ISA JOURNAL

ISSUE 38 | AUTUMN 2026

cover photo: Moon Hall School Reigate



An MP's view on taxing independent school fees

AI and the threat to critical thinking

Why assistive technology needs to be taught

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Welcome

FROM THE CEO

RUDOLF ELIOTT LOCKHART



There is a particular irony in the fact that as artificial intelligence becomes more capable of producing instant, confident-sounding answers, the questions facing school leaders have rarely felt more genuinely difficult to answer. What should we actually be teaching? What does it mean to learn something in a world where information is a prompt away? And what responsibilities do we take on when we place these tools in the hands of young people who are still working out who they are?

This issue does not pretend to resolve those questions, but it does take them seriously. Jeff Shaw, Headmaster of Scarisbrick Hall School, brings fifteen years of headship perspective to the debate, asking not just how we use AI, but what we risk losing if we are not deliberate about what we preserve alongside it. Emma Wood at Bronte School makes a case that might initially seem counterintuitive: that the fastest way to prepare children for a technology-driven future is, in some respects, to slow down. And David Curran at Moon Hall School offers something rarer still, a practitioner's account of teaching assistive technology, with all the complexity and honest reckoning that comes with that.

There are other voices here too. Stephen Lloyd at Centre Academy East Anglia shows what it looks like when creative subjects become a genuine lifeline for young people who have not found their place elsewhere, a reminder that no technology replaces the relationship between a teacher who truly knows their students and the students themselves. And we are grateful to include a thought-provoking perspective from an Islamic tradition on what AI asks of us as human beings, a contribution that widens the frame in ways that will repay careful reading.

The political context for all of this remains significant. Saqib Bhatti MP sets out the Conservative case against the education tax and the damage that has followed its introduction. Whether or not you share his politics, the pressure on our sector is real and his argument deserves to be heard.

As always, there is much more besides. Sport, arts, award winners, and a warm welcome to our new members. If something is missing that you think should be here, we would love to hear from you.



CONTRIBUTORS

Rudolf Eliott Lockhart, CEO of ISA
Sue Knox, Chair of ISA
Jeff Shaw, Headmaster at Scarisbrick Hall School
St Hugh's School
Myddelton College
Ballard School
New Hall School
Bronte School
Saqib Bhatti, MP
Emma Wood, Headmistress of Bronte School
David Curan, Head of Innovation and Futures at Moon Hall School Reigate
Aliya Azam of the Al-Khoei Foundation
Stephen Lloyd, Art Teacher at Centre Academy East Anglia

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.*

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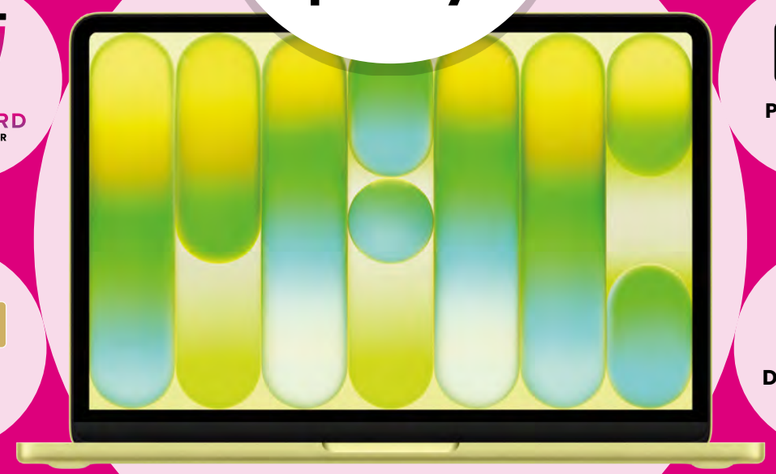
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ISA Awards

We are delighted to announce this year's Finalists and Highly Commended entries.

Each year, we welcome submissions for a variety of categories, which highlight the diverse range of strengths in our Members' schools. The Awards are a celebration of innovation, achievement and positive impact in developing the change-makers of tomorrow.

The 2026 ISA Awards Ceremony will take place at the Autumn Leaders Conference: 18 – 19 November, after a record-breaking number of entires. We invite you to join us in celebrating the best in your fellow ISA colleagues. If you are a Finalist, this is your chance to represent your school's achievements in perpetuity as the winners are announced. To book your place, scan the QR code here.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR FINALISTS AND HIGHLY COMMENDED SCHOOLS

ISA Award for Outstanding Engagement in the Community
Farnborough Hill | Lichfield Cathedral School | Littlegarth School
Highly Commended: Daiglen School

ISA Award for Future Readiness
Littlegarth School | Oxford International College | West Lodge
Highly Commended: Moon Hall School, Reigate

ISA Award for Outstanding Sport (Small School)
Bowbrook House School | Long Close | S. Anselms
Highly Commended: Cobham Hall

ISA Award for Outstanding Sport (Large School)
Ballard School | New Hall | Queen Ethelburg's
Highly Commended: Claires Court

ISA Non-Specialist SEND School of the Year Award
Gosfield School | Heathfield Knoll School | Rochester Independent College
Highly Commended: Salterford House School

ISA Specialist Provision of the Year Award
Barton School | Gretton School | More than Ed Independent School
Highly Commended: The Pivot Academy

ISA Award for International Provision
Buckswood School | Queen Ethelburga's | Rochester Independent College

ISA Award for Excellence and Innovation in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
ACS International School Egham | Chelsea Hall School | Downsend Junior School
Highly Commended: Crosfields School

ISA Award for Excellence and Innovation in Mental Health and Wellbeing
Blanchelande College | Mount House | Kneller Hall School
Highly Commended: Hendon Prep | St David's College

ISA Award for Excellence in Sustainability
Sponsored by devices for teams by HardSoft
Ballard School | Gosfield School | TASIS England
Highly Commended: Greenbank School

ISA Award for Excellence in Performing Arts
Lichfield Cathedral School | The Mead School | Woodlands School Hutton Manor
Highly Commended: Westville House School

ISA Award for Excellence in Visual Arts and Creative Writing
Beaulieu Convent School | Cundall Manor School | Heathfield School
Highly Commended: Charterhouse Square School

ISA Award for Innovation in Independent Education
Moon Hall School, Reigate | More House School | Tower College
Highly Commended: Scarisbrick Hall

ISA Award for Excellence and Innovation in Early Years
Dulwich Cranbrook | Sibford School | St Mary's School, Hampstead
Highly Commended: St Christopher's School

ISA Junior School of the Year Award
Cransley School | Norfolk House School, London | The Grange Junior School
Highly Commended: TASIS England

ISA Senior School of the Year Award
Sponsored by SFP School Fee Plan
Minerva Virtual Academy | North London Grammar | Kneller Hall School
Highly Commended: New Hall School

Welcome

FROM THE ISA CHAIR

SUE KNOX

Never would I have imagined I would be appointed to this position. I never intended to become a teacher. After a career in marketing, my ambition was a corporate career. My husband and I had our three children in France before moving to Australia, and it was there that the course of my life changed. We were sitting in the Sydney Opera House watching our children perform in a Schools Spectacular when I had an epiphany. I was captivated by the teachers supporting children with additional needs, enabling them to take their place on the stage and shine. I saw the difference that teachers can make to the lives of children. I realised that my destiny was to become a teacher! I began my teaching career as a French teacher in an independent girls' school in Sydney, but my management experience soon led me into leadership. Since then, I have worked in Australia and the UK and now have almost 15 years of headship behind me.

Those experiences have taught me that there is no single blueprint for a successful school. ISA schools are different because the communities they serve are different, varying in size, structure, age range, ethos and educational approach. Yet, whatever their size or structure, they share a commitment to knowing their pupils well, nurturing their individual strengths and giving every child the opportunity to thrive. That diversity is one of ISA's greatest strengths, and why I believe in the power of our Association. We have much to learn from one another.

As Heads, we are often expected to have the answers. Yet the most valuable conversations I have had have begun with someone saying, "we have this problem and this is what we tried." Sometimes it is the advice of another Head that helps us solve a problem, sometimes simply the reassurance that we are not alone. That sense of fellowship matters. Headship can be exhilarating, rewarding and privileged, but it can also be lonely. We carry the hopes and expectations of pupils, parents, staff, governors and owners, while navigating a complex educational, political and financial landscape. None of us can predict what the next few years will bring, but we can choose how we respond.

I believe that our response must begin with connection. This year, I want to listen to Heads across our Association: to understand the challenges you are facing, to hear what is working, to celebrate the practice within our schools and to identify where ISA can do more to support you.

But I also want us to look beyond the challenges of school leadership and ask a bigger question: how do we future-proof the children and young people in our care?

We cannot know what the world of work will look like in twenty years' time. Artificial intelligence, technology and global change will transform the opportunities and challenges our pupils face. What we can do is equip them to navigate uncertainty with confidence. Knowledge will always matter, but so will curiosity, creativity, adaptability, communication, critical thinking, resilience, the ability to work with others, to solve problems, to understand different perspectives and to keep learning when the answers are not obvious. Do come to our annual conference in May next year as we will be exploring these themes.

That brings me back to the moment that changed my career. I did not know, sitting in the Sydney Opera House, where teaching would take me. I recognised something that mattered: the transformative power of a great teacher and the difference we can make when we see potential in a child and give them the opportunity to shine. That remains, at the heart of education. As I begin this year as your Chair, I hope to use my experience, energy and enthusiasm to serve our Association, champion our schools and support the Heads and staff who work for the children in their care.

Please make the most of your Association. Engage with regional events and meetings and encourage your staff to take advantage of our courses and conferences. Professional development and the sharing of expertise can have a real impact on our schools, staff and pupils. When you need advice, reassurance or simply a sounding board, our Head Office team, led by Rudi and Peter, is there to support you.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the coming year, visiting your schools, hearing your stories and seeing first-hand the work taking place across the ISA. Thank you.

Sue Knox Headmistress, Duke of Kent School





JEFF SHAW, HEADMASTER AT SCARISBRICK HALL SCHOOL

AI, Education and the skills we risk forgetting

As I reached my fifteenth year as a Head, I found myself reflecting on the extraordinary technological changes that have transformed education since I first entered the profession. Schools have always sought to embrace innovation, from the arrival of the internet and interactive whiteboards to interactive voting systems, digital collaboration and cloud-based learning. Teacher training and inspection frameworks have consistently encouraged the effective use of technology, even if the definition of "effective" has evolved over time.

Yet, as John Dewey argued more than a century ago in *Democracy and Education* (1916), education has never been about adopting the latest tools. Its purpose is to prepare young people to participate thoughtfully and responsibly in society. Technology should therefore serve educational purposes rather than define them.

The launch of the iPhone in 2007 marked a watershed moment. Handheld computing, social media and the rise of the influencer economy fundamentally changed how we access information, communicate and form opinions. It is difficult to overstate the significance of that shift. More recently, the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence has presented education with another transformational moment—one that brings extraordinary opportunities alongside profound responsibilities.

There is much to celebrate. AI has the potential to reduce teacher workload, improve administrative efficiency and free educators to focus less on repetitive tasks such as marking and more on the professional judgement that lies at the heart of great teaching. Used wisely, AI can become one of the most significant educational innovations of our generation. The OECD's Digital Education Outlook reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that generative AI can improve teaching and personalise learning when implemented with clear pedagogical intent and strong human oversight. In other words, AI should enhance professional expertise rather than replace it.

However, I believe our conversation needs to go much deeper than implementation.

I have always been passionate about an education that refuses to pigeonhole young people and instead encourages them to become confident individuals. To achieve this, children need more than academic knowledge. They need strong moral values, the ability to distinguish reliable evidence from misinformation, and the capacity to understand, challenge and respectfully consider the views of others. Ultimately, education should enable every young person to fulfil their potential, become an independent thinker and contribute positively to society.

This is not a new aspiration. Paulo Freire argued that education should develop critical consciousness rather than passive acceptance of information. In an age where AI can instantly produce convincing answers, Freire's philosophy feels more relevant than ever. Our responsibility is not simply to help pupils find answers, but to help them ask better questions.

Equally, Sir Ken Robinson spent much of his career reminding us that education should cultivate creativity, individuality and curiosity rather than conformity. As AI becomes increasingly capable of producing competent, predictable responses, the uniquely human qualities of imagination, originality and innovation become even more valuable.

Throughout history, human beings have learned through relationships. We are explorers, innovators and problem-solvers by nature. For generations, much of our understanding of the world came through conversations within families and communities—around the fire, around the dinner table and through shared experiences. Knowledge was passed down through relationships built on trust, care and shared wisdom.

Educational research reinforces this idea. Lev Vygotsky demonstrated that learning is fundamentally social, with understanding developing through dialogue and collaboration. More recently, neuroscientist Mary Helen Immordino-Yang has shown that emotion, relationships and reflection are not distractions from learning but central to how deep learning takes place. AI may provide information, but it cannot replace the developmental value of genuine human relationships.

Today's young people inhabit a very different world. For many, uninterrupted family conversations have become increasingly rare, often replaced by the constant presence of digital devices. Their greatest influences may no longer be parents, teachers or local communities, but algorithms, content creators and commercial platforms competing relentlessly for their attention. Increasingly, a young person may ask AI a question before asking a parent, teacher or friend.

The consequence is not simply greater access to information; it is a fundamentally different way of experiencing the world. Young people are continually exposed to messages telling them what to think, how to look and what success should resemble. Endless scrolling can replace genuine exploration, while virtual interactions risk displacing meaningful human relationships.

In *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan Haidt argues that the smartphone-based childhood has fundamentally reshaped children's social and emotional development. While researchers continue to debate the extent of technology's impact on wellbeing, few educators would dispute that childhood itself has changed dramatically over the last two decades.

We are all familiar with the concerning trends surrounding young people's mental health and the ongoing debate about the role technology may play. Organisations such as UNESCO, the OECD and the Children's Commissioner for England increasingly emphasise that schools must help young people develop digital resilience alongside digital competence. Whether or not technology is the principal cause of declining wellbeing, schools cannot ignore the changing landscape in which children are growing up.

This raises important questions for educational leaders. What should our curriculum now prioritise? How do we ensure that technological innovation strengthens



education rather than narrowing it?

Many schools are rightly developing AI strategies and exploring how these tools can enhance teaching and learning. This work is essential. My question is whether we are giving equal attention to the balance that will inevitably be required.

National guidance in this area remains limited, and the curriculum often struggles to keep pace with technological change. Independent schools have frequently led educational innovation, and I have little doubt they will continue to do so with AI. Yet innovation should not be measured solely by the technologies we adopt. It should also be reflected in how deliberately we cultivate the human qualities that technology cannot replace: critical thinking, emotional intelligence, resilience, meaningful relationships and a secure grounding in values.

Research from the Education Endowment Foundation consistently reminds us that technology improves learning only when it strengthens excellent teaching rather than replacing it. The same principle applies to AI. The question is not whether we use it, but how thoughtfully we integrate it into an educational philosophy that remains fundamentally human.

Here, the work of Martin Seligman is particularly relevant. His research into positive psychology argues that wellbeing is not an optional extra but a prerequisite for flourishing. Schools therefore have a responsibility not only to educate academically but to help young people develop purpose, resilience and meaningful relationships.

There was perhaps a time when we assumed that children would naturally absorb these qualities simply by attending a good school. In today's world, I am no longer convinced that assumption is sufficient. If the environment beyond the school gates has fundamentally changed, then perhaps the building blocks of our curriculum must evolve too.

If we simply encourage pupils to use AI without helping them understand where its information comes from, who has developed it, how it has been trained, what biases may exist and why its answers should always be questioned, then we risk teaching dependency rather than discernment.

UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research argues that AI literacy extends far beyond writing effective prompts. Young people must understand how AI systems work, evaluate the reliability of their outputs, recognise bias, appreciate ethical considerations and retain responsibility for critical judgement. AI literacy is therefore as much about wisdom as it is about technology.

Equally, we should ask ourselves whether our curriculum creates enough opportunities for the experiences that AI cannot replicate. Are we intentionally creating space for debate, discussion, public speaking, reflection and collaborative problem-solving? Are we investing sufficient time in helping young people build healthy relationships, navigate disagreement respectfully and develop empathy?

These questions echo Guy Claxton's work on *Building Learning Power*, which argues that resilience, curiosity, reflection, collaboration and resourcefulness are not by-products of education but outcomes that should be deliberately cultivated. In an age where AI can increasingly provide answers, these dispositions become more—not less—important.

These are not soft skills. They are the foundations of thoughtful leadership, responsible citizenship and meaningful lives.

Perhaps, then, the challenge facing schools is not simply how we embrace artificial intelligence, but how we compensate for the aspects of childhood and human development that technology may unintentionally erode.

The future undoubtedly requires digitally fluent young people. It also requires young people who can think independently, communicate compassionately, question intelligently, lead ethically and build meaningful relationships. Those qualities have always been the true purpose of education. John Dewey famously wrote that *"education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."* More than a century later, those words feel remarkably relevant. If we embrace AI while simultaneously investing more deeply in the qualities that make us human, we will have achieved something far greater than technological innovation. We will have reaffirmed the enduring purpose of education itself.



Jeff Shaw is Headmaster of Scarisbrick Hall School, where over 14 years he has led the school through sustained growth, including a doubling in scale and significant investment its Sixth Form and facilities, with ISI recognising the school's RIVER teaching philosophy as a Significant Strength in 2025. He has spent around a decade as an ISI inspector and has twice served as National Chair of the Independent Schools Association (ISA). Jeff was also a co-founder of The Global Classroom, which, in partnership with the World Health Organization and UNICEF, reached 2.1 million students across 150,000 schools in 193 countries. His interests include educational leadership, school culture and the future of independent education.

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** to potentially appear in future editions of the Journal, on the ISA website, or shared on social media.

ST HUGH'S SCHOOL CELEBRATES OPENING OF NEW SENIOR SCHOOL HUB, THE HAYES CENTRE



St Hugh's School (LW)

St Hugh's School was delighted to mark the official opening of The Hayes Centre, its new Senior School Hub, at a special launch event held on the evening of Thursday 25 June 2026.

The Hayes Centre represents an exciting milestone in the school's development, marking the expansion of St Hugh's into senior education. The new Senior School will welcome its first Year 9 cohort in September 2026, offering pupils an ambitious, forward-thinking academic environment that builds on the school's long-standing reputation for excellence.

The opening event brought together members of the St Hugh's community, including current and prospective families, Governors, and key staff. Guests enjoyed welcome drinks and canapés, followed by addresses from Headmaster David Griffiths, Sally Ewins, Assistant Head of Seniors, and Samuel and Tilly, members of the pioneer year group.

The building was formally opened by Charlie Maynard MP, Emilie Darwin, CEO of the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS), and David Griffiths, Headmaster of St Hugh's, highlighting the significance of this development within both the school and the wider educational community.

FORMER MYDDELTON COLLEGE STUDENT ADDRESSES UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

A former student of Myddelton College has addressed the United Nations Human Rights Council at the age of just 19, following a journey that began when he moved to North Wales as a teenager to study for his A-Levels.

Bogdan Golovin, who studied Business and Economics at Myddelton College between 2022 and 2024, delivered a formal statement during the 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on 11 March 2026.

Representing civil society organisation Partners for Transparency, Bogdan spoke under Agenda Item 3 on the importance of combating corruption and protecting human rights.

Bogdan moved to North Wales at the age of 15 and says his time at Myddelton played an important role in shaping the independence, ambition and international outlook that he has continued to develop since leaving the College.

After completing his A-Levels in 2024, Bogdan moved to Geneva, Switzerland, where he is continuing his education in International Business while pursuing



Myddelton College (N)

opportunities in entrepreneurship, business development and international affairs.

Bogdan said he hopes his journey will encourage current Myddelton students to think ambitiously about the opportunities that may lie ahead.

BALLARD SCHOOL CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY, AND A NEW HEADMASTER


Ballard School (LW)

Ballard School in New Milton, Hampshire, is celebrating its 30th anniversary - with a new Headmaster Stuart Turner leading it into its next decade.

While a school has been on the site since 1895, and Ballard House itself dates back to 1906, the school adopted its current name with the merger of Edinburgh House and Fernhill Manor School in the mid 1990s. The award winning independent school has now celebrated its 30th academic year as *Ballard School*.

TUDOR TUNNELS AND ARTEFACTS DISCOVERED DURING REPAIR WORKS AT NEW HALL SCHOOL

Exciting new discoveries have been made at New Hall School in Chelmsford during ongoing repair works to part of the historic ha-ha. Previously unknown tunnels, believed to date back to the reign of King Henry VIII, have been uncovered beneath the grounds of the former Tudor Palace of Beaulieu.



Initial inspections of the tunnels have revealed a range of remarkable artefacts, offering a glimpse into Tudor life. Among the items discovered are what appear to be Tudor-era pots and pottery, alongside bones, glass bottles, fragments of glass, and pieces of lead. These finds are currently being carefully examined, with plans underway to display selected artefacts in the future.

As part of the School's ongoing engagement with its heritage, New Hall recently welcomed the Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Essex, Dr James Bettley JP DL FSA. An esteemed architectural historian known for his work on the Pevsner Architectural Guides, Dr Bettley was hosted by the School's archivist, Mrs Stella Beer. During his visit, Mrs Beer provided a tour of New Hall's distinctive architectural features.

Dr Bettley also met with Sixth Form student Tabitha B, discussing her passion for history and her aspirations to share this enthusiasm more widely. The visit concluded with a tour of the ha-ha wall currently undergoing repair, where the newly discovered tunnels are located.

YEAR 6 PUPILS MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY RAISING FUNDS FOR THE ALZHEIMER'S SOCIETY

Two of our amazing Year 6 pupils, Electra and Alice, who recently raised a significant amount of money for the Alzheimer's Society through an inspiring fundraising initiative. We have permission from both families to share their names and the story.

As part of their Leadership Accreditation, a Year 6 programme at Bronte School, the girls chose to support a cause that was particularly meaningful to them, having both been affected by family members living with Alzheimer's disease. The Leadership Accreditation requires pupils to complete a portfolio across a range of disciplines, with a strong focus on helping others, serving their communities, and developing as responsible young leaders.



Bronte School (LS)

Electra and Alice spent many hours designing and creating a range of beautiful handmade bracelets, featuring a variety of styles and positive messages. They then organised and ran a bracelet stall, inviting donations in exchange for their creations. Thanks to their hard work, determination, and entrepreneurial spirit, they sold out over two days and raised more than £500 for the Alzheimer's Society.

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ISA SPORT

NATIONAL EVENTS

SKIING
U9-U18 - Hemel Hempstead - 28 September 2026

FOOTBALL
U14/U16 - Boys - Nottingham - 20 January 2027
U11/U13/U15 Boys - LVS Ascot - 16 March 2027
U11 Boys - TBC - March 2027
U13 Girls - Lingfield College - 05 May 2026
U13 Girls - Dixie Grammar School - 06 May 2026
U11/U13/U15 Girls - LVS Ascot - 29 September 2026

SAILING
U9-U18 - Draycote Water - 01 October 2026

ESPORTS
U9 - U16 - Remote Rounds and Final - Nov 2026 & Feb 2027

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
U10/U11 - Colchester - 06 November 2026
U15 Boys - Oxford RFC - 11 February 2027
U13 Boys - Teddington - 1 March 2027
U14 Boys - Teddington - 2 March 2027
U16 Boys - Westonbirt School - 4 March 2027
U14/U16 Girls - Teddington - 10 March 2027
U18 Boys - Oxford RFC - 25 February 2027
U12 Boys - Teddington - 16 March 2027

BADMINTON
U13/U15 - Nottingham - 12 November 2026
U15/U17 - Nottingham- 13 November 2026

SQUASH
U13/ U16 - Wycliffe College - 23 November 2026

SWIMMING
U9 - U18 - London Olympic Pool - 27 November 2026

TABLE TENNIS
U11/U13 - Nottingham - 21 January 2027
U13/U15 - Nottingham - 22 January 2027

CROSS COUNTRY
National Finals - Himley Hall, Dudley - 12 March 2027

NETBALL
U11 - King's High, Warwick - 18 March 2027
U13 - King's High, Warwick - 19 March 2027
U14 - Nottingham - 01 March 2027
U16 - Nottingham - 04 March 2027
U18 - Nottingham - 05 March 2027

CLAY PIGEON
U13-U18 - Hartpury, Gloucestershire - 25 September 2026

TRIATHLON
U9-U18 - Ipswich High School - 30 April 2027

TENNIS
U13 - New Hall School, Chelmsford - May 2027
U15 - New Hall School, Chelmsford - May 2027

GYMNASTICS
U9/U11 - Adcote School, Shrewsbury - 9 May 2027

CRICKET
U15 Girls - Gosfield School - 10 June 2027
U13 Girls - Gosfield School - 15 June 2027
U15 Boys - St James Boys' Ashford - June 2027
U13 Boys - St James Boys' Ashford - June 2027

GOLF
U18 - Venue TBC - June 2027

ATHLETICS
National Finals - Birmingham - 14 June 2027

INCLUSIVE SPORT (SEND)
U9 - U18 Caythorpe Court PGL Adventure - 23-24 April 2027
U1 1 - U14 Finborough School, Suffolk - May 2027
U12/U13 - Leighton Park, Reading - 15 June 2027
U11 - U16 - Nottingham - June 2027

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
Janice Smith | King's High, Warwick

NORTH
TBC

SOUTH WEST
Simon Ward | Kingsley School, Bideford

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and Instagram @isaschoolssport for more updates.

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ISA SPORT Roundup

Future Stars Shine at Alexander Stadium





The Alexander Stadium played host to a celebration of ISA athletics on Monday 15 June 2027, as hundreds of the finest young athletes gathered for the ISA Nationals Athletics Finals 2026. Across an action-packed schedule featuring 112 track and field events, competitors from Years 4 through 11 represented seven ISA areas having qualified through from their area events.

Adding an extra touch of inspiration to an already memorable day, British Olympian and 800m finalist Alex Bell was on hand throughout the event to present medals and congratulate the young podium finishers.

Massive thanks to the amazing volunteers from Lichfield Cathedral and St John's School, Enfield. We couldn't have pulled off this event without the brilliant energy and support of their staff and students.

AREA POSITIONS

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

NATIONAL RECORDS BROKEN!

Congratulations to the following athletes for setting new records:

Year 8-9 Boys Shot Put — Jacob D.
Finborough School — 14.03

Year 8-9 Boys Sprint 100m — Yohan G.
More House School — 11.34

Year 8-9 Boys Javelin Throw — Jacob D.
Finborough School — 57.43

EdTech
beyond the classroom

WHY FEE COLLECTION DESERVES THE SAME ATTENTION AS THE CLASSROOM

Independent schools have invested heavily in classroom technology. Far fewer have looked as closely at the technology that collects their fees, yet it is one of the few areas where a school can cut cost, lower risk and improve the experience for families at once. The tools to do it are now mature.

Most schools still collect fees through a mix of Direct Debit, card links and bank transfers prompted by email, each added over the years, and none designed to work together. New research this year from IRIS Education found that 80% of independent schools offer Direct Debit, yet only 38% say it is their preferred method. That 42-point gap is the heart of it: schools rely on a method they do not rate, and the true cost rarely reaches a budget line.

That cost shows up in four ways. The first is staff time, lost to raising invoices, chasing late payers and reconciling by hand. On a few hundred families a term, a failed Direct Debit can cost £50 to £100 to put right once bank charges and chasing are folded in.

The second is fraud, now a live threat. The National Crime Agency and the Department for Education run a campaign warning schools about payment diversion fraud, where criminals impersonate a school and redirect a family's payment. IRIS found every bursar surveyed had been targeted, with parents losing an average of £3,200. The weak point is almost always the gap between the school's systems and the parent's inbox.

The third is access. Some traditional fee-finance options are regulated credit and require affordability checks, which means the families most in need of flexibility are the most likely to be turned down.

The fourth is the relationship. A school works hard to build trust with its families, then asks the same office to chase them for money, and those two jobs pull in opposite directions.

These pressures are not abstract. Since VAT was added to fees, affordability has moved to the centre of every Head's thinking. ISC data published in June 2026 shows pupil numbers have fallen by 30,000, the biggest drop since its records began, so retention now turns on small things, and how a school handles payment is one of them.

This is where the financial side of EdTech earns its place. Modern platforms automate billing and reconciliation, let families spread the cost, and use account-to-account payment, or pay by bank, in place of cards and emailed details. The effect is practical: no card fees, nothing sensitive emailed, no mandate to spoof, and a confirmed payment in real time. As commercial variable recurring payments mature, that flexibility will no longer depend on a Direct Debit that can fail.

None of this is experimental. Open banking is mainstream now, with 351 million such payments in the UK in 2025, up 57% on the year. The technology is proven; the question is whether a school is using it.

The benefits reach beyond the finance office. Every hour not spent on payment admin is an hour back for teaching and pastoral care, and families who can pay in a way that suits them are more likely to stay.

This is the thinking behind Edstart. Done well, modern fee collection protects income, frees staff, widens access and strengthens the relationship with families. For a sector under financial pressure, that makes it a leadership decision as much as a financial one.

SCHOOLS ALREADY USING EDSTART

"With the obvious financial pressures on parents and schools, both need a flexible payments model that is trusted, digital, fair, easy to use and simple to manage. That is exactly what Edstart delivers for parents and schools alike"

NIGEL SLATER, BURSAR, JOHN LYON SCHOOL

"Our debtors are currently 80% lower than this time last year."

RUCHIRA GAGE, CFO, THE PARED FOUNDATION SCHOOLS

If you would like to find out more, or to be put in touch with schools already using Edstart, please get in touch at schools@edstart.co.uk



Mark O'Keefe
Optima Consultancy & member of the Edstart advisory board

edstart.co.uk

ISA Inclusive Adventure
in partnership with PGL
23-25 April 2027

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PGL

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Open to students who require SEND support, including those with:
- Neurodiverse conditions
- Learning disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Other additional support needs





What to Expect
We're able to offer a huge range of adaptations and support strategies to make your trip a success, including:
- Dedicated SEND advisors on centre
- A tailored multi-activity programme and flexible timetable
- Additional time planned for transitions
- Quieter mealtimes and shop visits
- Quiet spaces and relaxation areas
- Relaxed activity timings and increased flexibility
- Smaller activity groups
- Accessible accommodation and facilities
- Specialist equipment, adaptations and mobility aids





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23-25 April 2027
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Lincolnshire, NG32 3ER
£89 per Student

Scan for more info



SAQIB BHATTI MP

We must do better at talking about the enormous contribution of the independent school sector

Choice and opportunity are exactly what parents need. Sadly, this message was not shared by the previous Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, or seemingly the new one, Lucy Powell, who are determined to restrict parental freedom and wage class war on our independent schools. The Conservatives are unashamedly pro-choice and will always stand up for the independent sector and parents, and the next Conservative government will reverse Labour's education tax.

As a Shadow Minister, the very purpose of my day job is to scrutinise Government policy. There has been much to criticise since Labour came into office in July 2024, but in my view, it is unquestionable that the callous decision to wage war on private schools has been one of the government's most reckless decisions.

Since Labour's education tax was introduced, over 100 of our nation's historic independent schools have closed.[1] The impact on our children has been unprecedented. The Department for Education's (DFE) own modelling on the number of children leaving the state sector has been blown out of the water. Their prediction that just 14,000 pupils would leave the sector was too low, when in reality 30,000 children, more than double the DfE's prediction, have now been displaced by this policy.[2] These schools, like all businesses, have also had to absorb the impact of increases in employer national insurance contributions and a higher minimum wage.

What made this tax raid even more pernicious was the timing of its introduction. We cannot forget that, despite pressure from the Opposition, parents and the wider sector, the Government decided to roll this tax rise out in the middle of the academic year.[3]

Regrettably, we have not seen the full extent of the long-term damage. Many parents will be waiting for their children to reach a natural milestone in their education, like the transition to senior school or a Key Stage, before making the move. Tragically, that means more schools are likely to close, disrupting thousands more children's education and further tearing holes through local communities.

This impact will naturally trickle down to the state sector. State schools will be under more pressure to take in children from the private sector, adding to class sizes and putting more pressure on our great, but overworked, teachers.

My party warned about the catastrophic impact the education tax would have, and I am afraid the consequences are now unravelling.

The Conservatives are very clear that we should be proud of our independent schools. They offer a first-class education and have a phenomenal global reputation. Not only do children get sent to the UK to learn, but other countries use the British school model too. This has huge benefits, particularly in boosting our soft power and promoting Britain globally.

In addition, it is impossible to overstate the tremendous value independent schools bring to their local communities. On a recent visit to an independent school, I was reminded of the value they bring to their local area.

The school runs a very generous bursary and scholarship scheme supporting children who otherwise would not be able to have the privilege of a private education. They instil strong civic values, getting pupils out into the local community caring for the elderly and teaching young children, which is just one example of their great social value. Furthermore, the school is by far and away the town's main employer, meaning if this school was under threat, it wouldn't just be the school that goes but the life and soul of the whole community.

The instigator of this deeply damaging tax raid, Bridget Phillpson, who in my mind will go down as our worst Education Secretary, is thankfully now out of a job. One might therefore have thought that Andy Burnham had decided that her vindictive policies were a bridge too far, even for Labour – a party which wanted to abolish private education under the far-left Jeremy Corbyn.

Sadly, Lucy Powell will not be introducing a pragmatic reset and could make things worse. Powell has been virulently against private education for years. In 2016, she opposed a proposal to introduce 10,000 free private school places at the same cost to the government of sending children into the state sector.[4] I want to be optimistic about the future, but I feel the political context will mean there is more uncertainty coming driven by Labour's dogmatic and class-obsessed backbenchers.

I want to conclude by touching on what I think we can do to make things better. Since being made Shadow Education Minister, I have been surprised that there are so many people who don't know that the Conservative Party fundamentally oppose Labour's tax raid and have committed in full to reversing it.[5]

It's on us to amplify this message more consistently, and I am grateful to the Independent Schools Association for allowing me to spread that message in the magazine. But for those of us that oppose the Government's tax raid, we all need to work together to draw attention to the pivotal role independent schools play.

It is undeniable that independent schools bring about substantial benefits, and by writing in this magazine, I am preaching to the converted. However, from the role these schools play in local communities, to the transformative opportunities they provide for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, to what they do for Britain's global standing, we must all work harder at painting this positive picture.



There will be a few spiteful class warriors, including some who proudly sport t-shirts with that message, that we can never win over. However, I am adamant that the vast majority of people will see through this prejudice and recognise that Britain still needs a thriving independent schools sector.

Saqib Bhatti MBE MP has been the Member of Parliament for Meriden and Solihull East since 2019 and Shadow Minister for Education since July 2025

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[1] City AM, 3 June 2026, https://www.cityam.com/number-of-private-school-pupils-plummets-after-labours-vat-hike-on-fees/

[2] The Spectator, 1 August 2026, https://spectator.com/article/schools-out-the-dissolution-of-private-education/

[3] The Telegraph, 12 July 2025, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/tax/devastating-impact-labour-private-school-vat-raid-revealed/

[4] The Spectator, 1 August 2026, https://spectator.com/article/schools-out-the-dissolution-of-private-education/

[5] The Conservative Party, 'Our Plan for Britain', https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan-for-britain

Professional Development Opportunities

ISA offers exclusive professional development courses for staff of schools across the independent sector – for our membership and beyond. Members enjoy discounted rates on our comprehensive range of courses designed to enhance skills and broaden perspectives. By completing our courses, you can advance your career and impact positively both students and the school community.

We are delighted to provide a diverse selection of CPD events, covering a wide array of topics, each combining expert knowledge with valuable networking opportunities.

Do take the time to incorporate ISA courses, an important part of continuous professional development, into your active schedule.

Cost:

The rate for most online courses is £140 / £170 (Member/ non-Member rate) per delegate.

How to book:

For more information on our programme and to book, visit our website

GDPR

Understanding and implementing the Data (Use & Access) Act 2025 within your school

6 November 2026 | Zoom | 9.30am – 3pm

[SLP] Leadership:

Heads Leadership Renewal Day

3 December 2026 | Zoom | 9.30am – 3pm

Marketing and Admissions

Best practice admissions

5 November 2026 | Zoom | 12:30pm – 3:00pm

Mental Health Pathway [MHP]

[MHP] Mental Health First Aid (1 Day)

10 November 2026 | ISA House, CB10 1PF | 9:30am – 3:00pm

Social Media for Independent Schools

12 November 2026 | 12:30pm-3:00pm

SEND

AI and SEND: Practical Approaches to Accessibility, Adaptation, and Support

1 December 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 11:30am

Senior Leadership Pathway [SLP]

[SLP] Leadership: Change Management for School Leaders and Managers

24 November 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am - 3:00pm

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Pathway

[EDIP] Gender and Sexuality Matters

27 January 2027 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

AUTUMN LEADERS CONFERENCE

The Autumn Leaders Conference is the new name for the Autumn Study Conference.

The Conference is a one-and-a-half-day event, which will provide a range of thought-provoking keynotes and relevant breakout sessions, full of pedagogical ideas and practical solutions to take back to your school.

This event also incorporates the ISA Art Final and the highly regarded ISA Annual Awards Ceremony, hosted by Olympic Medallist Christine Ohuruogu.

For more information and to book scan this code:

ISA Accreditations

Our professional development programme provides high-quality training opportunities for a wide range of school staff, promoting excellence in independent education across the board. ISA accreditations help support our Members and their staff in a range of different areas, providing professional development opportunities that keep schools up to date and add value to staff's credentials.

Providing high-quality continuous professional development (CPD) for staff is an essential tool for schools to maintain best practices, foster excellence in education and keep a competitive edge.

The ISA Certificate for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Lead
recognises the need for current, detailed and supportive professional development to ensure those who take a leading role in this area develop their skills and knowledge effectively. It is designed to enable all those who have an interest in equity, diversity and inclusion within their setting to maintain best practice.

The ISA Certificate for Senior Mental Health Lead
ensures School Leaders remain current and have opportunities to develop a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. The scheme aligns with the full DfE specifications for the role and is designed for senior staff with the role of Mental Health Lead within their setting.

The ISA Certificate in Advanced School Leadership
recognises excellence in Senior Leadership and celebrates a continuing commitment to drive personal improvement. It is open to those leaders (both members and non-members) who wish to develop their skills and knowledge in school leadership.

The ISA Certificate in School Leadership
Is designed for aspiring school leaders who are committed to continuous improvement. It's open to both ISA members and non-members, providing leaders a valuable pathway to develop their leadership skills and knowledge. Earning this certificate demonstrates a dedication to professional growth and showcases participant's advancing leadership capabilities.

Learn more about ISA Accreditations

EMMA WOOD, HEADMISTRESS OF BRONTE SCHOOL

Why the fastest way to prepare children for the future is to slow down

Protecting childhood in a world that never stops

Every September, I have the privilege of welcoming a new cohort of children to Bronte School. They arrive full of curiosity. They ask wonderfully unexpected questions, notice things adults often overlook and approach each day with enthusiasm and imagination. In our work with children, our role is not simply to teach them new things; it is to ensure they do not lose those qualities as they grow.

That feels more important today than ever before.

We live in a world that celebrates speed. Information is available in seconds, technology evolves almost daily and children are growing up surrounded by constant stimulation. It is tempting to believe that schools should simply keep pace: introducing every new innovation, accelerating learning and preparing pupils for careers that may not yet exist.

Innovation undoubtedly has its place, and schools should embrace developments that genuinely enrich learning. But I also believe we have an equally important responsibility: to know when to slow things down.

Because while knowledge has never been easier to access, curiosity, resilience, empathy and sound judgement still cannot be hurried.

INFORMATION HAS BECOME ABUNDANT; WISDOM HAS NOT

As educators, we can sometimes fall into the trap of believing that because something is new, it must be better. I don't believe that is always true.

The purpose of a preparatory education has never been simply to fill children's minds with information. Today, when facts are available at the touch of a screen, our role is increasingly about helping pupils think critically, ask thoughtful questions and develop the wisdom to interpret information, weigh evidence and form their own considered opinions.

One of the aspects of the curriculum at Bronte School that I value most is the emphasis we place on developing critical thinking, not as a standalone subject, but as a thread that runs through everything we do. Whether pupils are analysing a text in English, using evidence and reasoning to justify their conclusions in mathematics, investigating a scientific concept or exploring big questions in our philosophy lessons, they are encouraged to think deeply, question assumptions and consider different perspectives. Watching children discuss fairness, friendship, justice or responsibility is a powerful reminder that some of life's most important questions do not have simple answers. These conversations are often thoughtful, occasionally surprising and always respectful. Pupils learn to listen with empathy, challenge ideas rather than individuals, articulate their own thinking with confidence and understand that changing their mind in the light of new evidence is a sign of intellectual maturity, not weakness. In doing so, they begin to develop wisdom: the ability to apply knowledge with discernment, compassion and good judgement. These are qualities that extend far beyond the classroom. They prepare children not simply to achieve academically, but to become discerning, adaptable and compassionate young people, equipped to navigate an increasingly complex world with confidence and integrity.

SLOW CHILDHOOD IS NOT PASSIVE CHILDHOOD

When I talk about slowing childhood down, I do not mean lowering expectations. Quite the opposite.

Children thrive when they are challenged, but they also need time to immerse themselves in learning rather than constantly rushing towards the next achievement.

Our school motto, *Labor Ipse Voluptas – Work itself is pleasure* – perfectly captures this philosophy. Real satisfaction does not come from finding everything easy. It comes from perseverance, determination and the quiet pride of mastering something that once seemed difficult.

I see it when a child finally performs confidently in a LAMDA examination after weeks of practice. I see it during rehearsals for a school production, when nervousness gradually gives way to self-belief. I see it on the sports field, where teamwork and resilience often matter far more than the final score. I see it when pupils lose themselves in a book, become absorbed in a creative project or spend time outdoors exploring and discovering.

Sometimes the best learning isn't rushed. Sometimes the best lesson isn't even on the timetable.

Children need opportunities to wonder, to reflect and occasionally to be bored enough for imagination to take over. These moments are not distractions from learning; they are often where the deepest learning begins.

JOY AND BELONGING ARE THE FOUNDATIONS OF CONFIDENCE

One of the greatest joys of leading a small preparatory school is seeing every child become genuinely known, valued and understood. That may sound simple, but it has a profound impact.

Teachers understand not only how each pupil learns, but what excites them, where they need encouragement and when they are ready to be stretched. Just as importantly, families become true partners in their children's education. The conversations we have with parents are ongoing, honest and centered on helping every child flourish.

Confidence is rarely built through one grand achievement. It grows through hundreds of seemingly ordinary moments, bringing with it the quiet joy of achievement and self-belief.

It is the child who once hesitated to contribute an idea beginning to offer their thoughts with confidence. It is the pupil who encounters a difficult mathematical problem and, rather than saying, "I can't do it," approaches it with curiosity, resilience and the determination to find another way. It is the nervous performer who eventually steps onto the stage with pride, or the older pupil who instinctively takes responsibility for welcoming visitors or supporting younger children.

Those transformations do not happen by accident. They happen because children feel safe enough to take risks, secure enough to make mistakes and encouraged to see challenge not as something to fear, but as an opportunity to learn and to experience the satisfaction that comes from overcoming it. When children discover that effort, perseverance and asking for help are strengths rather than weaknesses, confidence grows naturally alongside capability.

CONFIDENCE IS RARELY BUILT THROUGH ONE GRAND ACHIEVEMENT. IT GROWS THROUGH HUNDREDS OF SEEMINGLY ORDINARY MOMENTS.

At Bronte, that confidence is rooted in a strong sense of belonging. Our older pupils naturally look out for younger children. Friendships develop across year groups, and kindness is modelled as well as encouraged. Children know they are valued for who they are, not simply for what they achieve. It is this sense of belonging that gives children the confidence to embrace challenge, take risks and experience the genuine joy that comes from learning, growing and succeeding together.

Children experience the greatest joy not when everything is easy, but when they discover they can achieve something they once believed they couldn't.

PREPARING DEEPLY HUMAN YOUNG PEOPLE

No one can say with certainty what today's Reception children will be doing twenty years from now.

The world they inherit will undoubtedly look different from the one we know today. Technology will continue to evolve, careers will change and new challenges will emerge. Yet I remain convinced that the qualities which matter most will stay remarkably constant.Kindness. Curiosity. Creativity. Integrity. Adaptability.

The ability to communicate well, work collaboratively and think independently.

These deeply human qualities cannot be downloaded, automated or measured through a single assessment. They are cultivated gradually through a childhood rich in opportunity, responsibility, encouragement and reflection. They grow each time a child solves a problem independently, shows compassion to a friend, finds the courage to contribute an idea, learns from a setback or experiences the satisfaction of achieving something that once felt beyond their reach. Over time, these moments shape the character, confidence and judgement that will serve children throughout their lives.

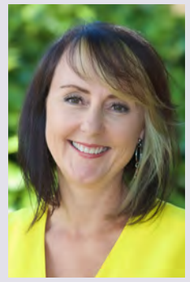
LOOKING AHEAD

Independent preparatory schools have always looked beyond the next assessment or the next set of results. Our responsibility is not only to prepare children for senior school, but to prepare them for life.

As education continues to evolve, we should embrace innovation where it genuinely enhances learning. Equally, we should have the confidence to protect those timeless elements of childhood that remain just as important today as they have always been: the freedom to be curious, the courage to make mistakes, the joy of discovering something for oneself and the security of belonging to a community where every child is known.

If there is one lesson I have learned as a Headmistress, it is this: children do not need us to make childhood faster. They need us to make it richer.

In preparing children for a rapidly changing future, perhaps the greatest gift we can offer is not to hurry childhood along, but to protect it. Because children who are given the time to think deeply, work joyfully and grow confidently will be ready not only for whatever tomorrow brings, but for a lifetime of learning beyond it.



Emma Wood has been Headmistress of Bronte School and Director of Bronte Nursery in Kent since 2017. She believes that a successful education is about far more than preparing children for the next assessment or milestone. Her educational philosophy places curiosity, creativity, individuality and joy at the heart of learning, giving children the space to think deeply, embrace challenge and develop the confidence and adaptability they will need for the future.

This article first appeared in *Education Insider Magazine* and is republished here with permission.



Rupert Weber, General Manager of Education at apetito

Closing the Hunger-Engagement Gap in School Meals

School meals continue to be an important priority for educators, but new market research from apetito reveals a significant gap between children's appetite for school meals and their enthusiasm for what's on the menu.

The survey of children, parents and decision-makers in the sector suggests 77 per cent of children feel hungry at mealtimes, highlighting the importance food plays in the school day, but only a third (36 per cent) look forward to eating the dishes. This suggests the current challenge is centred more around child engagement – they may be eager to eat but feel uninspired by what's on offer. In fact, the children surveyed scored their current school meal experience a 5.5 out of 10, with thirty-two per cent rating it a three or below.

These findings emphasise a clear need to rethink school mealtimes – balancing meeting children's expectations while supporting their health, wellbeing and learning.

Why Nutrition Alone isn't Enough

Nutrition and children's enjoyment go hand in hand – nutritious meals only benefit children if they're eaten. The research indicates a growing need to close the gap between hunger and enjoyment by providing meals that nourish children and that they look forward to eating.

Whilst it's essential that children have access to balanced, nutritious meals, research suggests this isn't enough to engage them. When asked what makes food appealing, children most strongly resonated with words such as 'tasty' and 'delicious', while parents placed more emphasis on balanced nutrition.

For children, flavour, enjoyment and familiarity prove to be the deciding factors. Over a third (36 per cent) said they are hesitant to try new foods, highlighting the importance of familiar or recognisable options on the menu, alongside choices that broaden tastes and delight more adventurous eaters.

This highlights one key message: Nutrition and enjoyment should not be treated as competing priorities.

The Home-School Divide

In comparison, 80 per cent of parents say their children enjoy mealtimes at home. This raises questions about what's preventing children feeling the same excitement about school meals as they do about meals at home.

The research findings suggest the answer may lie in the broader dining experience, rather than the food itself. While mealtimes at home often feature familiar favourites, and children may be more likely to have a degree of influence over what they eat and the environment they're eating in, school mealtimes can sometimes feel functional and transactional. Rather than focusing on enjoyment and actively engaging children, the priority can often be simply ensuring they're fed within tight timeframes.

Enjoyment is an essential part of successful school food provision. If children feel excited by the food being served, they are more likely to eat during meal service and develop positive relationships with food. If not, they can be more likely to disengage, which can have a knock-on impact to their health and wellbeing.

The challenge for schools and food providers is therefore not just to serve food, but to create an engaging mealtime experience that children look forward to.

Parents' Expectations are Changing

It's not just children's expectations that are evolving. Of the parents surveyed, satisfaction with school meal provision averaged 2.8 out of 5, indicating there is room for improvement.

Parents are placing increasing importance on the overall quality of school meals, suggesting concerns around limited choice and agency for children. Alongside balanced nutrition and menu choice, flexibility, particularly for children with strong preferences or varying appetites, ranked as parents' top priorities.

There's also a significant shift in viewing food as a part of wellbeing, not just fuel. Eighty-four per cent of parents prioritise eating together as a family, while 80 per cent actively involve their children in food preparation. These at-home habits reflect a growing need to create similar positive associations in school settings. While it's recognised that schools operate with different constraints and operational pressures, parents are increasingly seeking reassurance that school mealtimes are not just about food, but also enjoyment, engagement and instilling healthy eating habits in the long term.

Where Schools Need Support

The report findings sit within a challenging wider context: Schools continue to face significant external pressures that can restrict their ability to innovate and respond to challenging expectations.

Expectations around food quality, nutrition, and pupil engagement continue to be among the biggest barriers. Furthermore, rising food costs, energy prices, and wider inflationary pressures have also increased the cost of delivering school meals in recent years. Schools are also often constrained by their existing facilities, with many kitchens designed years ago for a very different school food landscape and not built to accommodate the volume required today. This, combined with rising labour costs, makes delivering a more engaging, exciting and personalised dining experience for pupils challenging.

While pressure persists, the goal is not for schools and food providers to choose between nutrition and enjoyment. School meals need to nourish children while also encouraging participation in mealtimes and creating positive food experience, posing an opportunity to close the hunger-engagement gap.



A Menu Refresh

Reflecting its biggest menu refresh to date, apetito has launched 18 new dishes, developed with children at the forefront, ready for the brand-new school year. Shaped by the views and experiences of pupils, parents and key decision makers across the sector, the new range, created with the expertise of apetito chefs and dietitians, combines great taste with balanced nutrition, bringing more enjoyment, variety and choice to school menus.

To find out more about the new range, visit apetito.link/new-childrens-range

To find out more about the current state of school catering, download the full market research report at :

apetito.link/school-meals-research

UPCOMING COMPETITIONS

SHAKESPEARE MONOLOGUE COMPETITION
Deadline: 10 NOVEMBER
Open to KS2-5

CHRISTMAS BANNER COMPETITION
Deadline: 23 November
Open to EYFS to KS2

DANCE COMPETITION
Deadline: 25 November
Open to KS2-5

YOUNG MUSICIAN COMPETITION
Deadline: 2 December
Open to KS2-5

DRAMA COMPETITION
Deadline: 9 December
Open to KS2-5
limited spaces

A CAPPELLA COMPETITION
Deadline: 16 December
Open to all
limited spaces

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

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 preferences on the ISA website.

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

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ISA | ARTS

Welcome back to a new academic year. We hope you had a restful summer break.

If you haven't yet had the chance to explore the National Arts Calendar 2026-27, we encourage you to visit our website to discover the wide range of creative opportunities, competitions and events available for your pupils throughout the year. If you have any questions or would like further information, please don't hesitate to contact us at isaarts@isaschools.org.uk.



Congratulations to all the schools that took part in the regional art competitions. The standard of work was exceptional, and it was wonderful to see so much creativity and enthusiasm on display. A huge thank you also goes to all the ISA Arts Coordinators, schools, teachers, judges and volunteers whose time, dedication and hard work made these events possible.

We wish the very best of luck to all the students who have qualified for the final, which will take place on Thursday 19 November at Chesford Grange Hotel. We look forward to celebrating their achievements and sharing all of the wonderful artwork in our virtual gallery, which will be available to view from mid-November.

One Starry Night

by Lena N J, Kingsley School – Highly Commended in the ISA Essay Competition 2026, Year 7-9 category.

One Starry Night

Drip. Drip. I sigh. Gran was right, it is going to rain after all. I said I didn't believe her, that it looked perfectly pleasant outside. She said to trust her, her knees didn't lie. I guess I shouldn't have doubted her knees. Not when they're right, like now. Perhaps I should've listened and taken a better coat. Too late now. The rain stars to pick up pace and cascades down form the darkening sky. The trail in front of me is already muddy, stones now slick and shimmering with wet. Icy fingers brush my neck. I shiver.

The murky sky casts long, hungry shadows upon my surroundings, and before I know it, it's suddenly descended into darkness. So much for my hope of catching the sunset. It's got dark earlier than I thought it would, but I suppose I'll have to stop for the night somewhere, so why not around here? Behind me, as I was walking, I think remember spying a hikers' hut in the woods. I glance behind me at the trees, only able to pick them out by their silhouette, darker than the sky behind them, but only just. They sway hypnotically in the breeze, beckoning me towards them.

Well, even if I don't find the hut, the canopy will offer some shelter from the unrelenting downpour. Hitching my bag higher up on my shoulders, I put my head down and walk rapidly into the woods. As I thought, the canopy of leaves does relieve me from the worst of the rain, but barely. I guess I can't really get any wetter now, though, my hair is plastered to my face and droplets run in rivulets down my cheeks, like cold tears. Joy.

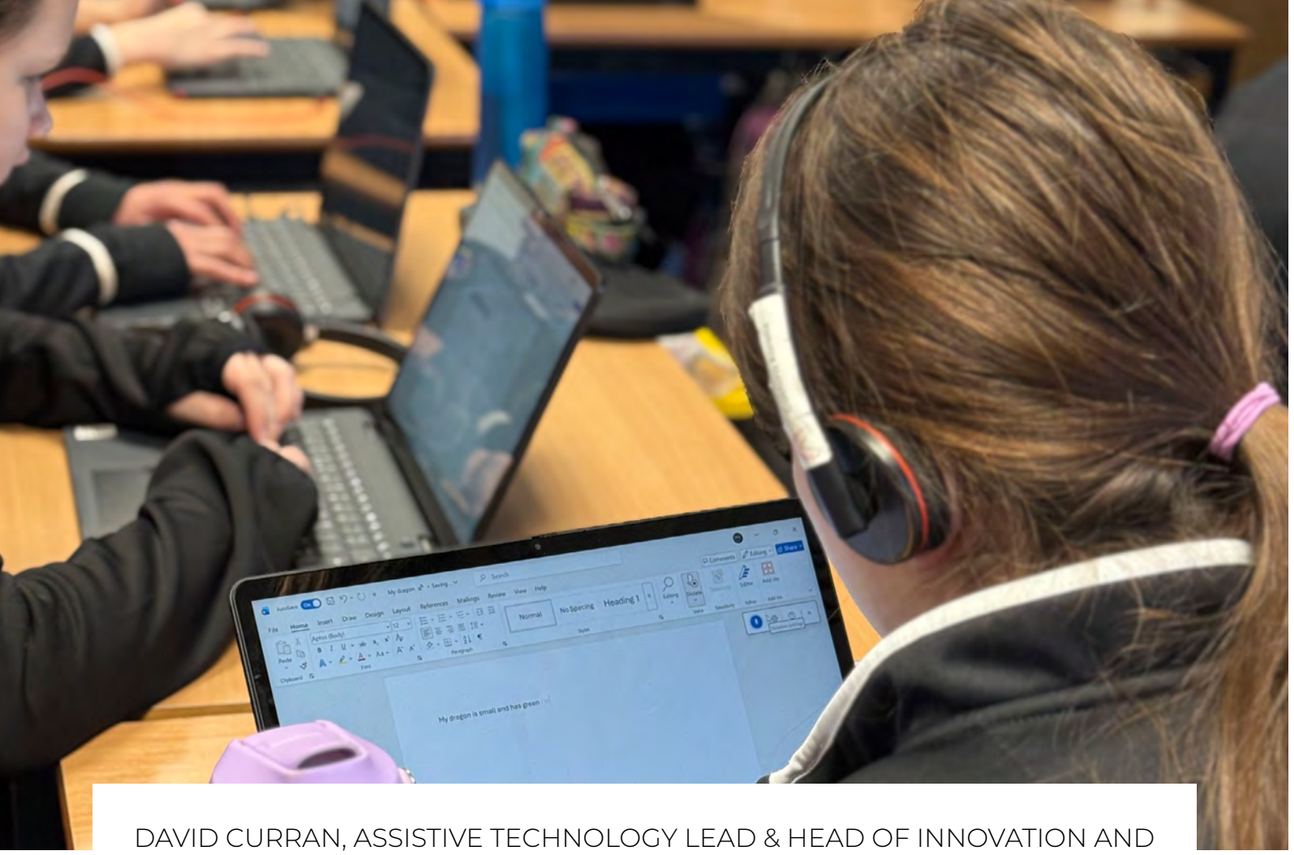
I reach a clearing, and I think I recognise one of the trees, how it's drooping so low and swaying so precariously it feels like it might fall over any second now. The hut must be close. I scour the clearing. There it is. A shade lighter than the trees around it. It's pretty small, but definitely big enough for one night. Empty, too; a great bonus. I quickly cross over to it and inspect my sleeping quarters for the night.

The first thing I notice is the portraits. There's about six of them in total. Their painted eyes stare straight of the canvas. One of them - the one closest to where I dropped my dripping bag-depicts a man. Eyes wild, mouth agape. Face marred and bloated by bruises that stain his face an inky purple. The stuff of nightmares. Goosebumps prickle on my arms. I stare at the painting; the painting stares back. My eyes water - it's never a good idea to have a staring contest with an inanimate object.

I look away hurriedly. I roll out my sleeping bag. I didn't bring a pillow-I decided to prioritise snacks instead - but that's okay. Besides, those Maltesers were worth it. I drift off to the aggressive, but soothing sounds of the rainfall still chucking it down outside.

As I wake up to nothingness. It takes me a moment to realise that it's because I've forgotten to open my eyes yet. My mouth feels dry and crusty. Groggily I prise my eyelids open and wince as weak sunlight falls directly into them. Good, hopefully that means it won't be as wet today. I'm just deliberating what to have for breakfast when I realise.

Sunlight. There were no windows last night, though. Were there? No, I'm sure there wasn't. There was only - portraits. I stiffen and sit up. There are six windows dotted around the room. I was never alone.



DAVID CURRAN, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LEAD & HEAD OF INNOVATION AND FUTURES AT MOON HALL SCHOOL REIGATE

Not all difficulty is a barrier: What five years of teaching assistive technology has taught us about access, belonging and independence

Not all difficulty is a barrier. Some difficulty is what the learning consists of.

That distinction matters whenever schools introduce assistive or educational technology. Our purpose should not be to make learning effortless. It should be to remove the avoidable friction that prevents pupils from engaging, while preserving the thinking, practice and persistence through which learning happens.

At Moon Hall School Reigate, a specialist dyslexia school for pupils in Years 3 to 11, we have spent five years developing the explicit teaching of assistive technology. Many of our pupils arrive after difficult experiences of education. They may have access to a laptop and specialist software, but access to a tool does not necessarily mean they can use it confidently, strategically or independently.

A device is not independence. Access must be taught.

When our work began, assistive technology largely sat within ICT lessons. We gradually developed it into a structured curriculum that teaches pupils how to use tools for reading, writing, planning, organisation and communication.

This includes familiar functions such as text to speech, speech to text, digital annotation, mind mapping, immersive reading tools, keyboard shortcuts and file management. Increasingly, it also includes artificial intelligence. The emphasis, however, is not on collecting more technology. It is on helping pupils understand which tool is appropriate, when it is useful and when it might interfere with the learning itself.
A pupil who automatically uses speech to text for every task may gain speed, but could miss opportunities to develop spelling, sentence construction or keyboard fluency. Another pupil may avoid dictation, even when it would help, because using it in front of peers feels conspicuous.

The educational decision cannot therefore be reduced to whether a tool is available. It involves the learner, the task, the environment and the purpose of the activity.

REMOVING THE WRONG DIFFICULTY

Cognitive load research helps to explain this. Learning places unavoidable demands on working memory, particularly when material is unfamiliar or complex. Poorly designed instructions, inaccessible text and unnecessary transcription can add demands that do not contribute to the intended learning.[1]

Consider a pupil studying a complex historical argument. The intellectual challenge may lie in weighing evidence and reaching a justified conclusion. If the pupil must spend most of their available effort decoding dense text or physically producing every word, those access demands may obscure the historical thinking we intended to develop.

Text to speech or dictation can reduce that obstruction. They do not remove the need to interpret evidence, organise an argument or exercise judgement.

The same distinction applies beyond SEND. I have seen capable Year 11 and Year 13 pupils struggle to begin or sustain extended coursework. They understood the subject, but planning, task initiation, organisation and the scale of the work became barriers to demonstrating that understanding.

Breaking the assignment into stages, using a planning structure or talking through an initial idea can help the pupil enter the task. Support should make the learning reachable without taking ownership of it away from the pupil.

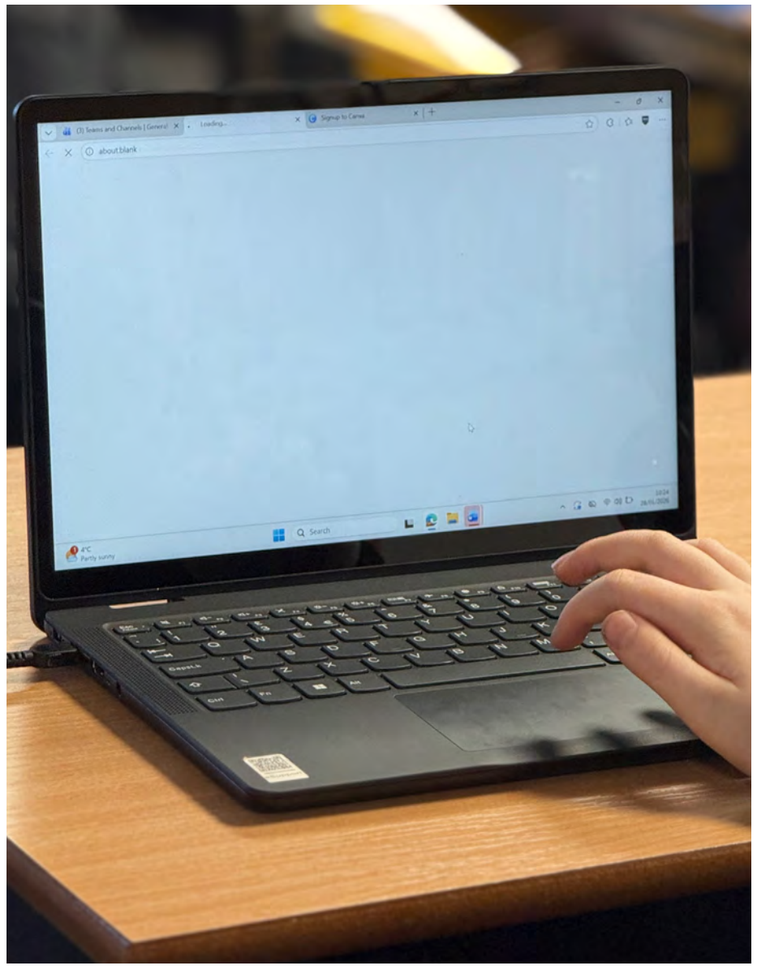
BELONGING BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

Technology use is also shaped by identity and belonging.

A pupil is unlikely to use support confidently if doing so makes them feel less capable or visibly different. This is particularly important for learners who have already internalised descriptions such as “slow”, “behind” or “not academic”.

Belonging is not an additional pastoral concern, separate from learning. It affects whether pupils ask for help, take risks and use the strategies available to them. The Department for Education’s 2026 white paper makes this explicit, arguing that children need a strong sense of engagement, belonging and inclusion to thrive, and expecting schools to monitor pupils’ belonging and engagement by 2029.[2]

This is one reason assistive technology should not be presented as remedial equipment issued only after failure. Many accessibility features are already built into everyday platforms and devices. When flexible ways of reading, recording, planning and responding are normal parts of classroom practice, pupils are less likely to experience support as evidence that something is wrong with them.
Universal approaches do not remove the need for individual provision. They create a more inclusive starting



point from which specific support can be added.[3]

WHAT OUR EVIDENCE HAS TAUGHT US

Our five-year journey has not produced a simple story in which more technology automatically led to greater independence.[4]

Access to devices improved. Pupils became familiar with a wider range of tools. Staff practice developed, and assistive technology became more visible across the school. Yet familiar challenges remained.

Some pupils chose not to use tools that could help them. Confidence varied between subjects and environments. Dictation could still cause embarrassment. Staff knowledge influenced whether technology was encouraged and embedded. A tool that worked well for one pupil could create additional complexity for another.

The most important lesson has therefore been that access requires teaching, rehearsal and review.

Pupils need opportunities to compare tools, recognise their own patterns of difficulty and reflect on what genuinely helps. They also need to know when to work without technological assistance. Independence is demonstrated by making increasingly informed choices about whether, when and why to use support. It is demonstrated by making increasingly informed choices.

Artificial intelligence makes this distinction even more important. AI can clarify instructions, help organise ideas, provide alternative explanations and support a pupil to get started. It can also complete too much of the intellectual work.

The leadership question is not simply whether AI should be allowed. It is whether its use preserves the intended learning and leaves the pupil better able to act without it next time.

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Schools considering their own approach might begin with five questions.

1. Are pupils explicitly taught how to select and use accessibility tools?
2. Can staff distinguish between the barrier that should be removed and the difficulty that should remain?
3. Do pupils feel safe using support without being marked out as less capable?
4. Is technology helping pupils build transferable strategies, or creating dependence on a particular product?
5. Do review processes include pupil voice and examine what happens across different subjects and settings?

These questions shift attention away from the number of devices purchased or applications licensed. They focus instead on whether technology is contributing to access, confidence and growing agency.

The aim is not a frictionless education. Learning will sometimes be demanding, uncomfortable and slow. That may be exactly where the learning lies.

Our responsibility is to ensure that pupils are not expending their effort on barriers created by inaccessible environments, unsuitable resources or assumptions about how everyone should learn. Remove those barriers, preserve the worthwhile difficulty and teach pupils how to navigate both.

A device may provide access. Independence comes from knowing whether, when and how to use it.

NOTES

[1] Fred Paas and Jeroen J. G. van Merriënboer, "Cognitive-Load Theory: Methods to Manage Working Memory Load in the Learning of Complex Tasks," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 29, no. 4 (2020): 394–398.

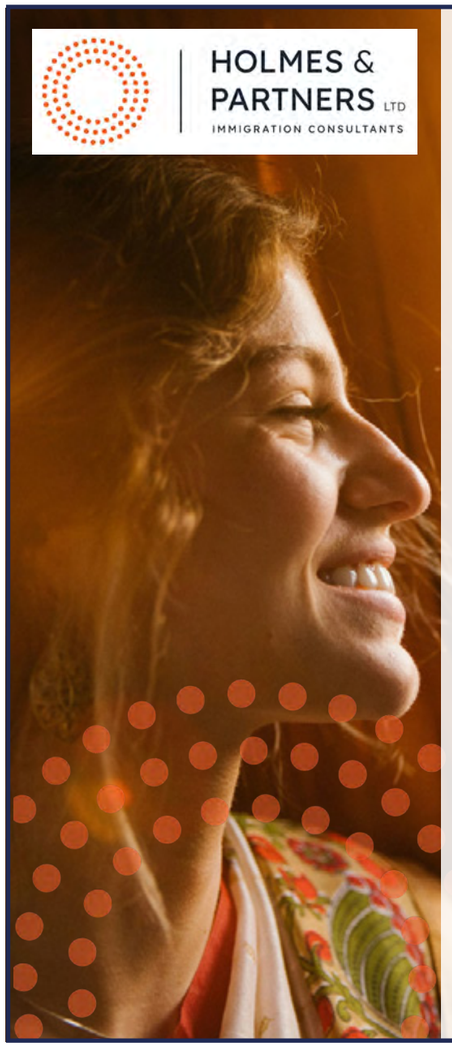
[2] Department for Education, *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* (London, 2026).

[3] CAST, *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0* (Lynnfield, MA: CAST, 2024).

[4] David Curran, Five Years of Explicit Assistive Technology Education at Moon Hall: Access, Confidence, Independence and the Evolution towards AI-Enabled Practice, 2021–2026 (unpublished practitioner research, 2026).



David Curran is Assistive Technology Lead and Head of Innovation and Futures at Moon Hall School Reigate, a specialist dyslexia school for pupils in Years 3 to 11. He has worked in education for 24 years across state and specialist settings. His work focuses on explicitly teaching assistive technology, inclusive uses of artificial intelligence, digital independence and the changing relationship between curriculum, careers and access to learning.



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ALIYA AZAM OF THE AL-KHOEI FOUNDATION

Man and machines, the intersection between faith and AI

In the technological model behind much of artificial intelligence, humans are often treated as information-processing systems, where intelligence is understood in terms of computation, patterns and problem-solving.

This differs from the Islamic view, which sees humans as moral and spiritual beings with fitra -reason, wisdom, conscience and a soul/self.

Work on what we now commonly call AI began in the 1940s and 1950s, with early computers, neural-network ideas, and Alan Turing's work on machine intelligence. However, the new reality of what we understand to be AI has only been in the public consciousness for less than a decade with Open AI's release of the first ChatGPT model in 2022.

Since then, other companies such as Anthropic, Google's DeepMind and Grok have come to the forefront leading to what has become known as an AI 'arms race' and handing great power to the tech bosses of Silicon Valley in California.

But what of human agency in this? This is the primary challenge posed by AI: will intelligent machines diminish or remove the power of humans to influence events in their day-to-day lives around the globe?

AI reflects deeper cultural transformations such as quantification and meaning, commodification and knowledge. From an Islamic perspective, the biggest concern about AI is how it changes our understanding of what it means to be human. The danger is not simply that machines may become intelligent, but that humans may start seeing themselves as nothing more than machines, forgetting their spiritual nature, consciousness, love, worship and moral responsibility.

An Islamic approach to AI begins with the Qur'an but also draws on the wider Islamic intellectual tradition and its ideas about the self, consciousness and knowledge. A key question is whether AI is truly becoming more human-like, or whether humans are projecting human qualities onto machines and beginning to think of themselves like machines.

What is the self in Islam? Humans are considered to be moral spiritual beings. When it comes to AI human beings are like an information processor, intelligence is computation. From an Islamic perspective intelligence is reason, wisdom, conscience. AI takes humans as a benchmark and maybe exceeding that. In Islam the concept of the fitrah in the Qur'an defines human reality, Q.30.30: 'So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fitrah of God upon which He has created [all] people…'

What do we mean by fitrah? fitrah is the God given nature. AI can mimic a fragment of the human self but cannot touch the spiritual core of what designs a human being.

So, we must ask ourselves: what is the self? Everyone has some concept of who they are and from an Islamic perspective we need to go deep. We need to focus on fitra because it defines humanity's innate, pure spiritual disposition toward God and truth. It shows our:

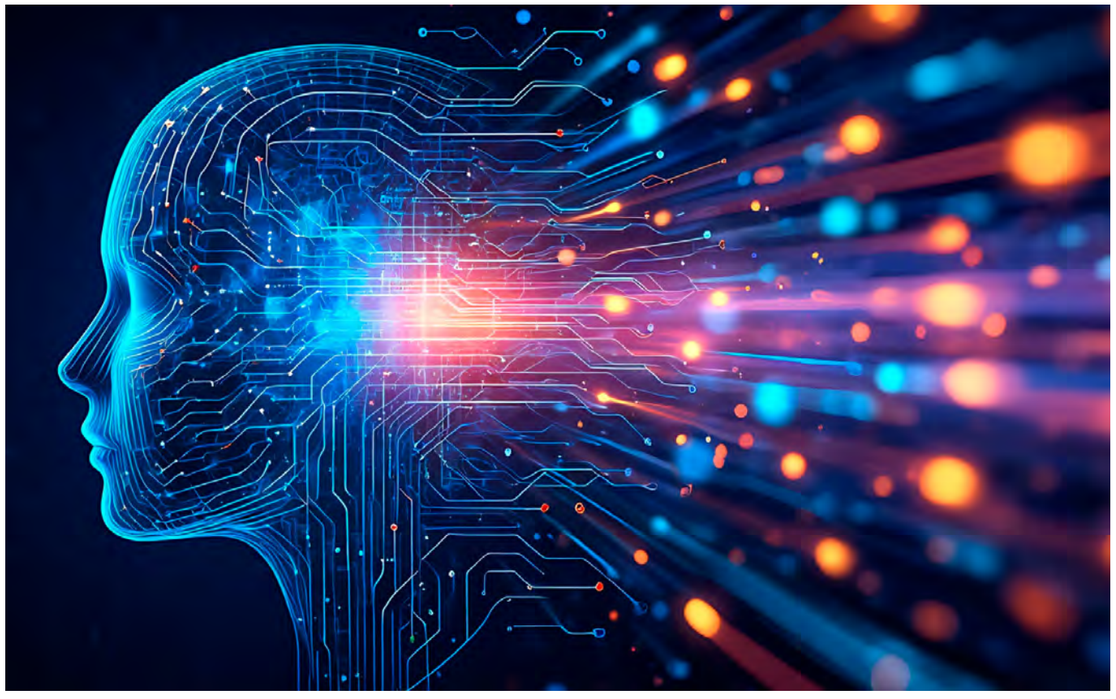
- Primordial nature
- God-given personality
- Knowledge of God – perfecting one's moral and spiritual nature
- Of being God's representative on earth – khalifah

The whole of life, all our religious practices in Islam, are a training ground in taqwa, which we can translate as God-consciousness: that I may be aware in every element of my life, words, actions and thoughts, that I am the creature of God, that God has given me a high vocation to serve, love, obey and worship God, that I am accountable to God and that, even though I cannot see God, God sees me all the time.

The key concern about AI from an Islamic perspective is not whether machines can become intelligent, but whether humans have forgotten that they are more than information-processing machines. Human beings possess a heart, spirituality, emotions and dimensions of experience that cannot simply be reduced to mechanistic processes or replicated by AI.



Aliya Azam is a UCL Psychology graduate with an MA in Islamic Societies and Cultures from SOAS, has a PGCE in Science, and has completed advanced Islamic Seminary training. She served as Head of Science for 34 years at A-Sadiq School and Al-Zahra School, is an interfaith coordinator for the Al Khoei Foundation, and has trustee roles with Religious Education Council, (REC) and the Christian Muslim Forum. Awarded an MBE in 2015, she represented the Shia Muslim community at majorr royal ceremonies.



STEPHEN LLOYD, ART TEACHER AT CENTRE ACADEMY EAST ANGLIA

Creativity in Practice: A conversation at Centre Academy East Anglia with the University of the Arts London





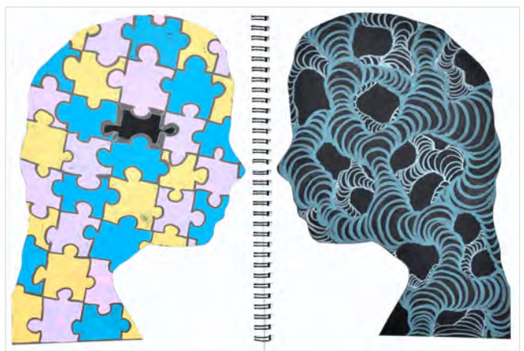
At Centre Academy East Anglia, learning feels a little different to what you'd expect in a mainstream school, and that's very much by design.

The school supports young people with a wide range of additional learning needs, many of whom haven't had the best experiences in traditional classrooms. With a strong leadership team, specialist staff and smaller class sizes there's a real focus on each student as an individual, helping them feel safe, understood, and ready to reconnect with learning in their own time.

Creative subjects play a big part in that journey. Through qualifications delivered with UAL Awarding Body, students are given the space to discover and develop their own creative voice, often in ways that feel far more natural to them than purely academic work.

When we visited, we spent time with Mr Lloyd, who leads art at the school, and it was immediately clear how much care he puts into both his teaching and his relationships with his pupils.

On a particularly rainy afternoon, he welcomed us into the art room, a warm, inviting space that felt like a world away from the weather outside. The room told its own story: students' work filled every corner, from bold splashes of paint and delicate hanging sculptures to clay leaves shaped into masks and sketchbooks filled with imaginative drawings. It wasn't just a classroom; it felt like a space that truly belonged to the students.



"Many years ago, when I first came here, I don't think the provision was quite right for our learners, however under the new management and support with my focus on shaping something that would work for our students and would allow them to connect with their creativity the department evolved" Mr Lloyd explains.

That process took time, and plenty of trial and error.

"We tried different approaches and gradually figured out what suited our students best. That's what led us to UAL. It wasn't a straight path, a bit of a rollercoaster, really, but since then, it's been really positive. The flexibility has made all the difference."

That flexibility allows Mr Lloyd to tailor projects around his pupils, their interests, their strengths, and their personalities, while still working towards meaningful qualifications.

"The students move between different lessons during the day," he says, "but when they come in here, it changes. As you've seen, they become immersed into the space itself which is quite unique."

And it's not just the space; it's the atmosphere he's created within it.

"It's somewhere they know they can relax," he adds. They can focus in their own way, and we keep things calm. It's important they feel comfortable, that's when they do their best work."

That sense of trust doesn't happen by chance. Mr Lloyd takes the time to really get to know his pupils, understanding that not everyone will take to art straight away.

"Sometimes, especially with SEN students, it can be hard at first," he says. "Some of them don't see the point of art. But once you build that relationship, once they feel comfortable with you, things can start to change."

And when it does click, the impact can be powerful.

For many students, creative work becomes something they can genuinely connect with, even a form of release or self-expression that they haven't found elsewhere.

"A lot of our students find writing difficult," Mr Lloyd explains. "So being able to express themselves visually gives them another way to communicate who they are and what they're feeling."

Projects that draw on personal identity often have the biggest impact.

"Self-portrait work is always strong," he says. "They don't have to put everything into words, they can show it in their own way. And you can really see their confidence grow when they realise what they're capable of."

For Mr Lloyd, success looks very different from traditional measures.

"It's not just about grades or finished pieces," he reflects. "It's about seeing a student come into the room and feel like they belong. Watching them take pride in what they're doing, build confidence, and start to explore their own ideas, that's what matters most."

Every creative setting is different. But in classrooms like this one, it's clear how much of a difference a supportive environment, and a school and teacher who truly understands their students can have. By building strong relationships and giving students the freedom to express themselves, Mr Lloyd and CAEA is helping open doors for learners who may not have found their place anywhere else.

Stephen Lloyd is the Art Teacher and Personal Tutor at Centre Academy East Anglia, located near Ipswich in Suffolk. Centre Academy is an independent specialist school dedicated to supporting students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia, ADHD, and ASD. The school provides a safe, structured, and intimate environment featuring small classes and individualised instruction, empowering students to develop vital coping skills and personal resilience rather than hiding their challenges.



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The ISA Team

Rudolf Eliott Lockhart, CEO
rudi.eliott.lockhart@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 581692
Peter Woodroffe, Deputy CEO
peter.woodroffe@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 581694
Helen Stanton-Tonner, Director of Education & Inclusion
helen.stanton-tonner@isaschools.org.uk | 07934 304519
Hannah Lovegrove Campion, Head of SEND
hannah.lovegrove.campion@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 524892
Joseph Tomkins, Education & Communications Manager
joseph.tomkins@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 619802
Philip Reynolds, Head of Press
press@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 523619
Alice Thompson, Head of Professional Development & Events
alice.thompson@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 581696
Helen Marks, Marketing & Events Coordinator
helen.marks@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 581695
Alex Glendinning, Marketing & Events Assistant
alex.glendinning@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 581697
Emily Ward, National Sports Manager
emily.ward@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 610189
Neave Wilson, National Sports Coordinator
neave.wilson@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 610181
Marie-Ange Moncuy, National Arts Manager
marie-ange.moncuy@isaschools.org.uk | 01700 800368
Alicia Muscella, National Arts Coordinator
alicia.muscella@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 610185
Karen Goddard, Office Manager and PA to the CEO
karen.goddard@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 581698
Gemma Golab, Finance Officer
gemma.golab@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 61980
Joanne Snow, Membership & Accounts Assistant
joanne.snow@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 581693
Lesley Rea, Senior Membership Assistant
lesley.rea@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 581699
Megan Snow, Admin Assistant
megan.snow@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 610184

Your Regional Ambassadors

Barbara McKeown, East
barbara.mckeown@isaschools.org.uk | 07779 003421
Lynn Maggs-Wellings, London North
lynn.maggs-wellings@isaschools.org.uk | 07739 859877
Linda Sanders, London South
linda.sanders@isaschools.org.uk | 07984 628033
Sue Manser, London West
sue.manser@isaschools.org.uk | 07554 954641
John Price, Midlands
john.price@isaschools.org.uk | 07835 205242
Emma Howard, North
emma.howard@isaschools.org.uk | 07931 523561
Victoria Kennington, South West
victoria.kennington@isaschools.org.uk | 07801 983103

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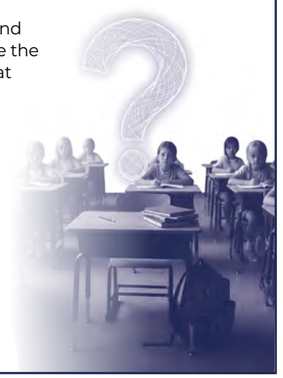
Legal Corner with
AI tech in independent schools –
a legal perspective

PENNINGTONS MANCHES COOPER

Artificial intelligence (AI) can be a powerful tool for supporting students through personalised learning, revision support and assistive technologies. On the flip side, it also presents challenges such as the risk of over-reliance and the potential impact on independent thinking and creativity. In any case, as AI use grows, it should be implemented with appropriate oversight and compliance with legal requirements.

Key areas to think about include:

- **AI usage policy and training:**
  An AI usage policy will promote the use of approved tools by both staff and pupils. The policy should be supported with training to staff and pupils to provide clear guidance on acceptable AI use and appropriate teacher oversight. Plagiarism and IP infringement risks should be highlighted, as well as bias risks and hallucinations, with critical thinking encouraged alongside AI use. Schools must specifically highlight to pupils the impact of using undisclosed AI in assessed coursework and potential consequences (such as cheating and potential losses of qualification), in line with Ofqual guidance.
- **Vendor selection and contracting for AI:**
  When procuring AI products or services, schools should carefully review contracts to understand provisions around AI, data usage and security, and ask the vendor how their AI operates, where the data is hosted and whether pupil data may be used for training purposes (and if so, under what terms). Are the Department for Education's Generative AI product safety standards met?
- **Safeguarding:**
  Schools should carry out risk assessments for harmful content and consider compliance with the Online Safety Act 2023 (especially if users can share content with one another using AI).
- **Data protection:**
  A Data Protection Impact Assessment should be carried out to understand and document what personal data is processed, how it is used and where it is stored. Are mandatory data processing provisions in place as needed? Safeguards for international data transfers should be implemented if relevant. Privacy notices may need to be updated to provide greater transparency, and internal records updated to ensure they capture this personal data processing.



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schoolblazer.info | info@schoolblazer.com | 01832 280011

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