princethorpe College - 23 & 24 May 2026

GYMNASTICS

U9/U11 - Adcote School, Shrewsbury- 10 May 2026

CRICKET

U15 Boys - St James Boys' Ashford - 10 June 2026

U15 Girls - Gosfield School - 11 June 2026

U13 Girls - Gosfield School - 16 June 2026

U13 Boys - St James Boys' Ashford - 18 June 2026

GOLF

U18 - Royal Hospital School - 18 June 2026

TOUCH RUGBY

U13/U15 - Oxford RFC - 09 June 2026

ATHLETICS

National Finals - Birmingham - 15 June 2026

INCLUSIVE FESTIVAL (SEND)

U11 - U14 Finborough School, Suffolk - 01 May 2026

U12/U13 - Leighton Park, Reading - 16 June 2026

U11 - U16 - Nottingham - 22 & 23 June 2026

AREA SPORTS COORDINATORS

EAST ANGLIA

Marc Holland | Woodlands School, Hutton Manor

LONDON NORTH

Sophie Martin | Kingshott School

LONDON SOUTH

Graham Herbert | Duke of Kent School

LONDON WEST

Kevin Long | Boundary Oak School

MIDLANDS

Sarah Dicksee | Dixie Grammar School

Neil McCollin | Princethorpe College

NORTH

Nick McMahon | Hipperholme Grammar

SOUTH WEST

Simon Ward | Kingsley School, Bideford

Follow us on X @ISAsportUK
and Instagram @isaschoolssport for more updates.





Lady Barn House (North)

ISA NATIONAL FINAL SUCCESS!

ISA U11 National Netball Final Champions
Lady Barn House (North)
11 March 2026

ISA U13 National Netball Final Champions
King's High School, Warwick (Midlands)
13 March 2026

ISA U11 Boys Football Final Champions
Gatehouse School (London North)
20 March 2026

WHAT A DAY AT HIMLEY HALL!

The ISA National Cross Country Finals took place on Saturday, 28 February 2026, at the historic Himley Hall in Dudley. The event brought together 542 talented young runners from 158 different ISA schools across the country. Students competed in 10 challenging, muddy races ranging from Year 4 through to Year 11. Adding to the prestige of the day, Great Britain 800m athlete Alex Bell attended as the special guest of honour. The Olympic finalist spent the afternoon inspiring the next generation of runners and handing out medals to the podium finishers.

THANK YOU, TETTENHALL COLLEGE

Special thanks to staff and students from Tettenhall College who volunteered their valuable time to help with the running of the event.

AREA POSITIONS

Senior Girls	1. ISA Midlands
	2. ISA London West
	3. ISA South West
Senior Boys	1. ISA London West
	2. ISA Midlands
	3. ISA South West
Junior Girls	1. ISA London West
	2. ISA South West
	3. ISA London North
Junior Boys	1. ISA Midlands
	2. ISA London West
	3. ISA East Anglia

Overall winner: ISA London West



DR VANESSA MITCHELL,
VICE PRINCIPAL AT
BLANCHELANDE COLLEGE

Rethinking SEMH in Independent Schools



I'm sure you'll recognise the following in your classroom: The high achiever who hands in every piece of work on time but paralysed by fear of failure. The polite child who never challenges an adult but quietly withdraws. The young person with immaculate uniform and outstanding grades but rising anxiety.

SEMH does not always look like disruption. More often, it looks like compliance. It is hidden. Hidden amongst meeting high expectations and standards. Anxiety and dysregulation. Perfectionism and emotional fragility. This presents us with a challenge. When SEMH is subtle, high-functioning and masked by performance, I think our instinctive response can be to soften our expectations. "Let's not add pressure". We question whether firm boundaries are appropriate. "Let's look at how we can adjust to prevent escalation" I've been there. It feels like the right thing, doesn't it? I've found students experiencing SEMH difficulties frequently need the opposite of softer and adjusted standards. And I say that because, to me:

Clear routines reduce cognitive load.

Predictable systems reduce anxiety.

Consistent adult responses reduce confusion.

As I see it, setting standards is far from the opposite of support. It is the structure that makes support even better. When expectations adjust depending on mood or circumstance, uncertainty and anxiety increase. These young people are already managing internal instability; therefore, greater uncertainty can potentially be deeply unsettling.

In independent schools, academic aspiration is high and parental expectations are significant. This

can leave us under enormous pressure to bend over backwards to support by making individualised adjustments. As a pastoral team we are navigating complex conversations - how do we maintain rigour while responding to vulnerability? How do we maintain that line which protects staff confidence while acknowledging genuine distress? How do we tread that line of not being too rigid but avoiding the drift in our standards and expectations?

HOW DO WE MAINTAIN RIGOUR WHILE RESPONDING TO VULNERABILITY?

Experience has shown me that compassion without clarity (*however well-intentioned*) can, over time, erode culture. When goal posts change unpredictably, staff feel unsure. When expectations and inconsistent, students





notice. When us as leaders appear unsure, confidence can be lost by all stakeholders. The impact? Those we seek to support end up feeling less secure, not more.

WHEN EXPECTATIONS AND INCONSISTENT, STUDENTS NOTICE.

I'm not suggesting that flexibility isn't a great tool in the kit. Nor am I dismissing the rise or seriousness of mental health needs in the school environment. Rather, I wish to suggest (*perhaps controversially?*) that emotional safety and consistent standards and expectations are not in tension but are interdependent.

Throughout my career, some of the most effective provision I have seen is not characterised by relaxed standards, but by strong, consistent relationships and robust systems. I am myself a self-confessed systems geek. I have seen the benefit of clear systems in schools which have helped build strong relationships and excellent communication. When systems are transparent, when consequences are delivered calmly and predictably by colleagues and when communication with parents is upfront, honest and grounded in values, trust and culture remain strong.

There is also a leadership dimension that cannot be ignored. SEMH is not solely a pastoral responsibility. It is a cultural one. As leaders we set the temperature of a school. If we appear uncertain about our standards, others will be too. We must model calm conviction which is warm and predictable but firm.

I currently lead in an all-through context. Therefore, I consider the above to be even more important. Transitions from Junior to Senior, and from Senior to

Sixth Form, are moments of emotional vulnerability. If there are no trusted systems or expectations alter dramatically or are inconsistently applied across phases, anxiety increases. But, when our students experience a coherent culture in which values, boundaries and relationships travel with them, belonging deepens and anxiety lessens.

So, I say, students whose struggles are most hidden often need the clearest structures. Supporting them needs confidence that the systems they rely on will hold. As leaders of independent schools, we pride ourselves on our strong relationships and high standards. Therefore, my call to action is not to choose between these. The most caring schools are not the loosest ones. They are the clearest.

Dr Vanessa Mitchell is Vice Principal at Blanchelande College in Guernsey, Channel Islands and a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching. A finalist for Pastoral Leader of the Year (2022), she has over fifteen years' experience in pastoral and whole-school leadership across the independent sector in the UK and Middle East. Her passion lies in school culture, student agency, and pastoral leadership, with a particular interest in how high expectations and compassionate care work together to support both student and staff wellbeing.



FROM FESTIVAL TO FORUM:

How Holme Grange is growing its sustainability community

An award win is easy to celebrate and move on from. Holme Grange School hasn't done that. Alex Glendinning spoke with the Holme Grange team about SustainFest, what the ISA recognition has meant in practice, and why they're already thinking about 2027.

What do you feel are the key impacts of SustainFest on your parents, pupils and the wider community?

SustainFest has created a strong sense of hope, positivity and action across our entire community. It encourages involvement from parents, pupils and visitors of all ages, empowering them to engage with sustainability in a meaningful and practical way.

The event provides an opportunity for people to discover initiatives, charities and organisations they may not have been aware of before, particularly those available locally. It also promotes important themes such as reducing food waste and making more sustainable lifestyle choices.

Importantly, SustainFest brings together like minded individuals with a shared purpose. It fosters a sense of collaboration and community, giving people the confidence and inspiration to take ideas further beyond the event itself.

SustainFest had a focus on experiential learning. What was the motivation behind this approach?

Our approach was driven by the belief that learning through doing has the greatest impact. Experiential learning allows sustainability to become tangible, memorable and engaging for all age groups.

For example, activities such as Year 9 pupils repairing electronics not only develop practical skills but also spark curiosity and conversation. This hands-on approach creates a real buzz within the school and wider community, making the learning experience more meaningful and long lasting.

In terms of the school's profile, how have you felt the impact of your win from last year?

Winning the award has significantly raised the school's profile and positioned us as a leading voice in sustainability within the education sector.

Our Sustainability Lead, Leanne Hughes, now co leads a sustainability forum for the ISA alongside another ISA member. The forum takes place once a term and provides a valuable opportunity to share best practice and expertise with other schools.

We have also seen increased engagement from the wider community. Stallholders and partners are keen to return and be involved again, and other schools and organisations are reaching out to learn from our approach. This recognition has opened up valuable conversations and strengthened collaborative opportunities.

What advice would you give to those entering the award this year?

Showcase everything you are doing, no matter how big or small. It is important to demonstrate the full scope of your sustainability efforts.

Most importantly, involve your pupils. Their voice, ideas and engagement are key to demonstrating genuine impact and authenticity. Giving pupils ownership of initiatives makes the work more meaningful and powerful.

What are the next steps in sustainability for Holme Grange this year, and do you plan on applying for the Awards again?

We absolutely plan to apply again. SustainFest will continue to grow, with plans already underway to make it bigger and better, particularly as we look ahead to 2027. Our next steps include increasing involvement from the wider community, collaborating with more local schools, and further embedding sustainability within the curriculum. We are also establishing a sustainability committee made up of pupils, parents and staff to help drive future initiatives and ensure continued progress.

How did you celebrate when you found out you won?

We shared the news through a press release and celebrated it widely across our community, especially with those who made it possible. It was important to recognise and thank everyone who played a part in making SustainFest such a success.

Most importantly, we made it clear to our pupils that this achievement was about them. Their passion, ideas and commitment were at the heart of everything, and we wanted them to feel a real sense of pride and ownership.



Alex Glendinning
Marketing and Events Assistant
alex.glendinning@isaschools.org.uk

Becoming a 'Tooled Up Education' School

Not just a product, but a proactive philosophy

School leaders today are navigating an increasingly complex landscape. Rising concerns around pupil wellbeing sit alongside growing expectations from parents, all within the reality of limited time and stretched resources. The challenge is not a lack of initiatives, but instead, identifying approaches that genuinely support the whole school community without adding to workload.

At a recent ISA event, a delegate viewing the 'Tooled Up' platform for the first time, said to me, *"I'm sold. What's the catch?"*.

Schools are rightly cautious. They are looking for good value solutions that are not only evidence-informed, but also practical and capable of delivering meaningful impact.

Tooled Up Education was founded in 2018 with the clear aim of bridging the gap between research and real life. Drawing on established evidence around the powerful, yet often underutilised, role of parental engagement, we set out to create a shared space where educators and families could access high-quality, practical guidance grounded in research.

We began with pilot resources designed to translate professional knowledge into everyday strategies for families. These focused on subjects like supporting reading at home or embedding mathematical thinking into daily routines. What quickly became apparent was the appetite for credible, actionable guidance.

The pandemic accelerated this work. As schools responded to unprecedented challenges, we collaborated with researchers to develop resources addressing mental health, resilience, family dynamics and children's digital diets. During this period, a notable shift occurred, schools gained a renewed insight into the importance of the home and school partnership.

The re-opening of schools coincided with an increase in complex mental needs in pupils. In response, we expanded our focus, supporting schools with tips that addressed these challenges while also asking a broader question: how do we equip children not just to cope, but to thrive?

This question marked a defining shift in our approach. Tooled Up became not simply a provider of resources, but a platform centred on psychological tools for life.

In practice, our member schools use Tooled Up in ways that are both strategic and efficient. They signpost parents to clear, research-informed guidance, reducing the need for repeated conversations. Pastoral teams have ready-to-use, expert-backed resources on complex issues, enabling them to respond with confidence. Educators save time through access to high-quality content that can be shared directly with families, rather than created from scratch.

At a whole-school level, this creates a more coherent culture, underpinned by a shared, evidence-based approach to wellbeing and learning.

Our work at Tooled Up extends beyond the UK, into Europe, Asia, and North America. Such partnerships have reinforced the universality of many of the challenges facing young people and has enriched our understanding of how cultural context shapes the way families engage with schools.

It has also helped us turn our attention to a new and pressing challenge: how to harness technological advancement without compromising quality in a landscape where AI can generate instant answers of varying reliability, schools and families need sources they can really trust.

This is where our new innovative tool, *Tula* comes in (Tooled Up Learning Assistant). Rather than searching the open internet, Tula operates exclusively within Tooled Up's curated, evidence-based platform. Members ask questions and receive responses grounded in research and delivered quickly, in the user's own language. Tula helps to bridge the gap between the speed of modern technology and the rigour of academic evidence.

Becoming a 'Tooled Up' school, therefore, is not just about adopting another platform. It is about embedding a shared language and a practical framework that supports everyone involved in a child's development. It is about creating a culture in which research is not abstract but actionable, a space where parents feel empowered rather than overwhelmed and where school staff feel supported rather than stretched. Tooled Up is not just something you buy, but instead, 'buy into'.

As I told the interested delegate at the ISA conference, *there's no catch*. There is, however, a commitment to maintaining the highest standards of evidence, to evolving in relation to live challenges in a complex world, and to ensuring that pupils are properly equipped not just for school, but for life.

Here are some comments from a selection of ISA members that attended the recent Heads' Conference and who gave feedback:

"Tooled Up is our safety net."

"We've been unsubscribing from lots of platforms, but we won't unsubscribe from Tooled Up, because we use you every single week."

"We use Tooled Up for everything and in particular, enjoy the valuable CPD for our staff."



If you would like to request a tour of our platform or would welcome being put in touch with other ISA schools using Tooled Up, we would love to hear from you. Do get in touch.

Dr Kathy Weston

CEO and Founder, Tooled Up Education
www.tooledupeducation.com

JANE KENDRICK, PSHE AND CAREERS
LEAD AT HEATHFIELD KNOLL SCHOOL

Developing Skills for the Future: A Whole-School Approach to Careers Week

Careers education is sometimes perceived as something that happens only in the later years of secondary school, when pupils begin to think seriously about qualifications, university choices or employment pathways. However, our recent whole-school Careers Week sought to challenge that assumption by demonstrating that the foundations of career readiness begin much earlier. By focusing on transferable skills and practical experiences, we created opportunities for pupils from Reception to Sixth Form to explore the skills they already possess and consider how these skills will support their future aspirations.

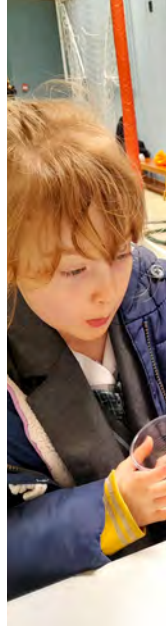
Our approach was deliberately structured to ensure that careers education was not simply about listening to presentations or meeting visitors. Instead, pupils were encouraged to engage actively through problem-solving, collaboration, reflection and leadership. The week was built around three key strands: Skills Sprints, Skills Studios and Skills Arcades, each designed to develop and reinforce the transferable skills that underpin success in education, employment and life more broadly.

A STRUCTURED FRAMEWORK FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

One of the key priorities when planning the week was to ensure that activities were purposeful and progressive across the different age groups. While younger pupils explored skills through play and creativity, older pupils were challenged to apply these same skills in more complex and reflective contexts.

Each class began the week with a whole-school assembly introducing the concept of transferable skills and explaining why these skills are valued by employers and further education providers. Pupils were encouraged to think about skills such as communication, teamwork, resilience, adaptability and leadership, and how these qualities can be developed through everyday experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

Throughout the week, pupils participated in Skills Sprints. These 20-minute sessions provided quick, engaging opportunities to practise specific skills. Alongside the



Skills Sprints, each class also took part in several longer sessions known as Skills Studios. These extended activities allowed pupils to explore skills in greater depth through collaborative challenges and project-based tasks.

The sessions offered during Careers Week gave all pupils an opportunity to engage with the activities and explore their developing skills. Where pupils had identified SEND profiles, some activities were thoughtfully adapted so that they could participate confidently and meaningfully. This sometimes involved adjusting task structure, providing additional guidance or allowing pupils to approach activities in ways that best supported their learning.

SKILLS IN ACTION ACROSS THE SCHOOL

For our youngest pupils, the focus was on building confidence, communication and cooperation. Activities included imaginative role-play scenarios where pupils worked together to organise simple events, create structures or design solutions. These experiences helped pupils recognise that everyday skills, such as listening, sharing ideas and trying again, are used in many professions.

In KS2, pupils took part in structured challenges designed to develop planning, leadership and problem-solving. Pupils worked together to organise events, solve puzzles and manage limited resources.

For pupils in KS3, the focus shifted towards independence and decision-making. Activities included scenario-based challenges where pupils justified their choices. In one session, pupils planned a school event before being told that circumstances had changed; perhaps a key resource had been removed or time reduced. Groups adapted their plans accordingly, demonstrating resilience and flexibility.

KS4 pupils explored skills in contexts that mirrored the workplace. Sessions focused on communication, decision-making and reflection. Pupils considered workplace scenarios, evaluated solutions and discussed consequences, helping them recognise that



many workplace skills are developed through everyday school experiences.

RECORDING AND REFLECTING ON SKILLS

An important feature of the week was helping pupils to recognise and articulate the skills they were developing. Pupils used Skills Passports to record examples of when they had demonstrated specific transferable skills, creating a clear record of their progress. This encouraged pupils to reflect on how they had used skills such as teamwork, communication, planning and adaptability. Staff and pupil leaders acknowledged achievements with stamps or feedback, helping pupils to build confidence in their abilities.

By the end of the week, pupils had accumulated reflections showing how they had applied skills in different situations. This reinforced the importance of transferable skills and helped pupils develop the language needed to describe their strengths with confidence.

LEARNING FROM EXTERNAL VISITORS

While the week placed a strong emphasis on internally delivered activities, external visitors, such as Worcestershire Apprenticeships and local HE and FE colleges, also played an important role in helping pupils understand how skills translate into real careers.

Following mock interviews, our Year 10 pupils completed reflection diaries, considering the questions they were asked, the feedback they received and how their preparation, including CVs and covering letters, supported them. This helped pupils recognise strengths and areas for development as they prepare for work experience and future interviews.

PUPIL LEADERSHIP AND WHOLE-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Another successful element of the week was the introduction of Skills Arcades, which took place at lunchtime and were run by Year 10 House Captains.

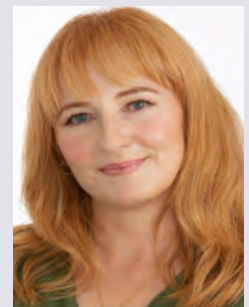
These short, energetic challenges allowed pupils from across the school to take part in activities focused on teamwork, listening and problem-solving, which helped create meaningful leadership opportunities while reinforcing a collaborative ethos.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our Careers Week demonstrated that meaningful careers education can be embedded throughout the school experience rather than confined to isolated events. By focusing on transferable skills and providing opportunities to practise and reflect on these skills, we created a programme that was engaging and appropriate for all age groups.

As educators, our role is not simply to introduce pupils to potential careers, but to help them understand and value the skills that will enable them to pursue those opportunities with confidence. Perhaps Megan, Y10 House Captain, summed it up perfectly when she said, 'it was great to see students from across the whole school working together and challenging themselves'.

Jane Kendrick is School Lead for PSHE and Careers Education and Subject Leader for Food and Nutrition at Heathfield Knoll School in Kidderminster. She has worked in education since 1993 in schools across Kent and the West Midlands and has held leadership roles including Trust Director of Sixth Form, Vice Principal for Teaching and Learning and Head of Faculty. She is passionate about helping pupils from Key Stages 1-5 develop transferable skills and realise their academic and aspirational potential.



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WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

NEW MEMBERS

New Members

Community Ed Academy	Sally Alden	East
Gurukula - The Hare Krishna Primary School	Gwyneth Milan	London North
Downsend School	Sally Johnston	London South
Elysian Liss	Joanna Mumford	London South
PhoenixPlace	Sophie Nelson	London South
Miller House School	Gaynor Donley-Williams	Midlands
St Michael Abbey School	Matt Hire	Midlands
Bradford Beacon	Ian Williams	North
Allerthorpe School	Sarah Grove	North
Imam Muhammad Zakariya School	Ayesha Desai	North
Strawberry Lane School	Adam Price	North
Avonside School	Christina Darkes	South West
Manor Wood School	Mohammed Awan	South West

TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP

Beehive Preparatory School	Heilandi Jansen	London North
Buxlow School	Ciarren Littler	London North
Ealing Independent College	Zoe Jarvis	London North
Northbridge House Senior School	Christopher Jones	London North
Salcombe Prep School	Roshan Adams	London North
St James Senior Girls School	Helen de Matttos	London North
Babington House School	David Laird	London South
Courtlands Independent Special School	Mark Birkbeck	London South
Wandsworth Preparatory School	Jo Pache	London South
Hall School Wimbledon	Jack Tyson	London West
Leighton Park School	Luke Walters	London West
Lloyd Williamson Schools	Shirley Drummond	London West
Luckley House School	Claire Gilding-Brant	London West
Napier School	Neil Kefford	London West
New Barn School	Krishna Purbhoo	London West
Thomas's Battersea School	Rupert Hawkins	London West
Thomas's College Richmond	Will Le Fleming	London West
Westbury House School	Sarah Nunn	London West
Hollygirt School	Rebecca Purdy	Midlands
St Michael Abbey School	Matt Hire	Midlands
The Shrubbery School	Leanne Crump	Midlands
Worksop College	Charles Bailey	Midlands
Maranatha Christian School	David Robinson	South West
Polwhele House School	Mark Clutsom	South West
St Christopher's Staverton	Carl Shuttleworth	South West
Westbourne School	Rachel Rees	South West

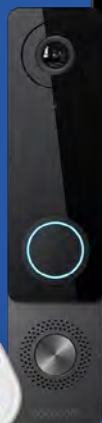
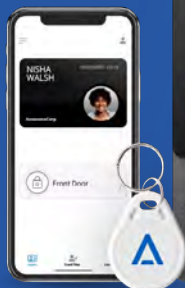
HONORARY MEMBERS

Dionne Seagrove
Clare King

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ISA Awards

The ISA Awards are now open, and will this year feature a new category for specialist SEND provision. Entries close on 23 July 2026 and we will announce the finalists in mid-September later this year. The ISA Awards Ceremony is held annually alongside our Autumn Study Conference, which this year takes place on 18-19 November 2026.

The popularity of the Awards reflects the growth of our Association as we continue to celebrate the brilliant independent schools that ignite minds and inspire futures. Categories reflect the breadth of provision in ISA Members' schools – highlighting the importance of diversity amongst our membership.

Find out more, including category details and last year's feedback by scanning here:



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 WINNERS

Congratulations to last year's winners, who represent excellence and innovation. These schools are recognised for their commitment to nurturing young minds, fostering creativity and inspiring the changemakers of tomorrow.

ISA Award for Outstanding Engagement in the Community

Winner: Moon Hall School

ISA Award for Future Readiness

Winner: St David's Preparatory School

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ISA Award for Outstanding Sport (Small School)

Mylnhurst Catholic Preparatory School and Nursery

ISA Award for Outstanding Sport (Large School)

Stafford Grammar School

ISA SEND School of the Year Award

Beech Lodge School

ISA Award for International Provision (NEW)

North London Grammar School

ISA Award for Excellence and Innovation in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

TASIS England

ISA Award for Excellence and Innovation in Mental Health and Wellbeing

Kings Oxford

ISA Award for Excellence in Sustainability

Holme Grange School

ISA Award for Excellence in Performing Arts

Stafford Grammar School

ISA Award for Excellence in Fine Arts and Design

Ballard School

ISA Award for Innovation in Independent Education

St Olave's School

ISA Award for Excellence and Innovation in Early Years

Liberty Woodland School

ISA Junior School of the Year Award

Forest Park School

ISA Senior School of the Year Award

King's High School, Warwick



PHILIP REYNOLDS, ISA HEAD OF PRESS

A headstart for happiness

The past decade has seen mental health and well-being issues become priority challenges for schools across the country. *Philip Reynolds*, ISA head of press, spoke to Dr Rebecca Ashcroft, head teacher at Red House School, after it recently won two accolades – the Silver School Mental Health Award and the Rainbow Flag Award - for its approach to both.

WHEN AND WHY DID RED HOUSE START TO PUT INITIATIVES IN PLACE FOR MENTAL HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND LGBT+ INCLUSION?

Our work in this area didn't begin as a single 'initiative moment' but rather evolved in response to wider national trends.

Following the Bronze School Mental Health Award in 2021, we began to formalise and strengthen what had already been a strong pastoral culture. From 2022 onwards, this became more structured with the

appointment of a whole school director of well-being and pastoral care, staff wellness ambassadors across both sites, a well-being lead in our Junior School, and the embedding of well-being within the School Development Plan.

We responded to the national conversations around increasing anxiety in young people by ensuring these areas were properly reflected in policy, curriculum and staff training. This led to the development of more consistent systems, alongside achievement of the Rainbow Flag Award (2022) and reaccreditation in March 2026. It is a live and evolving area of school life.

WAS IT OBVIOUS THAT THESE INITIATIVES HAD TO BE PUT IN PLACE?

Yes, the need became increasingly clear through both data and daily experience. We saw rising levels of anxiety, and increased pastoral and safeguarding referrals. This

presented as pupils struggling with friendship pressures and difficulties managing emotions in real time. These patterns directly informed the development of more structured and relational systems, including restorative practice and our 'RED' initiative - Respect everyone; Embrace challenge; Do Your Best - introduced in 2025, which helps provide consistency and calm expectations across school life.

ARE HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS IMPORTANT IN IDENTIFYING ISSUES?

Very much so. Strong home-school partnerships are central to how we understand and support pupils.

MENTAL HEALTH AND INCLUSION ARE BROAD TERMS. HOW HAVE YOU COVERED THIS AND IS THERE OVERLAP BETWEEN THE TWO, SPECIFICALLY LGBT+ INCLUSION?

The challenge is that they cover a wide landscape: SEND, neurodiversity, identity, relationships, and increasingly digital well-being. Schools are being asked to respond to more complex needs.

At Red House, we have developed a layered model:

- Universal support: Through PSHE & RSE, assemblies, mindfulness activities, Forest School, enrichment, well-being timetable, and curriculum-based learning;
- Targeted support: well-being prefects, mentoring, the Zen Den (a calm space in our Junior School, designed to support pupils in practicing mindfulness), restorative practice, the RED framework, and staff council input; and
- Specialist support: counsellor, play therapist, and referrals to external agencies.

This is underpinned by strong leadership, half-termly governor oversight, annual well-being surveys, and ongoing staff training. Importantly, well-being is not just for pupils: staff support structures, coaching and counselling access are part of the same system.

Inclusion and LGBT+ are deeply connected. They intersect around identity, belonging, self-esteem, and peer relationships. These are not separate strands but interconnected aspects of pupil experience.

The school's achievement of the Rainbow Flag Award alongside the School's Mental Health Award reflects this integrated approach. Inclusion is embedded through curriculum, staff training, pupil voice and leadership oversight; ensuring our pupils always feel safe, nurtured and supported.

IS THERE AN AGE GROUP THAT IS PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE?

We find that pupils in upper Junior School and lower Senior School are often most vulnerable due to

friendship dynamics and increased academic and social pressure. However, vulnerability is not fixed and changes across cohorts.

WHAT ARE THE PREVALENT PRESSURES PUPILS FACE?

The most significant current pressures are linked to digital life and social media exposure, particularly comparison and constant connectivity. We respond through PSHE & RSE, digital well-being teaching, external inputs regarding online safety, digital literacy and the importance of sleep.

HOW IMPORTANT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is central. This is embedded through relational practice, restorative conversations, and expectations in and around school. A key development is the RED initiative, which provides clarity and consistency while supporting reflection and growth.

We also use Forest School, enrichment, pupil leadership, PSHE & RSE and well-being sessions to build confidence, emotional literacy and independence. One much-loved part of daily life is Charlie, our school wellness dog, who supports pupils through wellness walks and by being a grounding presence around school.

HOW MUCH INPUT HAVE PUPILS AND STAFF HAD?

A great deal. Pupil voice is embedded through well-being prefects, pupil councils, annual pupil well-being surveys (since 2020), and informal conversations. Pupils actively shape well-being initiatives, events and aspects of school life. Staff input is equally central through our staff council (introduced in 2025), annual staff well-being surveys (since 2020), INSET feedback and regular professional dialogue. Staff feedback has directly led to workload adjustments, dedicated report writing time and communication improvements.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR THE SCHOOL TO BE RECOGNISED FOR THE WORK IT DOES AND WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT?

The awards are valued because they provide external reflection of our work and help ensure we are aligned with national expectations. However, the real focus is always impact in daily school life, how pupils and staff experience the culture. And perhaps that is the most important learning - well-being and inclusion are not projects; they are culture.

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