

# ISA JOURNAL

ISSUE 36 | INDEPENDENT LEADERSHIP | SPRING 2026  
cover photo: Arnold Lodge School



How to harness authenticity

Leading with wisdom in the AI moment

Why diversity and inclusion belongs in  
your leadership team

**ISA** | INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOLS  
ASSOCIATION



# TAILORED, NOT UNIFORM

We work in partnership to forge strong relationships to truly understand your school's community and what sets it apart.

Creating uniforms that students are happy and proud to wear.

Call us on 0113 238 9520 or email [info@perryuniform.co.uk](mailto:info@perryuniform.co.uk)  
[perryuniform.co.uk](http://perryuniform.co.uk)

**Perry**  
UNIFORM

# Welcome

## FROM THE CEO

### RUDOLF ELLIOTT LOCKHART

---



In an Association of almost 800 headteachers, there is a risk that devoting an issue of *The Journal* to leadership might feel like bringing coals to Newcastle. But what is clear from the heads across our Association is that successful leadership can look very

different from one school to another. Your leadership is not only a function of who each of you is and the choices you make, but also of the challenges you face and the communities you serve. This means that who you are as leaders changes over time even if the values you base our leadership on, and the desire to do the very best for the children in your care, might stay the same. I hope that this issue of *The Journal* gives you an opportunity to reflect on your own leadership and to explore the many dimensions of leadership in independent schools at a time when the landscape has never been more complex or more demanding.

The past few years have tested school leaders in unprecedented ways. From navigating a global pandemic to facing some of the most significant policy changes our sector has seen in generations, the role of headship has been transformed. As heads today you are expected not only to be educationalists and leaders of your communities, but also to handle finance, marketing, regulation and preparation for inspection, ever more involved and demanding parents, growing challenges of student and staff mental health, the need to recognise a rapidly changing society and the critical importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and the growing challenge of how AI is transforming everything. The way that ISA members rise to meet these challenges, and so often do so without pretension but with such humour, empathy, and humanity is why I find working at ISA such an inspiration. I hope our network of fellowship provides something similar for you, and that the pages of this issue give you space for reflection.

This issue brings together voices from across our membership who share their insights on what it means to lead well in today's world. Faith Hagerty, founder of The Acting Head, explores the power of authenticity in school leadership and why bringing your true self to the role matters more than ever. Laura Knight, founder of *Sapio*, examines how AI is reshaping the leadership landscape, offering both opportunities and challenges that require wisdom to navigate. James Wilding provides a fascinating personal perspective, reflecting



on over 60 years in independent education, from pupil to teacher to leader with over 40 years as a head, and how the profession has evolved through the decades. Dai Preston, Headteacher at Arnold Lodge School, reminds us that we cannot simply copy successful leadership from elsewhere; instead, we must write our own story based on our unique context, community, and vision. Stephen Burley, Head Master at King's High School, Warwick, tackles the "minefields" of modern educational leadership, while Tushi Gorasia, Headteacher at Charterhouse Square School, makes a compelling case for why diversity, inclusion and belonging in our leadership teams isn't just desirable, it's essential.

Of course, there's always much more. We have celebrations of our arts competitions, of our sport, of our award winners and our new members. And if there's something that you think is missing, please get in touch and perhaps you can rectify things in the pages of the next issue.

#### CONTRIBUTORS

**Rudolf Elliott Lockhart**, CEO of ISA

**Laura Knight**, Founder and CEO of *Sapio*

**Faith Hagerty**, Founder of The Acting Head

**James Wilding**, Academic Principal at Claires Court School

**Stephen Burley**, Head Master at King's High School, Warwick

**Dai Preston**, Headteacher at Arnold Lodge School

**Tushi Gorasia**, Headteacher at Charterhouse Square School

#### WRITE FOR THE JOURNAL:

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



English department at Ratcliffe College.



# Spaces to inspire



Our net-zero timber frame buildings are manufactured offsite for minimal disruption, using natural materials. Over 800 buildings UK-wide accommodate classrooms, SEND, SEMH, sports halls and pavilions, canteens and performing arts studios. Fully inclusive design and build for permanent buildings that won't cost the earth.

0800 917 7726  
info@tgescapes.co.uk

biophilic  
by nature

 **TG ESCAPES**  
modular eco-buildings



## CONTENTS

- 6 Leading with wisdom: Independent schools and the AI inflection point**  
Laura Knight, Founder and CEO of Sapio
- 8 Harnessing Authenticity: Channelling the authentic self in school leadership**  
Faith Hagerty, founder of The Acting Head
- 11 School News**
- 14 ISA Sport**
- 16 Excellence in English: What School Leaders Need to Know**  
Dandelion Learning
- 17 Fifty years and counting... leadership, management and teaching through the ages.**  
James Wilding, Academic Principal at Claires Court School
- 20 ISA Professional Development**
- 22 The arts (and minefields) of educational leadership**  
Stephen Burley, Head Master at King's High School, Warwick
- 26 ISA Arts**
- 30 You can't copy leadership, write your own story**  
Dai Preston, Headteacher at Arnold Lodge School
- 34 Independent leadership: Why diversity, inclusion and belonging in our leadership teams matter**  
Tushi Gorasia, Headteacher at Charterhouse Square School
- 36 Welcome to New Members**
- 38 ISA Awards**

ISA  
independently speaking  
the ISA podcast

now streaming on your favourite pocast app and the ISA website

LAURA KNIGHT  
FOUNDER AND CEO OF SAPIO LTD

# Leading with wisdom: Independent Schools and the AI inflection point

## FROM TURBULENCE TO TOPOGRAPHY

Against a complex backdrop of pressures - falling rolls, VAT on fees, rising operational costs, shifting parental perceptions, and intensified political scrutiny - the rise of a disruptive new technology has added both complexity and opportunity for independent school leaders. Generative artificial intelligence is not a storm to be weathered but a tectonic shift that is altering the landscape, requiring leaders to rethink how they govern, decide, and lead.

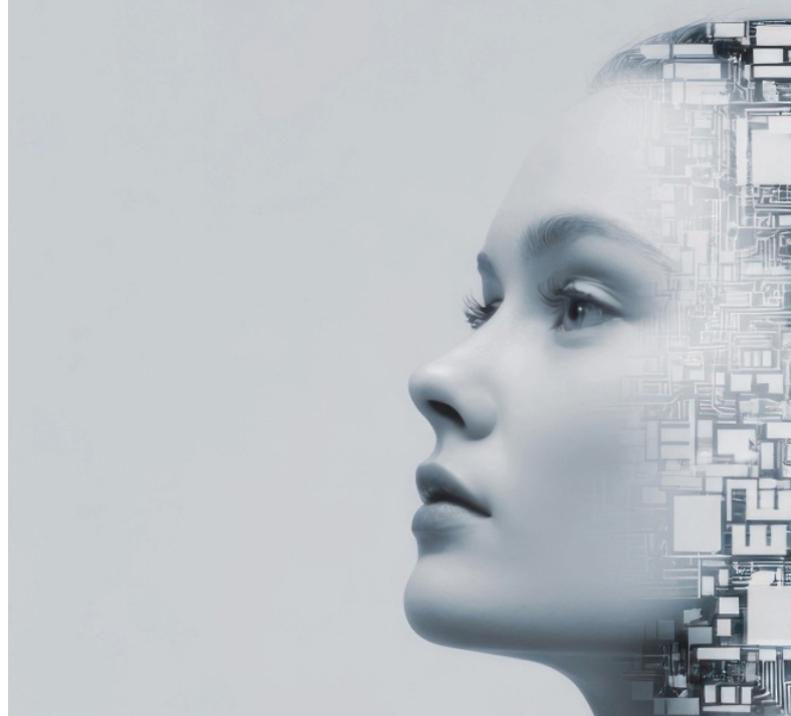
Together, we will address what the Independent Schools Association's diverse membership must consider as AI impacts and reshapes the landscape of educational practice and societal expectations. The framework is straightforward: AI presents opportunities for professional renewal, challenges to equity and integrity, and new responsibilities for values-led governance.

### OPPORTUNITIES: THE INFLECTION POINT

A common response to disruption is to cling to traditions that appear to have stood the test of time. In independent education, this can take the form of emphasising heritage, familiar routines, or the visible symbols of continuity. We know that oak panelling was never the value proposition in itself. It signalled something deeper.

Families who choose independent schools are not buying competence that is absent elsewhere. They are making an investment in *how* professional judgment is exercised: the conditions in which educators work, the time available to know pupils well, and the space to prepare young people for intellectual complexity and future flourishing. It is this exercise of judgment, rather than surface tradition, that ultimately carries real educational value.

For teachers, there is an opportunity to make the work of teaching more joyful, creative, and deeply human, but only if AI is deployed with care and professional judgment. In many settings, everyday teaching has become crowded with busywork and administrative labour that squeezes rather than enriches professional impact. Used



deliberately, Generative AI tools can relieve some of that pressure, creating cognitive and energetic space for the parts of teaching that cannot and arguably *should not* be automated.

For operational teams, AI opens up different ways of approaching the business of running a school. Bursars can use modelling and predictive analytics to explore fee scenarios, cost pressures, and demographic change. Admissions teams can analyse patterns of demand and tailor engagement. Admissions and communications teams can build accessibility and adaptive approaches into the content by default. Heads can reclaim time for relational and strategic leadership. The intent is to ensure that human effort is directed towards work that depends on judgment, trust, and relationship.

The golden opportunity here for leaders is cultural. This disruptive inflection point is a great opportunity for a legitimate pause, to examine *why* schools do what they do, and *how* that work is delivered. Independent schools that use this moment to clarify priorities and reassert values are likely to emerge with greater coherence and confidence.

### CHALLENGES: EQUITY, INTEGRITY, AND THE TRUST DEFICIT

If AI is reshaping the landscape, it is also making existing fault lines more visible. Research from the Sutton Trust highlights a difficult truth for the sector: pupils in independent schools already enjoy greater access to AI tools than their peers in the maintained sector. Left unattended, this advantage risks compounding existing inequalities. For a sector that increasingly articulates its public legitimacy through bursaries, partnerships, and demonstrable public benefit, AI engagement carries particular responsibility.

Academic integrity presents a parallel pressure point. Generative AI can now produce work that meets or exceeds the standards of many traditional assessment



formats without requiring meaningful cognitive engagement. In that context, a race to outfox detection tools is a fool's game. It invites an adversarial dynamic that turns assessment into compliance theatre and hollows out educational purpose. Retreating to paper-based or surveillance-heavy workarounds does not resolve the underlying issue and often intensifies it by reinforcing mistrust rather than understanding. Wise leadership resists this arms race, focusing instead on clarity of expectations, professional judgment, and assessment practices that reduce the incentive for concealment.

Safeguarding and data protection form a third, non-negotiable challenge. The risks are well documented: exposure to inappropriate content, algorithmic bias, new vectors for manipulation or grooming, and the loss of control over personal data when identifiable pupil information is entered into open systems. Managing these risks requires more than policy compliance. It calls for anticipatory governance, staff training grounded in real scenarios, and ongoing vigilance as tools and behaviours evolve.

Underlying all these challenges is the question of trust. Parents, staff, regulators, and the wider public are watching how independent schools respond to AI at a moment of heightened scepticism about private education. Uncritical adoption risks appearing naive and opportunistic. Blanket avoidance signals fear and complacency. The leadership task lies in mapping the landscape between the two: exercising visible, values-led judgment in a space where scrutiny is no longer episodic but continuous.

## RESPONSIBILITIES: WHAT LEADERS MUST DO

The Independent Schools Inspectorate looks at the impact of leadership decisions about AI on safeguarding, educational quality and compliance, not the tools themselves. This places accountability with heads and governors who understand their school's context and values. Given that, there are clear foundations that cannot

be compromised:

**Data protection:** No identifiable pupil data in open access systems. DPIAs required where personal data is processed.

**Safeguarding:** Policies must explicitly address AI related risks, including exposure, manipulation, and harm.

**Professional conduct:** Clear expectations for staff use, boundaries, and accountability, aligned with existing standards.

**Governance:** Visible oversight, with decisions documented, reviewed, and adjusted in light of impact on pupils, staff, and trust

Ask: does this align with our philosophy? Does it reduce burden without diminishing judgment? Does it strengthen our offer while protecting the vulnerable?

## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN DISRUPTION

Artificial intelligence will not solve the structural challenges facing independent schools, nor does it offer simple remedies. What it does change is the range of choices available to leaders, and the conditions under which those choices are made. Governed with clarity rather than anxiety, AI can enable schools to redesign how professional effort is deployed, how decisions are informed, and how educational and operational leadership are exercised in practice.

This is leadership work. It calls for the courage to let go of practices that no longer serve, the humility to learn and adapt in public, and the confidence to govern with clarity in pursuit of young people's flourishing.

## AI AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: THE NEW LANDSCAPE AT A GLANCE

### Opportunities

- Protect time for judgment, creativity, and relationship
- Use the moment to question habit and clarify purpose

### Risks

- Widening advantage gaps
- Compliance theatre
- Loss of trust through overreach or retreat

### Non-negotiables

- No pupil data in open systems
- AI-aware safeguarding
- Clear staff use expectations
- Visible governance oversight

**Laura Knight** is Founder and CEO of Sapio Ltd, a consultancy specialising in digital strategy, AI and innovation for education.

A TechWomen100 Award Winner 2025, author, and international keynote speaker, Laura helps leaders use technology *well* in education.

info@sapio.company



FAITH HAGERTY  
FOUNDER OF THE ACTING HEAD

## Harnessing Authenticity: Channelling the authentic self in school leadership

Something interesting happens to us when we are put in charge. A new voice develops deep inside our psyche, whispering quiet reflections which at times propel us into action, yet can also place unhelpful imposter-shaped obstacles in our way. As school leaders, we rarely come prepared for the demands of running a large business. Teachers mostly enter the profession to make a difference to young people, to share their passion for their subject, but less so to balance the books, tackle employment law or health and safety legislation. This lack of expertise can be viewed of course as a weakness in the sector, but is it not also an opportunity to stand up in front of our communities as authentic and reflective learners?

It is without doubt a fascinating time when it comes to the key players on the world stage. Our young people are watching the rise of a leadership style that gets results, that demonstrates power and influence, but lacks empathy, self-awareness and dare I say it, transparency. It is vital then, that as school leaders, we have the courage to model the human qualities we name in our school values. Have you ever noticed when interviewing prospective pupils, that you lean towards the children who go off-piste in their responses? It is a delight to witness a child who rather than reel off prepared answers demonstrating their academic prowess, instead puts their own individual stamp on the process. We enjoy them because they are authentic - we can learn so much from those young leftfield thinkers.

In my work as a coach, I am interested in whether authentic leadership can be learnt. We bring so much of our upbringing to our leadership style, as well as our own education, the role models we aspired to and the environments we have experienced, but leadership surely cannot be a fixed set of behaviours. I have enjoyed people I have coached consciously working towards authenticity by focusing on characteristics such as vulnerability and openness, which may not have come naturally to them as a way of presenting themselves.



Often the choices we make in the early part of our career as a school leader are very different to those we make a few years down the line. I would argue that wearing this journey proudly in front of our school communities is part of authentic leadership. In one of my prizegiving speeches as Head, I described the experience of first becoming a Head as putting on an expensive new outfit which doesn't feel like it suits you at first, but fits more naturally over time, the more you wear it. As far as I know, parents and pupils appreciated this honesty. We are all human after all.

I don't need to tell you that the current pressures being faced by the independent sector are placing unprecedented strain on school leaders. As a coach, I am witnessing the way in which external factors are forcing experienced leaders to second guess themselves, to question their ability and indeed their future in their roles. Times of immense pressure as a Head test our ability to wear the mask of positivity so integral to school leadership. Our staff and pupils look to us for reassurance and optimism, which can feel unmanageable at times. I remember when I first took on a Director of Sixth Form role and my Head at the time used to tell me off for what she called 'leaking', meaning letting my levels of stress show. While authenticity would suggest being prepared to expose times of stress and worry, we must carefully balance the needs of those in our care. Another current pressure on Heads which cannot go unmentioned, is the shrinking space for innovation, in an increasingly risk-averse industry. If you aspired to headship to share your creativity and belief that education can and must be better, I hear you. I fear that many Heads are around the board table with governors as we speak, having their wonderful ideas pushed aside for now. I urge you to hold on to these dreams - the sector needs you.

So what does authentic leadership mean in practice? One of the first things that strikes us when we take on a headship, is that we now represent by and large, the public face of our school. This means that our words,



face, voice and actions become public property in a way they may not have been before. In my consultancy work as The Acting Head, I support school leaders in finding authenticity in these public interactions. Public speaking as one example, is very much in the comfort zone of an ex-Drama Teacher Head such as me, but for some, standing on stage in front of key stakeholders understandably fills them with horror. The profound work here tends not to focus so much on the technical aspects of speaking, such as breath control, pace or volume, although these are all useful tools, but more on keeping imposter syndrome at bay. It's remarkable just how powerful an inner voice can be and the impact it can have on our ability to speak at an audible speed or stand without visible tension in our bodies. My advice remains the same. Your audience remembers how you made them feel, not every word you have said, so the more of your true character you feel able to bring to the speech you are delivering, the better. Going off script and the use of storytelling are both effective ways of allowing a more natural version of yourself to shine through - something many school leaders perhaps shy away from. So what if you stumble on a phrase or stutter the odd word - are our audience not ultimately seeking reassurance that we are all trying our best and often getting it wrong?

Finally, let's talk about the importance of humour in authentic leadership. When I look back at all the schools in which I have served, I remember most fondly, those where laughter rang through the corridors. Humour builds connections, embraces the ridiculousness of life and gives us strength to face whatever challenge is around the corner. As leaders, we naturally aim to present with gravity but perhaps the most effective version of this, is the ability to strike a balance between gravity and levity. The brilliant *Humour Seriously* outlines the "Four Deadly Humour Myths", one being that "humour simply has no place amid serious work".

<sup>1</sup> I couldn't agree more. Had it not been for the seeds sown through humour in one of the senior teams I

belonged to, I am not sure how we would have ever coped with the challenges thrown at us by Covid.

<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Aaker and Naomi Bagdonas, *Humour, Seriously: Why Humour Is a Superpower at Work and in Life* (London: Penguin, 2020), p. 24.

**Faith Hagerty**, founder of The Acting Head, started her career as a professional actor, before entering the world of education as a Drama Teacher in 2006. She then took on numerous middle and senior leadership roles in independent schools, before becoming Head of More House School in Knightsbridge in 2021. Since stepping away from headship, she has launched The Acting Head, drawing together her drama training with her senior leadership experience to support schools. Her warm and creative programmes enhance staff and pupil wellbeing, as well as developing leaders. She qualified as a Graydin-trained coach in December 2024.

Faith looks forward to speaking at the ISA Annual Conference in May.



# for independent schools IT leasing <sup>✓</sup>reinvented



**1:1 Parental Schemes**



**School DaaS Solutions**

**IT Departments** benefit from robust support, pre-config, and comprehensive asset protection.

**The Bursar** appreciates our flexible, tailored, budget-friendly solution.

**Students and teachers** enjoy the latest technology.



**EDUGUARD**  
PROTECTION

**85p**  
per student  
per day



**Protective  
Case**



**Pre-config &  
deployment**

**GOLD**

**Support Plan**



 **Microsoft Surface Pro 12**

**devices for education** by **HardSoft** ★★★★★

0203 970 4994 | [devicesforeducation.co.uk](https://devicesforeducation.co.uk)



# 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](mailto:comms@isaschools.org.uk) or tag us on Instagram [@isaschools](https://www.instagram.com/isaschools) to potentially appear in future editions of the Journal, on the ISA website, or shared on social media.

### WORKSOP COLLEGE WINS NATIONAL AWARD FOR PUPIL WELLBEING



Worksop College (M)

Worksop College has been named 'Independent School of the Year for Pupil Wellbeing' at the 2025 Independent Schools of the Year Awards, recognising its pioneering approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of its community.

Recognising that ad-hoc initiatives were no longer enough to meet the growing demand for mental health support, Worksop College dedicated significant time and resources to create an entirely new system of care – one that integrates early intervention, professional therapeutic support, and proactive wellbeing education.

### AL-FURQAAN PREPARATORY SCHOOL CELEBRATES GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS ACHIEVEMENT



Al-Furqaan Preparatory School (N)

Al-Furqaan Preparatory School is proud to announce its participation in a Guinness World Records breaking event, having taken part in the largest poetry lesson in the world in October 2024.

On 3 October 2024, pupils joined thousands of young people nationwide in a simultaneous lesson

led by poet Laura Mucha. The formal world record was achieved with 43,516 participants from around 500 schools, a number large enough to fill a football stadium. In total, more than 125,000 pupils from over 1,000 schools took part in the lesson, with every individual contributing to the creation of the poem and the success of the event.

The experience provided pupils with a memorable and inspiring opportunity to be part of a national creative community. The school is extremely grateful to Laura Mucha for delivering such an engaging initiative and for giving pupils the chance to contribute to a world-record achievement.

Following a rigorous verification process, Guinness World Records officially confirmed the record in 2025. The school is delighted to have been involved in this remarkable achievement and is very proud of what its pupils accomplished.

### BALLARD PUPILS INTERVIEW LEADING MARINE EXPERT AT COP30 EVENT

Young pupils at Ballard School have interviewed prominent marine scientist and climate change expert Professor Matt Frost as part of the COP30 Virtual Ocean Pavilion 2025.

The children, the youngest of whom is aged just seven, are all Eco-Ambassadors at the New Milton school. They interviewed Professor Frost live online on Thursday, October 6th, while he was attending the 30th UN Climate Change Conference (COP30) – a global summit held this year in Belém, Brazil.

Topics ranged from Professor Frost's expectations of COP and the carbon footprint of the event, to encouraging private companies to stop using single-use plastics, whale-friendly cruise shipping routes, and the impact of carbon capture and storage under the seabed.

The prominent professor, who is, among other things, Head of the International Office at Plymouth Marine Laboratory, was impressed with the "excellent questions" the children calling them "an



Ballard School (LW)

amazing group.”

The wide-ranging 30-minute exchange was brought to a close by Dr Gemma Connell, who chaired the event, describing the children - all Eco-Ambassadors charged with helping the school community become more environmentally friendly - as “the next wave of changemakers.”

## ABBEEY COLLEGE MANCHESTER INSPIRES FUTURE PATHWAYS



Abbey College Manchester, a leading independent college in the heart of the city, is celebrating the continued success of its careers and higher education support provision following a highly

successful University Fair and in anticipation of its Young Medics Event on 9 December.

The college recently welcomed representatives from ten partner universities to its annual University Fair, offering an invaluable platform for Year 12 and 13 students to explore a diverse range of higher education pathways. Throughout the afternoon, students engaged directly with university recruitment teams, seeking guidance on course options, entry requirements and student life.

Chris Randell, Principal, Abbey College Manchester, commented: “At Abbey College Manchester, we are exceptionally proud of our strong track record in successfully supporting students to progress to a wide range of competitive programmes at leading universities.” The Firs School hosts thrilling ISA North U11

## BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT



The Firs School, Chester, proudly hosted an action-packed afternoon of sport at the ISA North U11 Basketball Tournament, held at the Ellesmere Port Sports Village (EPSV). The event brought together mixed Year 5 & 6 teams for a fun and competitive day of basketball.

With seven other teams travelling from across the North (Hale Prep, Ladybarn House, Greenbank Prep, Beech

House, Queen Ethelburga's, Prenton Prep and Cransley) the tournament showcased fantastic enthusiasm and sportsmanship from every school involved.

After a series of closely contested matches, Hale Prep emerged as this year's champions, with Ladybarn House School securing second place. Team Firs delivered a fantastic performance, earning a well-deserved Bronze Medal in the eight-team league.

Headteacher David Girvan praised the effort and sportsmanship on display: “It was wonderful to welcome schools from across the region and enjoy such a fun, competitive afternoon of basketball together. Having a league format for the first time made it even more exciting for the children. We're incredibly proud of our players, and so grateful to everyone who helped make the tournament such an enjoyable experience.”

Special thanks go to Firs Basketball Coach Mr Warde for his leadership, and to Mrs Warrington, Miss Cooper, Mr Girvan and Mr Warde for organising and running the tournament. Their dedication helped create a memorable afternoon for all involved.

## BRIDGEWATER SCHOOL PUPIL WINS YUNEX TRAFFIC ROAD SAFETY DESIGN COMPETITION

Bridgewater School in Worsley is delighted to announce that Prep VI pupil Asa has won a regional road safety sticker design competition organised by YUNEX Traffic ahead of this year's national Road Safety Week.



Earlier in the autumn term, local YUNEX Traffic representatives invited pupils to create an eye-catching sticker to be displayed on their fleet of vehicles, encouraging drivers to think carefully about their behaviour on the roads. Asa, a keen young artist, produced a bold, vibrant design with a clear and thoughtful message for all road users. His artwork was selected as the winning entry, and he was presented with a certificate and prize voucher by YUNEX Contract Manager, Iain Armstrong.

Road Safety Week, organised by the charity Brake, is the UK's biggest road safety campaign. Each year, thousands of schools, organisations and communities take part, helping to raise awareness, promote safer road use and champion Brake's commitment to safe journeys for everyone.

Bridgewater School is proud to support initiatives that encourage pupils to engage with important community issues. Through opportunities like this, the school fosters a strong sense of social responsibility, reflecting its core values of integrity and inspiration. Asa's achievement exemplifies how creativity can be a powerful tool for positive change and highlights the enthusiasm with which Bridgewater pupils contribute to the world around them.

## The ISA Team

### Rudolf Elliott Lockhart, CEO

rudi.elliott.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

### Debra Cannon, Education Officer

debra.cannon@isaschools.org.uk | 01799 610184

### Joseph Tomkins, Communications & Content Manager

comms@isaschools.org.uk | 07199 619802

### Philip Reynolds, Head of Press

press@isaschools.org.uk | 07199 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

## 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

### Printed by The Manson Group

8 Porters Wood, Valley Road Industrial Estate,  
St Albans AL3 6PZ

enquiries@mansongroup.co.uk | 01727 848440

### Artwork/Design Meadowview Media

gabbi@meadowviewmedia.com | 07931 512253

## Legal Corner with Penningtons Manches Cooper



### Employment Rights Act 2025 Probation Periods: How long is too long?

On 18 December 2025, the much discussed Employment Rights bill became the Employment Rights Act 2025. Whilst it became law on 18 December 2025 a number of the changes within the Act will take effect over the course of 2026 and 2027. One of the biggest changes is the reduction in qualifying service. The Employment Rights Act provides protection from unfair dismissal as a right to employees once they have 6 months' service rather than two years. This is a significant increase in employees' rights, although, it does not come into effect until January 2027. This is particularly problematic for schools that will often offer probationary periods of a year. This change in the length of qualifying service means that an employee dismissed for failing to pass their probationary period with nine months' service can claim unfair dismissal. This increases the need for schools to properly manage expectations and performance during a probationary period. Whilst the right only applies from January 2027, it will apply to staff employed prior to this date. This means that an individual employed in May 2026, with a probationary period of a year, could claim unfair dismissal if they fail their probationary period in February 2027. This means that schools should now consider what is an appropriate probation period for staff and implement clear processes for monitoring and reviewing how an individual is performing during their probationary period.

Failure to do this, or providing probationary periods that are too long now, could result in increased liabilities for the school going forward. The biggest change arising from this increased protection is for schools to consider the best and most appropriate length of their probationary periods and ensure that any concerns are properly addressed rather than left which could inadvertently lead to staff that are not suitable for the role having increased employment rights.



## NATIONAL EVENTS

### SKIING

U9 - U18 - Hemel Hempstead - 28 September 2026

### FOOTBALL

U14/U16 - Boys - Nottingham - 23 January 2026

U11/U13/U15 Boys - LVS Ascot - 17 March 2026

U11 Boys - St George's Park - 20 March 2026

U13 Girls - Lingfield College - 05 May 2026

U13 Girls - Dixie Grammar School - 06 May 2026

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

### SAILING

U9-U18 - Draycote Water - 01 October 2026

### ESPORTS

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

### HOCKEY

U11 Boys - Lee Valley - 29 January 2026

U13 Boys - Lee Valley - 03 February 2026

U15 Boys - Lee Valley - 05 February 2026

U11 Girls - Lee Valley - November 2026

U13 Girls - Lee Valley - November 2026

U15 Girls - Lee Valley - November 2026

### RUGBY

U16 Boys - Westonbirt School - 12 February 2026

U15 Boys - Market Bosworth - 13 February 2026

U14 Boys St James Boys' Ashford - 27 Feb 2026

U18 Boys Scarisbrick Hall School - 04 March 2026

U13 Boys - St James Boys' Ashford - 05 March 2026

U12 Boys - Teddington - 16 March 2026

U14/U15 Girls - Teddington - 20 March 2026

U10/U11 - Colchester - 06 November 2026

### BADMINTON

U13/U15 - Nottingham - November 2026

U15/U17 - Nottingham - November 2026

### SQUASH

U13/ U16 - Wycliffe College - 23 November 2026

### SWIMMING

U9-U18 - London Olympic Pool - 28 November 2025

### TABLE TENNIS

U11/U13 - Nottingham - 21 January 2026

U13/U15 - Nottingham - 22 January 2026

### CROSS COUNTRY

National Finals - Himley Hall, Dudley - 28 February 2026

### NETBALL

U18 - Nottingham - 02 March 2026

U16 - Nottingham - 10 March 2026

U11 - King's High, Warwick - 11 March 2026

U14 - Nottingham - 12 March 2026

U13 - King's High, Warwick - 13 March 2026

### CLAY PIGEON

U13 - U18 - Hartpury, Gloucestershire - 13 March 2026

### TRIATHLON

U9 - U18 - Ipswich High School - 01 May 2026

### TENNIS

U13 - New Hall School, Chelmsford - 07 May 2026

U15 - New Hall School, Chelmsford - 08 May 2026

### EQUESTRIAN

U 9- U18 - Princethorpe College - 23 & 24 May 2026

### GYMNASTICS

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

### CRICKET

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

U15 Girls - Gosfield School - 11 June 2026

U13 Girls - Gosfield School - 16 June 2026

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

### GOLF

U18 - Venue TBC - June 2026

### TOUCH RUGBY

U13/U15 - Oxford RFC - 09 June 2026

### ATHLETICS

National Finals - Birmingham - 15 June 2026

### INCLUSIVE FESTIVAL (SEND)

U11 - U14 Finborough School, Suffolk - 01 May 2026

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

U11 - U16 - Nottingham - 22 & 23 June 2026

## AREA SPORTS COORDINATORS

### EAST ANGLIA

Marc Holland | Woodlands School, Hutton Manor

### LONDON NORTH

Sophie Martin | Kingshott School

### LONDON SOUTH

Graham Herbert | Duke of Kent School

### LONDON WEST

Kevin Long | Boundary Oak School

### MIDLANDS

Sarah Dicksee | Dixie Grammar School

Neil McCollin | Princethorpe College

### NORTH

Nick McMahon | Hipperholme Grammar

### SOUTH WEST

Simon Ward | Kingsley School, Bideford

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

 ISASPORTUK

 ISASCHOOLSSPORT

## ISA NATIONAL SWIMMING FINALS 2025:

# Celebrating talent, inclusion, and teamwork



In November of 2025, 517 pupils from 148 independent schools came together in London for the ISA National Swimming Finals, a showcase of skill, determination, and sportsmanship. The event included two para races (Boys and Girls), featuring 9 talented para swimmers, highlighting the importance of inclusion and opportunity in school sport.

We were very happy to be joined by David Hill, Paralympic swimmer, international medallist, and elite Para Triathlete. With over 15 years competing at the highest level, including representing Britain at the Athens 2004 Paralympics as the youngest British athlete, becoming British Champion

in 2014, and finishing Top 10 at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, David inspired both pupils and spectators alike with his insights and personal experiences.

A special thank you goes to Manola Restivo and the dedicated team of volunteer students from St John's Prep and Senior School, whose energy and organisation were instrumental in ensuring the day ran smoothly. Their commitment exemplifies the collaborative spirit at the heart of ISA sports.

The 2025 National Swimming Finals not only celebrated exceptional swimming talent but also demonstrated the power of teamwork, inclusion, and the sheer joy of competition, all hallmarks of the ISA sporting programme.

### AREA POINTS FROM THE DAY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1	ISA London West	430
2	ISA Midlands	409
3	ISA South West	386
4	ISA North	374
5	ISA East Anglia	361
6	ISA London South	291
7	ISA London North	180

### NATIONAL RECORDS

Year 6 Boys 50m Breaststroke	ACS International School Cobham	Jacob	00:38.54
Year 5 Boys 50m Backstroke	St David's Prep	Aaron	00:36.68
Year 8 Girls 50m Backstroke	St Michael's School Llanelli	Isla	00:32.12
Year 9/10 Boys 100m Backstroke	New Hall School	Archie	01:00.10
Year 5 Boys Freestyle 50m	St David's Prep	Aaron	00:31.99
Year 8 Girls Freestyle 50m	St Michael's School Llanelli	Isla	00:28.43
Year 9/10 Boys Freestyle 100m	New Hall School	Archie	00:53.62
Year 7 Girls 50m Butterfly	St Mary's School Colchester	Eloise	00:32.21
Boys Para-50m Freestyle	Worksop College	Max	00:29.98
Year 6 Boys Medley Relay 4x50m	London South		2:28.05
Year 7 Boys Medley Relay	London West		2:17.86
Year 9-10 Boys Medley Relay	South West		1:54.77
Year 7 Boys Freestyle Relay	London West		2:04.76
Year 9-10 Girls Freestyle Relay	Midlands		1:55.49
Year 9-10 Boys Freestyle Relay	South West		1:44.84
Year 11-13 Boys Freestyle Relay	London West		1:41.62

# Excellence in English: What school leaders need to know

Having spent more than two decades working alongside primary leadership teams, we know that excellence in English is rarely the result of a single programme or initiative. Instead, it is secured through thoughtful leadership: leaders who understand their staff, know their pupils well, engage critically with research and hold a clear, shared vision for what high-quality English teaching and learning looks like in their school.

In the independent sector, where autonomy is a strength and expectations are high, English leadership plays a significant role in shaping pupils' academic success, cultural literacy and confidence as communicators. We have found that the following indicators consistently feature in schools where English provision is both inspiring and impactful.

## 1. Know Your Staff

Staff expertise is the most powerful driver of pupil outcomes. Effective English leaders regularly audit subject knowledge, pedagogical strengths and CPD needs. For example, leaders might ask:

- Who is passionate and knowledgeable about teaching vocabulary and is keen to share good practice?
- Who needs support with a specific area such as phonics, fluency or Guided Writing?

Depth of subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge remains one of the strongest predictors of pupil success. A sharp focus on ongoing professional development ensures the best outcomes for pupils. English leaders need to be experts in the field and if not, are clear about how and where to access high-quality guidance.

## 2. Know Your Pupils

Pupil voice is a powerful and often underused leadership tool. Pupil conferencing provides leaders with rich insights into curriculum experience, attitudes to reading and writing, and the lived reality of classroom practice. Inviting pupils to present writing they are proud of encourages valuable conversations and using relaxed spaces like libraries helps foster openness.

## 3. Know Your Data

A nuanced understanding of outcomes enables leaders to celebrate success, identify patterns and ask the right questions. In high-performing schools, leaders focus on the essential question: *so, what does this tell us about teaching, learning and curriculum design?*

## 4. Know the Research

Leaders need manageable, reliable sources of research that translate evidence into classroom practice. Trusted briefings help leaders stay informed without adding to workload.

## 5. Know What Really Matters

- **Oracy** is taught explicitly with designated lesson time. Teachers are confident in teaching The Four Strands of Oracy effectively.
- **Reading for Pleasure** is actively cultivated through high-quality texts, reading aloud and strong reading communities.
- **Systematic, synthetic phonics** is taught rigorously, supported by well-matched texts, timely intervention and catch up.
- **There is a focus on fluency** as the bridge between decoding and comprehension.
- **The Science of Reading** underpins classroom practice. All teachers understand the interplay between the elements which make up the 'reading jigsaw'.
- **Transcription (handwriting and spelling)** is taught discretely and explicitly.
- **Vocabulary and Grammar** are taught through direct instruction, spoken language games and Shared Writing to ensure mastery of language.
- **Authentic purpose and audience** drives writing and concrete, inspirational content and choice ensures pupils are motivated and enthusiastic writers.
- **Time is dedicated to redrafting and editing** to improve writing outcomes.
- **Growth Mindset** beats at the heart of the school. The immense power of mindset, resilience and self-belief is understood by all as pivotal to success.
- **Keep English high on the agenda** and remember that small actions can have big consequences.

The most successful English leaders are those who resist the urge to do *more* and instead focus on doing *what matters most*—well, consistently and with purpose. By holding a clear vision of excellence, leaders ensure that English remains a source of joy, challenge and opportunity for every teacher and every child.

Scan the QR code on the banner below to visit our website and browse our full English CPD offer via: <https://training.dandelionlearning.co.uk/>

**Pet Henshaw and Tre Christopher from Dandelion Learning** have provided inspirational English CPD for schools in the UK and internationally for over 20 years.



Dandelion Learning

[info@dandelionlearning.org](mailto:info@dandelionlearning.org)



@dandelionlearninguk



@DandelionLearning



- ✓ Keep up to date with free watch on demand, expert-led English briefings for Primary Leaders and sign up for the next free live online briefing: <https://training.dandelionlearning.co.uk/>
- ✓ Scan the QR code to solve all English CPD needs with Dandelion Learning's Whole School Subscription/Annual Licence which includes 30 recorded sessions and 10 live online events for just £49+VAT pcm, per school or purchase an Annual Whole School CPD Licence for £588+VAT.
- ✓ Or buy an Individual Teacher Subscription: £14.99+VAT pcm or Annual Licence £178.88+VAT





JAMES WILDING

## Fifty years and counting... leadership, management and teaching through the ages.

Fifty years and counting... leadership, management and teaching through the ages.

In 1960, my parents, David and Josephine Wilding, traded stable careers for a pioneer's gamble. Dad had hit the "monastic ceiling" at St. Benedict's (where further promotion was reserved for the clergy), so they decided to start their own school. After stretching every financial sinew, and charming a London bank manager into overruling his local branch, Claires Court opened with 19 pre-prep pupils, including my brother Hugh (aged 8) and me (6).

By 1964, the school expanded to Ridgeway's 12-acre grounds. That decade saw an exponential growth in day and boarding numbers, with the school's age range covering 6-13. Both Hugh and I had to move on to public school (Douai) for our O-level and Sixth Form years, and stayed in lock-step when we went to Leicester for our undergraduate years. There I met my future in Jenny, and joined her in the teaching profession in 1975.

### **0-10 YEARS, THE FIRST DECADE, EDUCATING MORE OF THE BABY BOOMERS**

The comforting nature of prep schoolmastering in September 1975 was that it seemed no different to the educational offer all the way back to the 1930s, and certainly indistinguishable from mine of a decade and more earlier. Whilst the Maths books were identical, I had also been recruited to teach Science. Still, the approach was modernised entirely through the implementation

of Nuffield Science, matched by the construction of a science lab in the school building. My parents had chosen to cease boarding provision, converting Ridgeway into a pre-prep school for 1975, which meant my youngest class tonight was Year 3 (5), giving a 2-year run-up to 11+, and 4 years to Common Entrance in the 'sixth form', from where the Headboy and prefects were drawn. From 1976 onwards, Claires Court was set to expand upward to cover O-levels, while retaining its other missions of grammar and public-school preparation.

My Science teacher education was conducted through Easter residential 3-day courses held in the major public schools of Radley, Oakham, Uppingham and Oundle, where not only did I learn how to inject *Xenopus* toads with oestrogen for spawning, but also how to weld railway lines using a Thermit bomb and run wireless radio transmitters to signal across the ether. These practical activities covered the Science curriculum examined. They provided suitable extension work for the curious, eager to attend after-school science club and learn more about the practical benefits of engineering and technology. Our expansion to 16+ met the needs of half of our existing clientele and tapped into recruiting pupils into the senior school who had failed grammar school entry, whose aspirational parents were keen to give them every opportunity to succeed in the managerial classes.

One example of such aspiration was the enthusiasm parents had for supporting the new sport of skiing; our Easter trip to the Alps sold out as soon as it was advertised. Another was to provide their sons with the opportunity to

travel independently, with 28 of the 29 boys in S3 (Y11) being equipped with new sub-50 cc mopeds when they turned 16 (1981-82). It's easy in hindsight to recognise the carnage this new swarm of bikes caused across the country, yet it freed parents from the school run and met the growing desire of mothers to re-enter the workforce. Many of the O-level leavers chose not to follow on to Sixth form studies, entering their families' businesses or apprenticeships, supported by vocational training at College. And, to close this decade, my brother Hugh joined the school to take over its business affairs as Bursar.

I took over as Master-in-Charge of the Senior school in January 1981. I was visited by HMI that month, to 'feel my collar' and check that I knew the school regulations of the day. Reg 1 was to keep a secure boundary, so we walked the perimeter to check the gate and fence. Regs 2 and 3 related to keeping Admission and Attendance Registers, paper documents of the most significant importance, to be assiduously managed, and ideally completed in ink. Reg 4 was associated with the administration of corporal punishment by the head only, still in use at the time and, at the parents' request, to be retained. The register was checked, the nature of the crimes explored, and an earnest discussion on the equipment to be used. As the interview was completed, HMI produced a small A5 red paper leaflet, advertising the benefits of Mr Whippy's Rattan canes. The practice ceased shortly afterwards.

## **11-20 YEARS, THE ARRIVAL OF LATCH-KEY KIDS and the purchase of maidenhead college**

These adolescent liberations moved into the school curriculum, replacing some knowledge-memorisation with coursework modules, marked by teachers in-house. The school's successful growth continued through the mid-eighties, boosted by students' growing confidence, which enabled them not just to show what they could learn but also to understand and do, so that those moving on knew what they were good at. Careers education commenced, as did work experience after the GCSE exams. The Arts and Sports flourished, best exemplified by the growing strength of school exhibitions, concerts, drama productions and sports teams.

Parents remained very engaged with school activities, and the formalisation of the PTA helped both fundraising and school development, enabling our proprietorial school to be seen as more inclusive & democratic. The school roll had grown to 460 by the early 1990s, with parental confidence high, supporting the school's ambition to open a sixth form. The all-girls school, Maidenhead College, had not enjoyed such success, and in spring 1993, their trustees requested that we take over the college and release them from their responsibilities. We kept at the chance, enjoyed the support of their bank, NatWest, and this created the space for a Sixth Form, opening in September 1994.

## **21-30 YEARS, WELCOMING THE MILLENNIALS to a new style of learning, screens and digital content.**

GCSEs have seen a marked rise in student attainment across the country, and the implementation of the National



Curriculum from 1991 has continued to modernise the curriculum at the primary and lower secondary levels. We had initially chosen to embrace the testing, partly to demonstrate how well we were doing compared to the state sector. This approach had served us really well, with GCSE successes quickly followed by A-level results, opening access to leading Universities, including Cambridge. The National Curriculum was designed to open up a broader approach and new possibilities. Sadly, to this day, the opposite is true in state primary schools: funding and inspection success largely follow SATs performance, with little left to cover other essential skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence, which are fostered through a more diverse curriculum.

Claire's Court has always kept our sixth form as a separate College environment, and, as a consequence, boys and girls, on separate sites, through the 90's & into 21st century have maintained their emotional and leadership development, and their Year 11 graduation, as a coherent programme. Certainly, school transfers to local state sixth forms and FE colleges remained clearly available, encouraging parents to see the financial burden of school fees as limited. The need for A-level reforms to complete the moderation of England's education system culminated in Curriculum 2000, which expanded A-level choices from 3 to 5 subjects and introduced coursework and modular assessments. Our school's willingness to embrace and encourage these changes stood in stark contrast to other sixth forms, partly because of teaching resource and physical space constraints, and partly because of a lack of careers guidance and a corresponding understanding of future career pathways.

Claire's Court Sixth Form students continued to take part in all the additional co-curricular activities when time and opportunities were available.

The teaching of US in A-level History allowed us to build a relationship with the elite College of William & Mary in Virginia and to open access to other US universities, whilst the teaching of Law introduced students to the Inns of

Court and careers beyond. Our involvement in activities of the Independent Schools Association included my Chairing of ISA, and adoption of some of its major regional events such as Athletics and Rugby. In short, from 1995 onward, most enjoyed opportunities to shape their own thinking and expand their choices. Children gained widespread access to PCs at school and at home, and the internet opened new avenues for exploring opportunities and conducting research. Core, however, to these benefits, young people remained very social, with perhaps a somewhat casual disregard for the use of alcohol.

The optimism of the 90s was severely shaken by the dot-com bust of March 2000, the subsequent World Trade Centre destruction by al-Qaeda and subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These crises helped focus our community on what mattered, and our pastoral curriculum had to adjust quickly to the host of new challenges that followed. Perhaps most notably, we'd introduced school nurses to support the growing welfare needs within our school. These can not just be from children entering mainstream school with significant health issues, but also to provide much-needed common sense to an increasingly concerned volume of parents.

### **31-40 YEARS, GENERATION Z GATHERS PACE, capturing the iPhone, yet styles of teaching in retreat.**

After all the schools' efforts to implement modern curricula to prepare children for the future, the future suddenly seemed far less confident. Children entering school were considered digital natives, and as part of that change, the modern mobile phone arrived, giving them access to all the world's knowledge and people. The ongoing expansion of British Universities, coupled with opportunities to study anywhere in the World and fuelled by the growing availability of student loans to cover tuition fees and living costs, helped refocus both GCSEs and A Levels back to their academic-only roots. The impact of these changes on my school and professional life was profound. Always an innovator, I saw both the value of digital technologies and their associated dangers. At the same time, we chose to leave the UK National Curriculum in favour of our own question-based curriculum in 2005, providing a solid foundation for GCSE courses.

The technology changes now underway led me to take the school to Google in 2012 and to be invited to join the Google Teacher Academy the following spring. The benefits of Chromebooks in the classroom quickly brought to light the children's growing competencies. Juniors began blogging with fellow pupils in New Zealand, whilst the broader typewriting skills acquired enabled more learners to move beyond the difficulties experienced with writing and spelling. Greater access to collaborative writing brought many benefits, allowing them to share ideas and work more closely as a team. Despite the arrival of austerity measures nationwide in 2010, their impact had not yet been felt, and events such as the 2012 Olympics helped fuel the optimism we had at school as we recovered from the pressures of the 2008 financial crash. The future looked brighter...

### **41 TO 50 YEARSOLD, GENERATION ALPHA IS ARRIVING, with no knowledge of the last century, yet to face political uncertainty, and, at the close, navigating the pandemic and meeting AI.**

It's not just the Alphas, who at least had an excuse (not being born), but the politicians and education business sycophants who choose to have no corporate memory and unravel so many of the advances in UK education and our wider European dream. Bit by bit, the Gove reforms to public exams in England saw further centralisation of Education into the hands of the DfE. By taking 5 years to implement further changes to GCSEs, removing modules and forcing state schools to pursue the EBacc, the government deprived their children of much of the choice needed to develop a broad skill set. Specifically, forcing a narrow focus on History, Geography and an MFL saw the wide scale diminution of art, drama, music, RS and PE at GCSE, whilst changing A levels at the same time meant a voyage in hope for schools for 5-10 years without checking of the possible negatives outcomes, not least the reduction in the importance of collaboration in the classroom. Our sector relished the fact that our independence allowed us to sidestep some of the drawbacks, yet... talking of team experiences, the assembly I ran at the Senior Boys school the day after 26 June 2016 saw 400 adults and children in complete shock. We've not recovered, to be honest.

The DfE's centralisation of education has handed massive power to exam boards, who now control everything from textbooks to online revision. This has sparked a frantic "grade-chase" fueled by tutoring, yet research confirms that true education requires a much broader scope—one focused on wellbeing rather than just the workplace. Our community engagement and sporting successes over these last 10 years have encompassed ISA awards, national sports recognition, wide-ranging Duke of Edinburgh awards and the establishment of our CCF, the first to be awarded the King's Colours. That Claires Court remains so committed to the co-curricular is because that's how the many perils of that other online world for children can be avoided, replaced by opportunities for boys and girls to work together in real time.

Fifty years in, the "Screen-free childhood" movement is finally gaining steam. I don't expect to be in post—or perhaps even alive—when the "Generation Gamma" arrives in 2039, but I welcome the growing parental awareness of the dangers of social media.

After five decades, I am struck less by how much has changed than by how often we must relearn old truths. Each generation arrives shaped by new forces, yet thrives best with structure, community, and time away from the world's noise. Our independence has allowed us to prioritise balance between knowledge and curiosity, technology and humanity, ambition and wellbeing, keeping the child at the centre. If my career has proven anything, it is that schools exist to grow people, not to serve systems. That conviction, passed down, tested, and renewed over five decades, remains my reason for optimism about education's future.



# Professional Development

ISA offers exclusive professional development opportunities tailored for educators and leaders within independent schools. Members enjoy discounted rates on our comprehensive range of courses designed to enhance skills and broaden perspectives. By participating, you can advance your career and positively impact both students and the school community.

We are delighted to provide a diverse selection of online development options covering a wide array of topics. Each course combines expert knowledge with valuable networking opportunities.

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

## Cost:

The rate for most online courses is £130 / £160 (Member / non-Member rate) per delegate.

## How to book:

For more information on our programme and to book, visit our website [www.isaschools.org.uk/events](http://www.isaschools.org.uk/events)



## Leadership Senior Leadership Pathway [SLP] Leadership Pathway [LP]

[LP/SLP] Getting the best from your team - empowering others

17 March 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

[LP] Aspiring to Senior Leadership

24 April 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 2:30pm

## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Pathway [EDIP]

Embracing Difference: A practical approach to disability awareness for education professionals

18 March | Zoom | 10:00am – 12:30pm

[EDIP] Racism, Bias and Providing Culturally Sensitive Services

21 April 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

## Mental Health Pathway [MHP]

[MHP] Mental Health: Mental Wellness and Building Resilience in staff and pupils

6 May 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

Youth MHFA refresher

21 May 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 1:30pm

## Marketing and PR

Creating a Crisis Management Plan

18 March 2026 | Zoom | 1:00pm – 4:00pm

Establishing an Alumni Relations and Development Office

29 April 2026 | Zoom | 9:30am – 3:00pm

## CONFERENCE

**Our 2026 Annual Conference will be held at the Mercure Bristol Grand Hotel on 13-15 May.**

It is a two-and-a-half-day conference beginning with registration at 10:30am on Wednesday and finishing with lunch on Friday.

The conference programme will be packed with a variety of engaging and informative speakers, and will also include the Association's AGM, and Annual Dinner. This is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy some networking, to be inspired, and to share in the unique fellowship of ISA.



Scan the QR code to book

## 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

## ISA AWARDS 2026

### **THE ISA AWARDS OPEN ON 2 MARCH**

ISA Members are invited to enter the annual ISA Awards, which celebrate success in our Members' schools. The Awards allow you to promote your achievements to both existing and prospective parents, and the wider community.

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.



Scan the QR code for more information

As a Heads Association, we hold many leadership courses, both for Heads and wider leadership roles. We provide sessions on everything from running a school to development for Middle Leaders.

Our SLP courses are targeted specifically toward senior leaders who wish to further progress or strengthen their position within their SLT, whilst our Leadership Pathway [LP] courses focus on aspiring leaders.

The PD leadership provision develops school leaders of all levels, enabling them to better serve their school communities. The contents of these courses include challenging conversations, establishing leadership style, collegiate relationships as you transition through roles, and many more.

ISA prides itself on fellowship, and all of our leadership courses provide a space to exchange best practice and support.

### **Alice Thompson**

ISA Head of Professional Development and Events





2025-2026 Head Girl Team

STEPHEN BURLEY  
HEAD MASTER AT KING'S HIGH SCHOOL, WARWICK

## The arts (and minefields) of educational leadership

2025 has seen some of the most seismic changes to independent education. With VAT on school fees, the withdrawal of business rate relief, increases to employer National Insurance contributions (not to mention TPS and National Minimum Wage rises), the market realities for the independent sector have changed forever. This has created an existential crisis for many independent schools as Heads, bursars, governors and leadership teams across the UK look to ways to secure futures by adapting to yet another 'new normal'.

Having emerged from the Covid pandemic and the surreal challenges of running schools during national lockdowns, school leaders could barely imagine the changes and challenges that the sector now faces. When we position this context against the other sharp reality to have emerged – that an increasingly concerning number of Headships fail within the first two years in post – we are left asking who will want to lead our schools in the coming years of uncertainty, and how can we reimagine headship to become again the sustainable and life-enhancing profession it once was?

For me, Headship is and remains, truly, the very best job in the world and I feel an enormous sense of privilege, excitement and joy in leading a school community and working with talented, motivated and often inspirational colleagues and pupils. However, it is also crystal clear that the art of headship has radically changed and that the minefields are more numerous and far easier to step on than ever before. In 2023 RS Academics published a very insightful analysis, *The Art of Headship*, to highlight a significant shift. While the original study, published in 2013, emphasised the Head as an educational leader focused on vision, culture, and academic standards, the

latest report shows that Headship has become far more complex and demanding.

Heads in the 2020s are required to balance educational leadership with financial management, heightened parental expectations, staff and student wellbeing, regulatory pressures, and reputational risk. Emotional intelligence, resilience, and stakeholder management are now essential competencies, reflecting how the role has evolved from primarily leading schools to strategically sustaining organisations in an increasingly challenging environment. And it's worth noting that this report was published well before the recent changes, including VAT on school fees, that have transformed the role of Headship once again.

As Heads and school leaders, we have a whole new science of educational leadership to draw upon - from university courses to the latest theories on servant leadership, distributed leadership, authentic leadership, situational leadership and much more. The theoretical basis for educational leadership has never been stronger. The issue, of course, lies in the practical day-to-day realities of running busy, complex and challenging organisations, balancing the competing needs and demands of various stakeholders and the necessarily reactive work of each day with the deeper and broader strategic leadership that will enable schools to thrive as well as survive.

For me, values-driven leadership has always been the key - leading with heart, kindness, warmth and honesty to build trust and build relationships. Being intentional in doing this and deliberately making time to be more intentional are the habits that have been the foundation of my work

as a leader in schools. Within this, I would highlight three core areas:

### 1. Prioritise School Culture

The litmus test of any good school is 'culture', a nebulous, hard-to-measure thing that you feel instinctively and intuitively as you step into and out of every school environment. It forms the DNA of a school and runs through every single interaction, from the welcome on Reception to the ways that staff interact with one another and with students, and the ways that students behave and interact with each other and their teaching and support staff. It is to do with the energy and intentionality with which community, togetherness and belonging are demonstrated through all aspects of school life.

For me, culture is the key, and it is important to note that it doesn't happen by magic – it is deliberately and intentionally shaped and crafted from the leadership and values of the school. Strategic development is vital, but my advice to any new head is to work strategically on the school's culture and ethos, starting with core values and working through how they will be lived out and manifested in the daily reality of school experience.

### 2. Find the joy – the power of aspiration, positivity, optimism

As we all know, schools can be stressful places and perhaps have become increasingly so in recent years, with time-poor staff working under a range of pressures and students who can find social and academic pressures challenging. This is why a leadership focus on the power of aspiration, positivity and optimism is vital. The research is very clear on the significant impact of showing young people what is possible and helping them believe that they can achieve this. The Barack Obama mantra 'Yes, we can', with the collective pronoun to emphasise shared endeavour and shared goals, transforms both outcomes and culture in schools. Embedding growth mindset and positive role modelling with the genuine belief in the transformative power of hard work and aspiration, enveloped with high levels of positivity and optimism create the conditions to enable success. Alongside this, within our strategic focus on wellbeing at King's High, we worked intentionally to promote fun, joy and play for both students and staff. This came in many forms from the investment in play equipment – table tennis, table football, netball hoops - around school, the introduction of school animals, to the re-visioning of form time and house meetings to include singing, dancing and, occasionally, silent discos. The strategic focus on positivity and play to create a sense of joyful belonging can too easily be overlooked amidst the contextual pressures now facing the sector.

### 3. Play to strengths not weaknesses

There can be a natural tendency in staff appraisal, or performance review processes to identify, address and focus on 'areas for development'. Whilst this can sometimes be helpful, my recommendation would be to turn this on its head so that the process identifies a member of staff's strengths, abilities and competencies and to work intentionally to build on this. One of the key arts of headship is to ensure that all staff are facing in the

right directions and working to their areas of strength to enable higher levels of motivation, engagement and reward. This is the basis of 'strengths coaching', a coaching approach that focuses on identifying, developing, and applying a person's natural talents and strengths, rather than concentrating primarily on weaknesses or deficits. It is based on the core idea that people achieve greater performance, engagement, and wellbeing when they use their strengths intentionally and consistently. Many schools are now embedding coaching across all areas of school life and are seeing significant benefits to this approach. This, combined with a focus on strengths, both for staff and students, elevates motivation and creates a culture of celebration and recognition.

I'll end with a quotation from the influential leadership theorist and author, Peter Drucker: 'The best way to predict the future is to create it.' In times of challenge and uncertainty, it is ever more important to show agency and confidence, to be proactive, showing ambition, vision and determination. Rather than reacting to challenges as they arise, Drucker emphasises that effective school leaders actively shape a clear vision for improvement and inspire teachers and students to work toward shared goals. By encouraging innovation, supporting professional growth, and focusing on long-term development, we create the conditions that will enable sustained and meaningful progress. This proactive approach ensures that schools are not shaped by circumstances, but by purposeful, intentional and confident leadership.

**Dr Stephen Burley** is the Head Master of King's High School, Warwick, an independent day and boarding school for girls aged 11–18. After teaching at The King's School, Canterbury, Sevenoaks and Headington Rye Oxford, he joined King's High in 2017 and became Head Master in 2021. He champions inspirational teaching, wellbeing and future-focused education and under his leadership the school has won several national awards including ISA Senior School of the Year 2025. In 2025, Stephen was selected by Tatler as 'Best Head of a Public School'.



# QUALITY CATERING WITHOUT THE PREMIUM PRICES

**apetito**

WILTSHIRE

EST. FARM 1991

FOODS

Serving over 30,000 pupils across hundreds of schools every day, partnering with apetito means ***more than just great food*** - it's unlocking unmatched benefits for your schools.

Our innovative solution delivers ***exceptional meal quality***, streamlined operations and significant cost savings.

*Scan Here!*  
*to find out more*





*“Our school has never historically served hot food and now with apetito we’re serving hot nutritional food. The quality can’t be compared, it’s more affordable, and the variety is second to none.”*

*Ursuline Prep School*

---

*Get in touch to arrange a no obligation tasting session today.*



education@apetito.co.uk



0117 463 3563

The first two days of the ISA Drama Competition were held in mid-February at Luckley House School. Congratulations to all participants, and good luck to the schools performing on 29 April at King's High School, Warwick. Results will be announced in May.

## UPCOMING COMPETITIONS

### HANDWRITING COMPETITION

Open Now  
Deadline: 16 March

### SPORTS COVER DESIGN COMPETITION

Open Now  
Deadline: 26 March

### EASTER EGG COMPETITION

Open for entries: 4 March  
Deadline: 24 March

### YOUNG STORYTELLERS COMPETITION

Open Now  
Deadline: 21 April

### BOOK COVER DESIGN COMPETITION

Open Now  
Deadline: 21 April

### DIGITAL ART COMPETITION

Open Now  
Deadline: 23 April

### CHARITY EVENT CHALLENGE

Open Now  
Deadline: 6 May

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

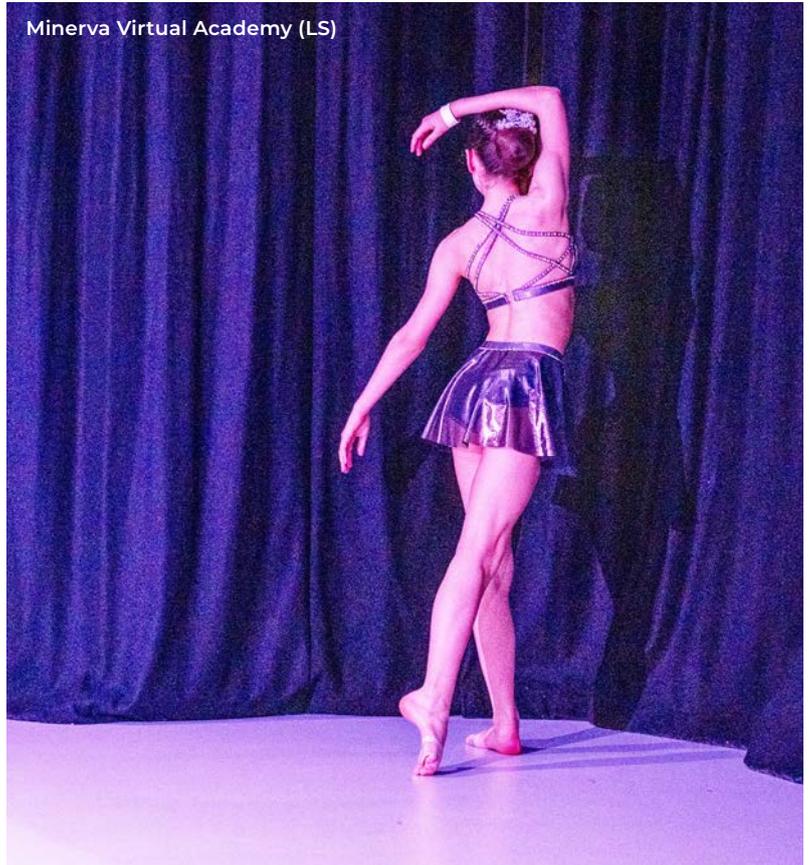
Follow us on X and Instagram  
@ISAartsUK for more updates.

X @ISAartsUK

Instagram isaartsuk



Minerva Virtual Academy (LS)



There are still plenty of exciting opportunities to get involved this year, including the Minibeast Competition and Easter Hat Competition for EYFS and Primary pupils, as well as the Scrapbook Challenge open to all age groups. For full details of these events, along with the ISA Arts calendar for the year, please visit our website.

Any questions please contact [isaarts@isaschools.org.uk](mailto:isaarts@isaschools.org.uk).

MEPA Academy (LS)



# National Art Competition

We are pleased to share the ISA National Art Brochure, featuring the work of all finalists from the 2025 competition. With more than 1,700 entries received, congratulations to every participant, the standard of artwork was exceptional once again. If your school did not take part, please visit our website to learn how to get involved this year.





## ISA ART COMPETITION

Open to all ages  
Final Tuesday 18 & Wednesday 19 November 2026  
Chesford Grange Hotel, CV8 2LD

**2026**



SCAN HERE

isaschools.org.uk | isaarts@isaschools.org.uk  
Competition open to ISA Members Schools only

*For more information about all our events, including the Isa Arts Calendar for 2025-2026 year, please visit our website. If you have any questions, please contact:*

***isaarts@isaschools.org.uk***

# Designed for the Next Generation



## Specialist Manufacturer of Educational Furniture

- Survey & consultation service
- Full drawing & space planning service
  - Bespoke design
- Extensive range of finishes
  - CNC Technology
- Installation service & ongoing support
  - 10 year guarantee



Call  
**+44 1299 828888**

Visit

[www.witleyjones.com](http://www.witleyjones.com)

or Email

[enquiries@witleyjones.com](mailto:enquiries@witleyjones.com)



**HOLMES &  
PARTNERS** LTD  
IMMIGRATION CONSULTANTS

## Your Admissions Team Should Be Filling Seats - Not Fighting Compliance

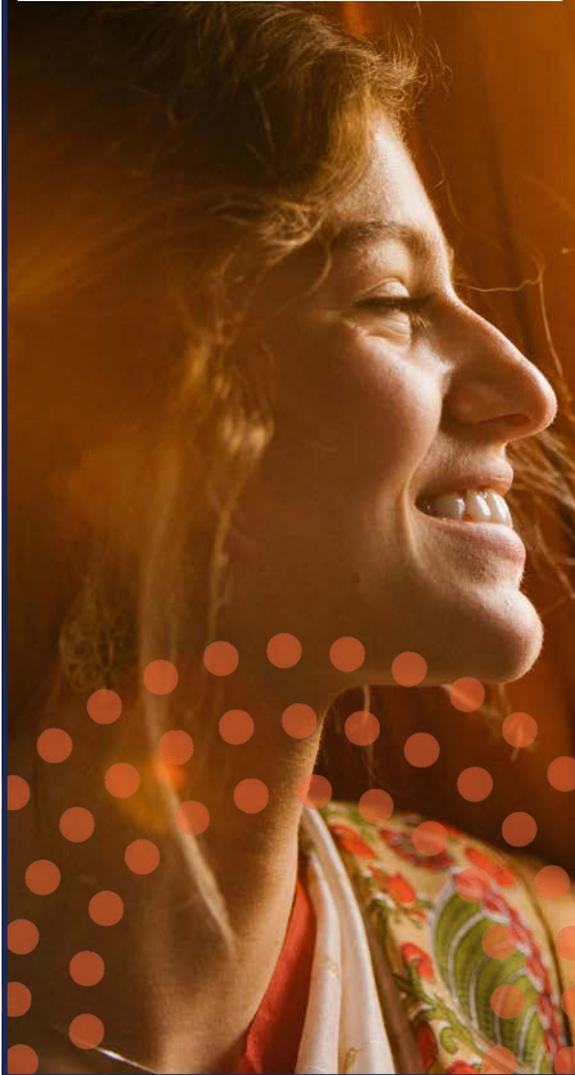
Admissions teams are at their best when they are building relationships, nurturing families, filling seats and maximising boarding occupancy. Yet in today's increasingly complex regulatory environment, UKVI compliance, sponsorship duties and BCA monitoring can quietly consume hours of valuable admissions time. Time that should be spent converting enquiries into confirmed pupils and protecting enrolment targets is instead diverted into navigating visa queries, documentation checks, reporting requirements and constantly evolving immigration rules.

That is where we step in. We work in partnership with independent schools to manage the complexity of UKVI compliance and sponsor licence responsibilities, ensuring schools are inspection-ready, audit-prepared and fully aligned with their Basic Compliance Assessment thresholds. Our role is not to replace admissions teams, but to strengthen them. By taking ownership of compliance processes, from CAS support and SMS reporting to robust record-keeping and ongoing regulatory oversight, we free admissions professionals to focus on what they do best: driving recruitment and safeguarding occupancy.

The impact is immediate and strategic. Schools gain confidence ahead of UKVI inspections, protection of their BCA results, and assurance that sponsor duties are being met with precision and consistency. At the same time, admissions teams regain the capacity to build relationships, improve conversion rates and support families properly throughout the admissions journey. Importantly, our fee structure is designed to be cost-neutral to the school. There is no additional financial burden, simply greater efficiency, reduced compliance risk and strengthened operational resilience. In an environment where a single compliance issue can disrupt international recruitment, having expert oversight provides invaluable peace of mind.

Compliance handled. Admissions empowered. Leadership reassured. If your priority is to protect your licence, safeguard your BCA results and give your admissions team the freedom to focus on growth, now is the time to act. Book a strategic compliance conversation and future-proof your international recruitment.

For more information, please reach out to us at [holmes-partners.co.uk](https://holmes-partners.co.uk) | [enquires@holmespartners.co.uk](mailto:enquires@holmespartners.co.uk) | 011 3898 0360



Ready to dive deeper into your subject and connect with passionate educators just like you? Join our **Subject Level Networking Groups** and **Discussion Forums**—all virtual, all free!

Whether you want to share ideas, solve challenges, or spark inspiring conversations, there's a place for you.

Scan the QR code to join the conversation and take your teaching further!





DAI PRESTON  
HEADTEACHER AT ARNOLD LODGE SCHOOL

## You can't copy leadership, write your own story

### THE HEADTEACHER PARADOX

Leadership is deeply personal. *Your* leadership is rooted in *you*. It is who you are. The things that shaped you. Your experiences to date. To be the best leader you can be, you need to embrace this and be authentically you.

Despite this, the success of leadership is almost entirely defined by how others experience you. In many ways, being a new Headteacher is a bit like being an aspiring writer; your writing comes from *your* experience, but the success of your writing will be defined by the willingness of others to appreciate it. This "Headteacher's paradox" for school leadership is one that I think we should talk about more to help new and aspiring leaders understand that the success of their leadership is rooted in others as much as it is in themselves.

I became a Head early in my career, without the typical apprenticeship. I hadn't spent years watching a Head navigate crises, build culture or make the type of calls that annoy a school community in the short term but turn out to be successful in the medium and long. Without this, I didn't have an archetype to fall back on.

So, I did what any first-time Head would do: I read everything and tried desperately to learn from successful school leaders. Leadership theory, school improvement case studies and any book on school leadership I could find. I attended every conference, took notes furiously, and tried to construct a blueprint for successful headship from other people's stories.

Looking back, I assumed that if I just studied enough

successful heads, I'd be able to crack the code. Find the recipe. But here's what I quickly discovered: there is no code. I realised, after a while, the fact that I came to headship as a blank slate wasn't a weakness - it was a strength to utilise. Trying to create a leadership style based on other people is like trying to write Shakespeare by copying Tolkien. It might look credible from a distance, but it will never resonate because it's fundamentally inauthentic. The form is wrong. The voice doesn't match what the story needs.

Early on, I'd go to conferences and take notes and ideas from the brilliant keynote speaker. I'd listen, earnestly, to how other Heads had made their schools a success. I'd be brimming with ideas...but by the time I was back in my own school, the ideas felt hollow. The decisive approach that transformed another Head's school would seem too aggressive. The thoughtful 5-year plan from another Head's school would feel too slow-moving. However well-intentioned, these ideas could only ever point me in a direction; they could never give me the map.

Over time, I came to realise that successful school leadership is found in a deep understanding of the context within which we operate. Whilst external advice and ideas can inspire, the success of our leadership is found in the unique combination of our leadership, our school community and our school's current reality. It is the interaction of these three things that create potential success (or indeed tension) for school leaders.

Think of it as a Venn diagram with 3 interconnecting circles covering Your Leadership, Your Community, and

Your School's Context.

**Your leadership:** Consider the experiences, values, and vision that shaped you as a leader. The things you care about deeply. The principles you won't compromise. The driving force behind you. Your style and your skillset. The type of story you want to write.

**Your community:** Define what parents, governors, staff, and the local context need from leadership. What they fear. What they hope for. Their definition of what makes a school successful, which may not match yours. Their previous experience of successful leadership (or not, as the case may be). In effect, your target audience and what they want from your writing.

**Your school's context:** Finally, you must consider the staff in front of you, the children you serve, the budget you're working with, the history you've inherited, and the possibilities that exist.

Where these three circles overlap is where you find out if your leadership is successful. It's in this overlap that you know the type of writer you need to be to shape your school's story for the future. It's here, and only here, that you can realise whether you're writing the next chapter in an ongoing saga or whether you need to start a whole new set of stories.



## COMING TO HEADSHIP WITHOUT A MAP

Coming to headship without extensive modelling meant I could not simply copy someone else's context. I had to discover my own. This blank slate forced me to ask better questions. Not "What would a good Head do?" but "What type of leader can I be for my school? What does my school expect from its leader? What needs to change here, and what must stay the same?"

Understanding my context meant understanding the type of writer I needed to be, and the type of writer my school needed. If the traditional independent school is Tolkien, then my school needed Pratchett: still fantasy, aware of tradition, but more willing to challenge it, ask

awkward questions in footnotes and laugh at the absurd.

Once I understood this, everything shifted. I was not independently educated, and I had little sense of what a traditional independent school should look like. What I did have was a vision, a deep belief in how wonderful the school already was and how much better it could be, along with a clear sense of the leader I wanted to become. On the community side, staff and parents had chosen ALS because they wanted something different. They wanted a school that was willing to rethink things, and they believed in what ALS stood for. In terms of context, the school had moved from Preparatory to all through, and that period brought several Heads in quick succession. What was needed now was clarity, energy and stability.

With this understanding, I was no longer trying to borrow someone else's narrative. Instead of searching for the answer, conference notes became ideas to test, not instructions to follow. Leadership books became frameworks to examine in light of our context, not templates to copy. Conversations with other Heads became discussions about how they understood their own leadership situations, not rulebooks for mine.

## GROWING LEADERS TO FIND THEIR OWN STORY

Understanding the importance of context has changed how I develop leaders around me. Teaching others what good leadership looks like now feels less useful. Leadership theory has value, but it matters far more to help new leaders discover their own authentic leadership and the specific context they work in.

Think of it like this: as Head, I must hold all three circles at once. I work with the complexity of my own vision, the sometimes-competing needs of the community, and the practical reality of what is possible right now. Leadership for me means navigating the tension between those three.

A Deputy Head or Middle Leader holds the circles differently. Their role is to translate vision into direction. They take the idea "we need to rethink reading" and turn it into "here are our three reading priorities this term and what they look like in practice". They still operate across the circles, but their focus is on creating clarity from complexity.

Staff need something different again. They need consistency and simple, repeatable systems that work on Monday morning. They operate mostly in the school's reality, and they need the strategic complexity filtered into practical action.

Where the circles overlap is where leadership works well at every level: ambitious goals, translated into clear priorities, supported by systems that enable delivery.

Leadership development breaks down when we place people in the wrong space within the framework. We ask staff to hold strategic complexity when they need

operational clarity, or we push middle leaders into pure delivery when they should be working between vision and reality.

## DEVELOPING LEADERS: UNDERSTANDING THEIR OWN CONTEXT

It is just as important that Deputy Heads and Middle Leaders understand their own leadership context. To support them with this, begin by helping them build self-awareness. Are they pragmatic or principled? Decisive or reflective? What motivates them as a leader?

Next, help them understand what their community expects of them. What does their team need? What do you expect as their line manager? Is this clear? If not, tension will inevitably arise between their leadership and the expectations around them, and this tension will limit their ability to lead effectively.

Finally, ask them to consider the context of their area of responsibility. Does it need significant change? Is it already successful and in need of stability? Is there agreement on this? If this is unclear, it can again create unnecessary tension.

When a leader understands expectations from their team and from their line manager, and when there is shared agreement about the goals for their area of responsibility, success becomes far more likely.

## YOUR STORY, NOT SOMEONE ELSE'S

I'm grateful now for coming to headship without a strong model to follow. It meant I couldn't default to "this is how my head did it." I had to discover my own context and understand my own vision.

For aspiring heads who've worked under strong, long serving headteachers, finding their own context often requires active unlearning. They've internalized someone else's style so completely that "would my Head have done this?" becomes the question that paralyzes rather than guides.

The Heads who are most successful aren't the ones who perfectly executed someone else's playbook. They're the ones who understood their unique context and had the courage to lead from it.

Your leadership has a story. It's shaped by where you've been, who you're serving, and what's in front of you right now. That story is still being written, and it won't - it can't - look like anyone else's.

If an aspiring Head asked me for advice now, I wouldn't give a direct answer. Instead, I would ask them about their three circles. What's your context? What does your community need and fear? What's the actual reality you're stepping into? They don't need my story; they need to understand theirs.

Read the leadership books, absolutely. Attend the conferences. Have the conversations with experienced heads. But recognize them for what they are: glimpses into other people's context. Let them expand your thinking, challenge your assumptions, offer possibilities. But don't try to photocopy them.

Your staff don't need you to be that inspirational Head from the conference. Your community doesn't need you to replicate what worked brilliantly at the school down the road. Your governors don't need you to lead the way your predecessor did. They need the leader who emerges from the context of your leadership, their needs, and this school's reality. They need you to write in your own voice, not someone else's.

The technical challenge of Headship isn't in the policies or the budgets or even the ISI framework. It's in developing the clarity to understand your unique context and the courage to lead from it, even when your story looks different from everyone else's.

That's the story of your leadership. Make it a good one.

**Dai Preston** is Headteacher of Arnold Lodge School (a co-educational independent all-through day school for pupils aged 4-18) and Executive Headteacher of Stratford Preparatory School (a co-educational Preparatory School for pupils aged 2-11). Dai has been Headteacher of Arnold Lodge since 2016 and, in that time, the school has grown from 164 pupils to 480 (and is now at maximum capacity). Dai is also an ISA Director, ISA Chair of Inspections and a Team Inspector with ISI.





# Meeting your KCSIE obligations

## A compliance-first approach to school security

Safeguarding is fundamental to duty of care in your school, and KCSIE 2025 brings heightened focus on how technology intersects with student protection.

Many of the KCSIE changes and updates in 2025 relate to technology, with new guidance around AI, online safety and KCSIE filtering and monitoring. Meanwhile, security technology is a vital part of safeguarding schools, so knowing how it intersects with KCSIE 2025 guidance is crucial.

From video security to access control, education leaders must balance safety, compliance, privacy, and long-term value when selecting security solutions.

### How security technology can support your KCSIE compliance:

- **Video security:** Choose a system that aligns with KCSIE 2025 and GDPR regulations.
- **Access control:** Control entry to help ensure every visitor is logged, verified and authorised.
- **Visitor management:** Integrate with safeguarding frameworks and enforce DBS checks.
- **GDPR compliant smart sensors:** Monitor air quality, vaping and more without a camera.

### Quick KCSIE and technology success checklist:

- **Involve multiple stakeholders:** Safeguarding leads, IT, facilities, governors, SLT.
- **Design a roadmap:** Compliance milestones, budget planning, anticipated upgrades.
- **Train staff:** Technology is only effective if people know how to use it.
- **Prioritise scalability & compatibility:** Choose open-standards solutions that adapt to change.

Technology is more than a set of tools; it's a cornerstone of a school's duty of care. By combining the right solutions with strong leadership and a culture of transparency, schools create environments where students feel safe, staff feel supported and parents feel reassured.

**View the KCSIE blog post and request your free school safety guide.**



TUSHI GORASIA  
HEADTEACHER AT CHARTERHOUSE  
SQUARE SCHOOL

## Independent leadership: Why diversity, inclusion and belonging in our leadership teams matter

Leadership in independent schools has always been about more than operational excellence or academic outcomes. At its best, it is moral, relational and values driven. As our sector continues to reflect on its role and purpose in an increasingly complex and diverse society, some questions feel unavoidable: who leads our schools, why does it matter and what message does that leadership send to our communities?

For me, leadership has never been abstract. Growing up in 1970s England as a British-born Indian girl, often feeling like an outsider, profoundly shaped my understanding of belonging, representation and the vacuum of role models around me. I was often the only child who looked like me in the room and this has not really changed over the past 5 decades. Being labelled “bright” opened doors that might otherwise have remained closed. Grammar school, Cambridge University and a professional, global career in education followed. Yet that sense of difference and wanting better for our children has never fully disappeared. Instead, it became a lens through which I came to understand schools, and ultimately leadership, as places that can either widen opportunity or quietly limit it.

Those early experiences, combined with my career across largely all-white educational environments, have shaped my conviction that diversity, in all aspects, in leadership is not a ‘nice to have’, but a moral imperative. Those experiences shaped my understanding of schools not just as places of learning, but as environments that can either affirm belonging or quietly reinforce who is seen, heard and valued. They also shaped my belief that leadership, particularly in independent schools, carries enormous responsibility.

The most recent National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report on Ethnic diversity in the teaching workforce provides sobering context for this conversation. While ethnic diversity is well represented among applicants



to teaching, this aspect of diversity diminishes sharply at each stage of progression. The picture is starkest at senior leadership level where the vast majority of schools have an all-white senior leadership team.

This matters not because leadership should mirror demographics for its own sake, but because leadership shapes culture. Leaders determine whose voices are amplified, which experiences are legitimised and what success looks like. When leadership lacks diversity, schools risk unintentionally reproducing narrow definitions of excellence and belonging – regardless of how inclusive their intentions may be.

However, independent schools, with their autonomy and agility, are uniquely positioned to lead rather than follow in this space.

### **LEADERSHIP, BELONGING AND WELLBEING**

My work in schools on equality, diversity and inclusion did not begin as a compliance exercise or strategic initiative. It has always started with empathy and listening – particularly to staff and to students and their lived experiences. I make a deliberate decision to place belonging and wellbeing at the heart of leadership. Clear professional boundaries, visible respect for staff diversity and consistent modelling from the leadership team are early, practical steps. Embedding inclusion and belonging, not as an initiative, but as a mindset woven into curriculum, policies, recruitment and daily interactions has proven significant impact. At one school I led, staff surveys moved from negative feelings of wellbeing to show 100% of staff felt that there was a positive culture of respect, collaboration and care – a shift within 2 years. This is not accidental. When we feel seen, represented and safe - teaching staff, support teams and leadership are more likely to feel happy, to lead, inspire and to thrive. This can only then benefit the children in our care.

## WHY LEADERSHIP DIVERSITY MATTERS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

There is sometimes a quiet assumption that diversity is more relevant to schools serving visibly diverse communities. I would argue the opposite. All schools, regardless of geography and intake, have a responsibility to prepare young people for the world as it is.

Leadership diversity brings cognitive diversity: different ways of seeing problems, interpreting behaviour and defining success. It challenges groupthink and strengthens decision-making. Research consistently shows that diverse leadership teams are more reflective, more innovative and better equipped to respond to complexity.

From an educational perspective, leadership diversity also matters symbolically. Students, regardless of their age, and parents notice who holds authority. They absorb powerful messages about who leads, who belongs and who is trusted. Representation alone is not enough – but its absence speaks volumes.

For students, seeing leaders from diverse ethnic backgrounds and/or protected characteristics expands what feels possible. For staff, it signals that progression is attainable and that leadership is not reserved for a narrow group. For parents, it builds trust, particularly when school leadership reflects the diversity of the wider community and society.

### MOVING BEYOND TOKENISM

One of the most important lessons I have learned as a leader is that authenticity matters. Initiatives perceived as tokenistic or “force-fed” can do more harm than good. True inclusion requires humility, reflection and a willingness to sit with discomfort and to adjust accordingly.

This can mean resisting the temptation to reduce diversity and inclusion to calendar events or one-off training sessions. While we celebrate cultural festivals and national moments, we are equally committed to everyday inclusion: curriculum choices, language, staff voice and leadership visibility.

I have always been intentional about embedding inclusion into the fabric of school life. This means curriculum review, representation in reading material, regular professional dialogue and creating space for staff and pupils to share who they are. It also means acknowledging intersectionality, including socio-economic backgrounds, and recognising that belonging is experienced differently by different individuals. Our scaffolded, reflective approach – revisited regularly and owned by all staff – has helped ensure this work is sustained rather than performative.

Crucially, this is never about lowering standards or privileging one group over another. Inclusion is not owned by one person or committee; it becomes a shared team responsibility.

### LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY AND THE PIPELINE

The NFER report highlights that the lack of diversity at senior levels is not due to a lack of aspiration, but to structural

barriers in progression, mentoring and retention. This places a clear responsibility on those of us already in leadership positions.

### INDEPENDENT SCHOOL LEADERS MUST ASK THEMSELVES HARD QUESTIONS:

- What does our staff team reflect?
- Who do we encourage to step forward?
- Whose leadership potential do we recognise – and whose do we overlook?

Mentoring, transparent pathways and visible role models all matter. So does challenging our own assumptions about what leadership “looks like”. Independent schools, with our freedom over recruitment, professional development and culture, have a real opportunity to disrupt patterns that have persisted for too long.

### A CALL TO THE SECTOR

Independent schools have long prided ourselves on innovation, values and leadership. Embracing diversity, inclusion and belonging in leadership is not a departure from that tradition – it is its natural and timely evolution.

For me, leadership is ultimately about creating environments where others can flourish. When leadership teams are diverse, reflective and inclusive, they send a powerful message: that difference is recognised and valued, and that students, staff and parents alike can see themselves reflected in the life, values and future of the school – where belonging, equity and excellence exist side by side. That is the kind of leadership our schools, and our society, need now more than ever.

**Tushi Gorasia** has been an award-winning, educator for over 30 years and has a continuing passion for extending the love of learning, safeguarding of staff and students, as well as promoting well-being, diversity and belonging in schools. She has taught at independent, state and international schools across key stages from Years 1 to Year 8 and is an English specialist. Tushi has lived and worked in London, Hong Kong, New York and Singapore. She has extensive media experience on the radio, publishing and in print. Tushi is currently Headteacher at Charterhouse Square School. She is committed to balancing high academic standards with the holistic wellbeing and developing confidence of students and her teams.



# WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

## NEW MEMBERS

Wildwood Nature School	Tara Royle	London North
Gurukula - The Hare Krishna Primary School	Gwyneth Milan	London North
The Anchor SEND Friendly Ind School	Carole Nicholson	London South
L'Ecole des Petits	Laurent Balerdi	London South
L'Ecole de Battersea	Cecillia Beylefeld	London South
Hornsby House	Edward Rees	London South
Elysian West Horsley	Karen Keane	London South
The Oratory School	Matthew Fogg	London West
Insights Independent School	Barbara Quartey	London West
Eton End School Trust	Sarah Bond	London West
St Michael Abbey School	Matt Hire	Midlands
Sibford School	Rebecca Evans	Midlands
Quorn Hall School	Andy Cutts-McKay	Midlands
Miller House School	Gaynor Donley-Williams	Midlands
Strawberry Lane School	Adam Price	North
Imam Muhammad Zakariya School	Ayesha Desai	North
Durham High School	Michelle Hill	North
Bradford Beacon	Ian Williams	North
The Stable School	Denise Carpenter	South West
The Lion Works	Justine Collinson	South West
Manor Wood School	Mohammed Awan	South West
Kings Bournemouth	Andrew Roper	South West
Kingfisher School	Julie Jeanes	South West
Dovecote School	Neil Gage	South West
Avonside School	Christina Darkes	South West

## TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP

Daiglen School	Claire Murdoch	London North
Egerton-Rothesay	Allan Cairns	London North
Faraday School	Alarie Drummonds	London North
Halcyon London International School	Jeff Lippman	London North
Heartwood House	Chris Seymour	London North
Maple Walk School	Mia Santa-Humfrey	London North

# WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

## TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP (CONTINUED)

Mount House School	Jon Cooper	London North
North Bridge House Canonbury	Charlotte Tassell Dent	London North
North Bridge House Nursery and Pre Prep	Sarah Cartwright-Styles	London North
Orchard School and Nursery	Louise Burton	London North
London Scandinavian School	Karina Samura	London North
St Mary's School, Gerrards Cross	Lars Fox	London North
Ripplevale School Rochester	Natalie Christie	London South
Fulham School	Thomas Lewis	London West
Heathfield School	Jonathan Williams	London West
Holme Grange School	Pippa Adams	London West
La Petite Ecole Francaise	Anthony Artist	London West
Mayville High School	Sarah George	London West
The Gregg Prep School	Anita Jolley	London West
The Roche School	Charlotte Doherty	London West
Bosworth Independent School	Anthony Oulton	Midlands
Burton Hathow Preparatory School	Reece Murphy	Midlands
RGS Dodderhill	Amy Page	Midlands
The Old Vicarage School	Matthew Adshead	Midlands
The River School	Emma Ellin	Midlands
Wycliffe College	Christian San Jose	Midlands
Belmont School Lancashire	Devin Cassidy	North
Edenfield Girls High School	Mohammad Sayeid-Al-Jamee	North
Hale Preparatory School	Kathryn Busby	North
Hipperholme Grammar School	Tim Bostwick	North
Moorland Private School	Ashleigh McKeown	North
Moorlands View School	Paul Dugdale	North
Avondale Preparatory School	Craig Wardle	South West
King's School Plymouth	Sarah Ibbotson	South West
Moyles Court School	Paddy Padfield	South West

## HONORARY MEMBERS

Natasha Dangerfield	Westonbirt School
---------------------	-------------------

# ISA Awards

The ISA Awards will open this year on 2 March. Entries close on 23 July 2026 and we will announce the finalists in mid-September later this year. The ISA Awards Ceremony is held annually alongside our Autumn Study Conference, which this year takes place on 18-19 November 2026.

The popularity of the Awards reflects the growth of our Association as we continue to celebrate the brilliant independent schools that ignite minds and inspire futures. Categories show the breadth of provision in ISA Members' schools – highlighting the importance of diversity amongst our membership. Find out more about getting involved on our website.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 WINNERS

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

### **ISA Award for Outstanding Engagement in the Community**

**Winner:** Moon Hall School

### **ISA Award for Future Readiness**

**Winner:** St David's Preparatory School

Sponsored by

School Fee Plan



### **ISA Award for Outstanding Sport (Small School)**

Mylnhurst Catholic Preparatory School and Nursery

### **ISA Award for Outstanding Sport (Large School)**

Stafford Grammar School

### **ISA SEND School of the Year Award**

Beech Lodge School

### **ISA Award for International Provision (NEW)**

North London Grammar School

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

TASIS England

### **ISA Award for Excellence and Innovation in Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Kings Oxford

### **ISA Award for Excellence in Sustainability**

Holme Grange School

### **ISA Award for Excellence in Performing Arts**

Stafford Grammar School

### **ISA Award for Excellence in Fine Arts and Design**

Ballard School

### **ISA Award for Innovation in Independent Education**

St Olave's School

### **ISA Award for Excellence and Innovation in Early Years**

Liberty Woodland School

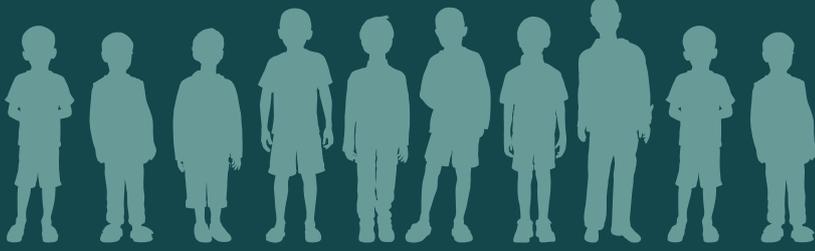
### **ISA Junior School of the Year Award**

Forest Park School

### **ISA Senior School of the Year Award**

King's High School, Warwick





ANDREW HAMPTON

# Working with Boys

## Creating cultures of mutual respect in schools

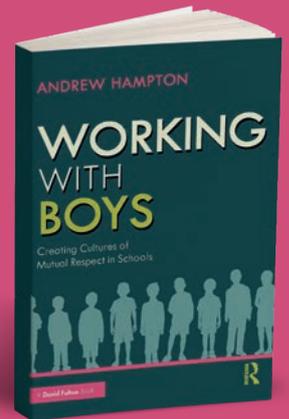
Working with Boys is a whole-school, iterative programme of study that uses guided reflection to empower boys to self-regulate their attitudes and behaviour and be the best they can be. The programme has a proven track record of supporting boys to be consistently principled, honourable, noble, trustworthy, upright and dignified.

ISA schools can claim a discount of 10% if they quote "ISA10" when emailing [info@workingwithboys.com](mailto:info@workingwithboys.com)

[workingwithboys.com](http://workingwithboys.com)



Now available as a training opportunity both online and face to face



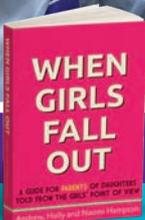
# Girls on Board

## Empowering girls to resolve conflict through empathy, not blame

- 0.5m girls empowered
- 5,000+ teachers trained
- 1,000+ schools on board in 20 countries, across 6 continents

[www.girlsonboard.co.uk](http://www.girlsonboard.co.uk)

Training for teachers and parents available both online and face to face



AVAILABLE ON AMAZON

# schoolblazer

*Guaranteed to deliver exceptional service.*

*The UK's No.1 choice for independent schools.*



INTELLIGENT SIZING



FREE NAME-TAPING



ETHICAL & SUSTAINABLE



QUALITY GARMENTS



Ethical Trading Initiative

Member



★ Trustpilot



UNIFORM + SPORTSWEAR

info@schoolblazer.com | 01832 280011

schoolblazer