



Website Redesign Playbook



THE 2019/2020 EDITION FOR UK INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
AND MATS



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Introduction

We can all recall examples of where we had misjudged someone or something based on the fact that we allowed our first impression to drive our expectations. And regardless of whether we like it or not — or whether it is fair or not — the same exact judgment occurs when people come to your school's website.

Research shows that schools have only seven seconds to grab the attention of a website visitor before they make a judgment on whether to leave or stay. And key stakeholders' first evaluations of a school are often based on their school website.

If your site is dated, difficult to navigate, cluttered, lacking critical information, or housing out-of-date content, current and potential community members will not only be frustrated, but may also associate the outdated website with the quality provided by the school.

Just like you wouldn't trust a commercial website that lacked professional design with your credit card information, a website visitor may form a negative impression of your school if your website doesn't meet their expectations.

Whether your goal is to attract the most qualified teachers or to increase enrolment your website is your most valuable and essential tool in today's web-driven world.

In this 2019/20 UK Edition of *The Website Redesign Playbook*, you will learn what it takes to make the most of your first impression and take your website to the next level!



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Section One

Is It Time For a Redesign?



Is it time to redesign?

Website redesigns should happen about every 3-5 years, with regular upkeep along the way.

That doesn't always happen, though. Website redesigns are a lot of work — from the migration of content, to adding ALT text to hundreds of photos, to potentially switching vendors — the daunting task of it all is enough to send even well-staffed schools running in the opposite direction and “putting it off” until the next summer (again).

KEY TAKEAWAY

Given that a redesign should happen every 3-5 years, it is essential to appropriately maintain your website during that time to make the redesign process smoother when the time comes.

In addition to the intense workload, cost is often a factor in keeping a website long past its expiration date. It is expensive, especially if you need to bring in additional resources to help. While these two reasons often prevent a redesign from happening, in this section, we discuss what should encourage you to redesign — even if done slowly — on a budget.

Four Signs it is Time for a Website Redesign

SIGN #1: YOUR WEBSITE IS NOT RESPONSIVE

If your website is not responsive, this is arguably the most compelling reason to redesign. It is not only an essential SEO ranking factor and website accessibility requirement, but it is also the only way to engage all community members and stakeholders.

Responsive Web Design

(RWD) means that your website is optimised for viewing across multimedia platforms: desktops, smartphones, and tablets.

In addition to being “Responsive,” if you’re redesigning this year, it is important to **work with a provider who designs “mobile-first,” which takes responsive design**

one step further, by creating optimised variations of your website based on the device. At Finalsite, this means we design your homepage’s design on all devices at the same time to ensure a seamless experience.

Responsive design results in good performance in search, better represents your schools quality of education, and provides a more memorable and engaging experience. Most importantly, your audience expects it.

Responsive design is no longer a web design trend, but a web design necessity, as the majority of schools see at least 50% of their website traffic coming from mobile. If potentially missing out on reaching 50% of your community isn’t a good enough reason to redesign, we’re not sure what is!



SIGN #2: YOUR CONTENT IS SIMPLY A CATASTROPHE

The beauty of redesigning is that you get the opportunity to fix the mistakes you made on your old site and start fresh — especially in terms of content.

Old content, too many quick links, disorganised calendar events, large photos that slow down load times — you name it, we've seen it on all school websites. You're just trying to make everyone happy, and still have time to complete the 1,000 other tasks on your to-do list. So sure, it's easy to see how these things happen. But, even if you have good excuses as to why your content is falling short of your community's (and the industry's) expectations, having a website that does not serve its purpose — to effectively communicate and inform — is a problem.

When a website redesign is treated like a one-time project, rather than an ongoing strategic initiative, content easily gets messy. You have multiple people making changes; styles aren't consistent on every page; and photos don't meet a particular standard of quality. And after a few years, your school website is a jumble of voice, tone, fonts and even colours that aren't representative of your school's brand.

In almost all cases it is easier to start fresh with a redesign, as it provides you an opportunity to migrate what you like, scrap what you don't need, write new content, and better serve your community.

SIGN #3: POOR WEBSITE PERFORMANCE

If there's one place you should always turn, it's to the data. Google Analytics provides excellent insights on year after year website traffic, bounce rates, time spent on your site, top hit pages, top exit pages, and more. A thorough review of this data often leads to data-driven decisions about a website redesign.

In working with 2,200 schools around the world we've learned a few key data indicators that reveal it is time for a website redesign. These include:

A dip in overall website traffic: This may indicate current and prospective families can't find your site, or they don't find it useful, so they don't use it. Some schools end up using social media more than their website because of this, but that strategy isn't sustainable.

An increase in homepage bounce rates: This indicates that a visitor visits your homepage and immediately leaves — most likely because your site is confusing or loads slowly.

A decrease in overall time spent on site: This also indicates that website visitors are frustrated because content isn't easy to find.

Regardless of the reason, when website performance is on the decline, it is almost always an excellent reason to initiate the website redesign process.

SIGN #4: YOUR WEBSITE DESIGN AND CONTENT IS NOT ACCESSIBLE

In the UK, 1 in 5 people have a disability - this could be visual, hearing, motor or cognitive (affecting memory and thinking). But the concept of accessibility doesn't just apply to people with disabilities - all users will have different needs at different times and in different circumstances. Accessibility is about making sure your service can be used by as many people as possible.

In 2012, Finalsité launched its first responsive site, before mobile had taken off. We saw internet trends lending themselves toward increased mobile use, and we encouraged Finalsité schools around the world to get ahead of the curve and go responsive. And now when we look back, we wonder how we ever built sites that didn't consider mobile use to begin with!

We feel this same sense of innovation in regards web [accessibility](#). While we have always taken measures to ensure incredible user experiences, in 2017 we completely changed the way we looked at websites, to ensure content is accessible to all. **And in five or six years, we'll look back on this moment and wonder — how did we ever have inaccessible websites?**

There are three tiers of accessibility: design, functionality, and content.

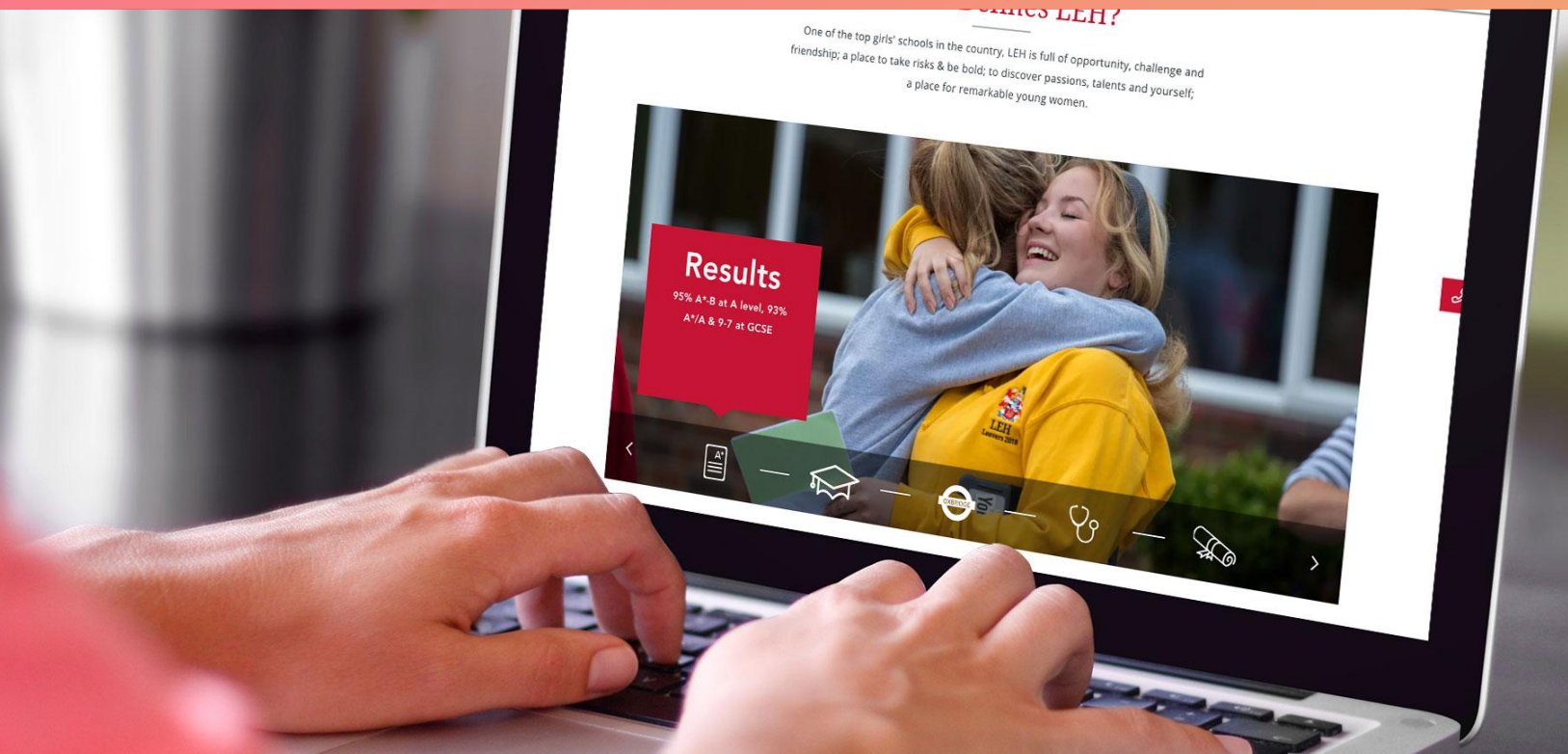
Design and functionality should be handled by your website provider ensuring that navigation and forms can be tabbed through, the colour contrast meets WCAG 2.0 (or 2.1) requirements, and so forth. Websites that are more than two to three years old most likely did not take these regulations into consideration.

Content If your school has not yet implemented the necessary approach to achieve an accessible website, a redesign is the perfect opportunity to start from the ground up on design, functionality and content especially if your last redesign was prior to the introduction of WCAG 2.1.



Section Two

Modern Web Design Trends



Web Design Trends for Schools

The way your website looks and the way your website works are equally as important.

Web design trends are “trends” because they do change based on what’s happening in the industry. Strategies like responsive design and web accessibility aren’t trends, but something we view as requirements and industry standards.

One of the biggest misconceptions about school design is that a website can’t be both accessibility compliant and visually engaging.

The website examples and trends in this section push the envelope on design and accessibility, proving that you can have it all!

BEFORE YOU REDESIGN:

Determine the purpose of your website. Is your main goal to get important content in front of current families? Or maybe you care more about marketing the successes of your school to key stakeholders. Or maybe...a little bit of both!

Modular Layouts

With the rise of responsive design, modular or grid layouts – also called cards or tiles – have become a trend in web design due to their layout flexibility. They're a great way to combine social feeds, calls-to-action, photos and videos into one grid-like homepage that doesn't involve scrolling. Elements can be arranged into stackable blocks or groups, which is a nice feature when optimising your website for multiple devices.

PRO TIP:

Modular layouts create a mash-up feel. Combine different media and contrasting colours to create a segmented look, while maintaining a cohesive design. You can use them to display news, photos, programs, or differentiators.

Tonbridge School

The screenshot shows a grid of content blocks on the Tonbridge School website. The top row features a large image of a boat with watermelons, a text block about the 'Environmental Photographer of the Year exhibition' dated 14 Aug 2019, and a red call-to-action block for 'The Boarding Option' event. The bottom row includes a social media retweet from 'TONBRIDGE SCHOOL', a 'WORLD' graphic, and a photo of a school building. Navigation elements like 'ARRANGE A VISIT' and 'FOLLOW US' are visible.

Dauntsey's

The screenshot displays a modular layout for Dauntsey's. It includes a 'Welcome Aboard' section with a text block and a video player showing two boys. Below this is a 'Billy Elliot: the making of ...' section with another video player. To the right, there's a 'A Day in the Life of ...' section with a text block and a video player showing a girl in a school uniform. The layout uses a mix of text, images, and video content.

Campbell College

The screenshot shows a social media feed for Campbell College. The header reads 'Connect with us'. The main content is a large group photo of a school band in front of a 'START' archway. To the left is a Facebook post from @Campbell College about a speech day. To the right is a tweet from Belfast News Letter (@News_Letter) retweeted by Campbell College, mentioning a pipe band during a battlefield tour. The interface includes social media icons and engagement metrics.

Full-Width Hero Photos and Videos

Showcasing your school's community is the cornerstone of your efforts, whether you are communicating with current or future community members. Full-width hero videos and images — media that span the entire frame of a device — are taking web design by storm, providing website visitors an engaging first look at your community before diving into text content.

Keep in mind that if you wish to have large images and videos on your website, they should be high resolution, and preferably not taken on a smart phone.



Vertical Storytelling and Longer Pages

Scrolling is a continuation in contrast to clicking, which requires a decision, making long, scrolling pages much more easy for today's user to explore.

Popular social media websites such as Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter have made scrolling commonplace for the modern user — you don't even realise that you're doing it, but you're continuing to engage and explore.

Scrolling allows you to tell your school's story more efficiently, without forcing users to click and make a decision.

PRO TIP:

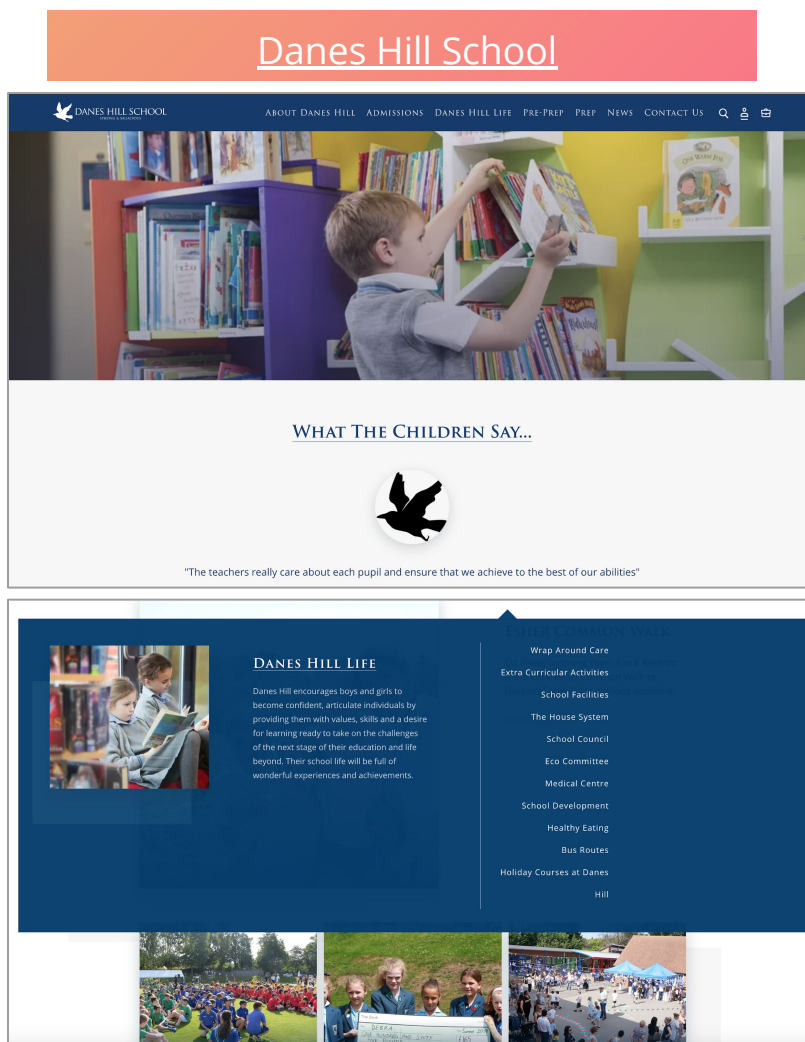
Prioritise your most important content at the top of your scrolling page. If your goal is marketing your school, design enhancements like infographics should be first. If your primary goal is informing your community, content like news should come first. And, remember to always end your pages with calls-to-action!

The screenshot displays the Oakham School website with a vertical scroll layout. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'OAKHAM ENTERPRISES', 'JOB OPPORTUNITIES', 'CONTACT US', and 'PORTALS'. Below this is a large hero image of a choir performing in a grand hall, with a red overlay containing the school's crest and the text 'Welcome to Oakham School'. A red arrow points down from this section to a quote from the headmaster: 'This is such a friendly school, everyone is so welcoming'. Below the quote is a 'Headmaster's Welcome' section featuring a photo of Nigel M Lashbrook, the headmaster, and a 'Read The Full Welcome' button. To the right is a 'Latest News' section with three articles: 'Excellent Exam Results', 'CCF Expedition to Norway 2019', and 'Blog: India Schools Project 2019'. Below the news section is a large image of students on a bridge, with an 'About Oakham' section and a 'Read More' button. At the bottom, there is a 'Come and Visit Us' section with a map of the school's location and a 'View larger map' button. The website also features social media icons in the top right corner and a search bar.

Fixed Elements

A fixed element is an element that remains in place as you scroll down the page. Fixed elements keep important information front and centre on longer scrolling pages, and improves the user experience.

Fixed elements are also commonly used as a “sticky menu.” Sticky menus are navigation elements that stay in one location on a site even when the user moves a webpage up or down. Having a site’s navigation options always present is a great UI feature that allows users to quickly navigate around your site or page without having to scroll back to the top of the page.



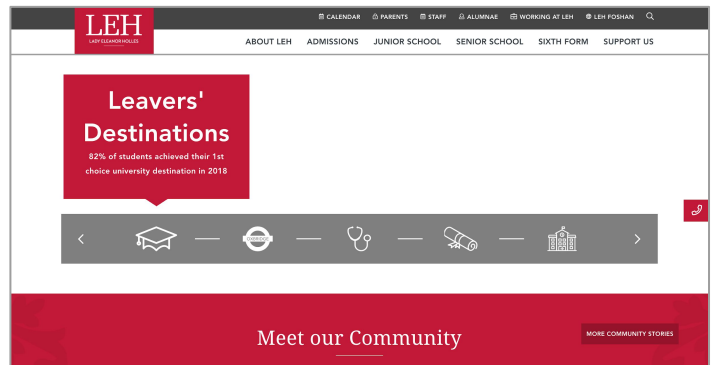
Interactive Elements

With scrolling, animations rollovers and hover effects, interactive elements create richer user experiences with the intent to engage and delight. Faster Internet connections and new advances in coding language makes these lightweight animations possible, without slowing page load times. At Finalsite, we implement best practices to ensure these interactive elements are accessibility compliant. **Visit the websites below to experience their interactive elements:**

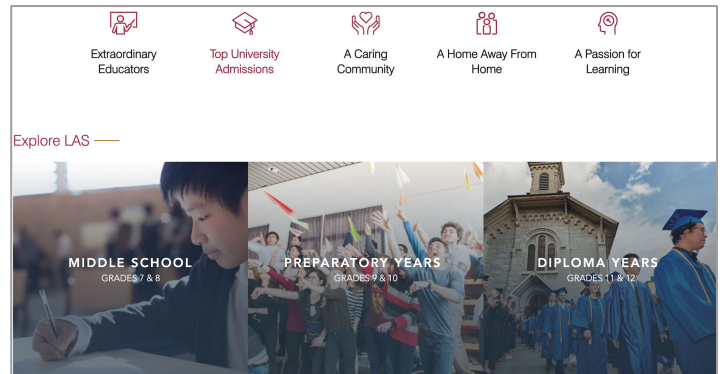
[Escola Concept](#)



[Lady Eleanor Holles](#)



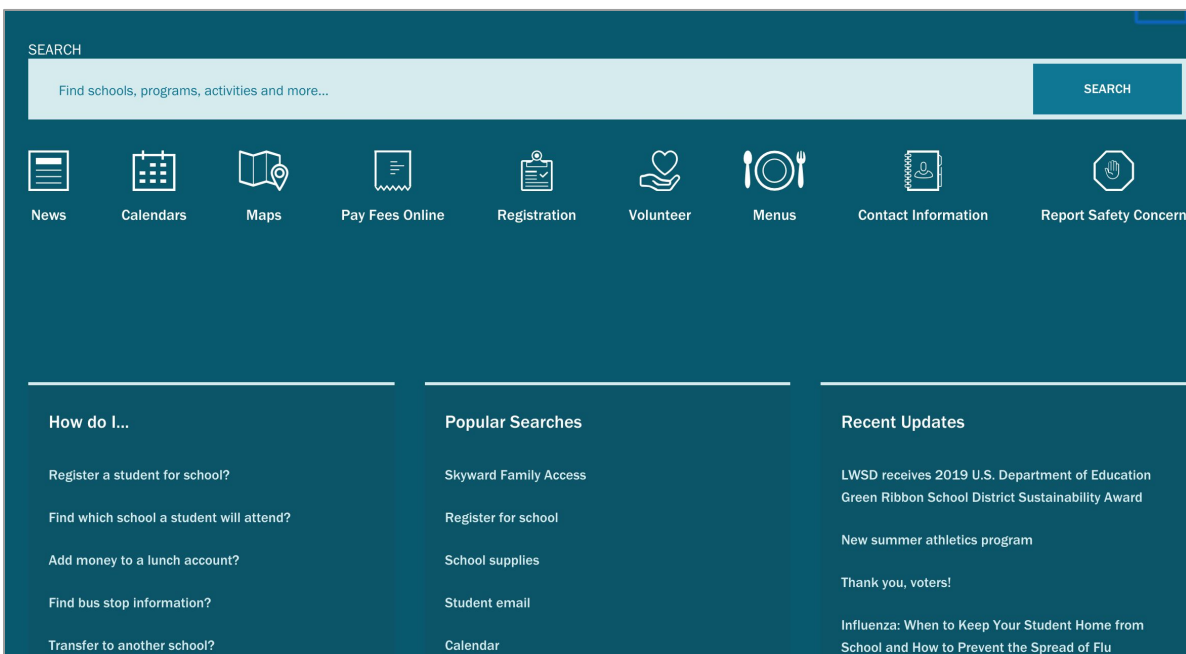
[Leysin American School in Switzerland](#)



Improved Search Experiences

As a school, you have a plethora of information that parents, stakeholders, students, staff, and prospective community members need to access quickly — yet no way to guide them. That’s a tough problem! And while your website and navigation might be perfectly structured, today’s generation is used to depending on Google to quickly get answers to the questions they have and the content they need. Offering this same type of experience on your website will please all members of your community.

For example, check this interactive search experience on [Lake Washington School’s](#) website, includes Finalsite’s powerful search platform, graphic calls-to-action, and categorised quick links to the school’s most popular questions and searches.



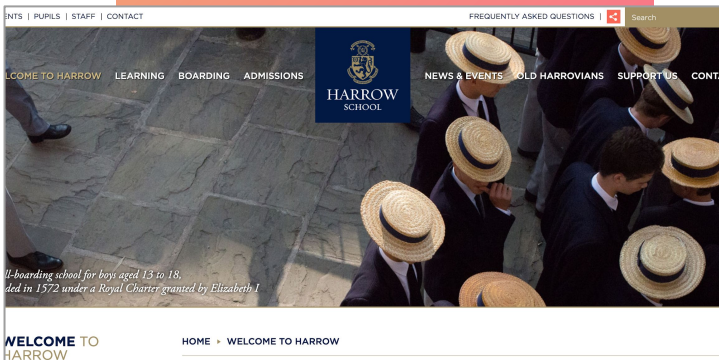
Stakeholders Across Global School Group and MAT Sites

Is your school part of a multi academy trust or belong to a global group? When designing your homepage and its individual school sites, consider the importance of the same user experience across all sites. Parents and community members who need to access different content across different individual sites don't want to have to re-learn navigation everywhere they go.

PRO TIP:

While you can keep the navigation and design elements the same across each school site, customise it with each school's logo, colours, photos and video to make it feel unique enough — but also simple enough — for all end-users.

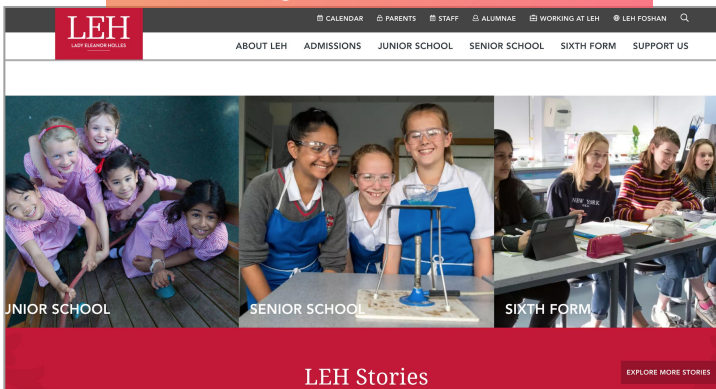
Harrow School



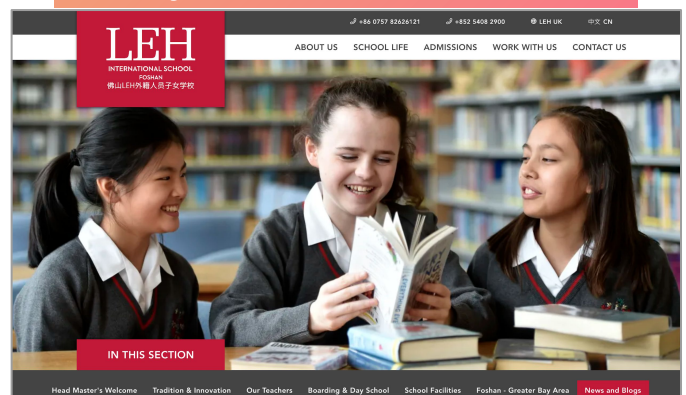
Harrow Shanghai



Lady Eleanor Holles



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Custom School Menus for School Groups and MAT Sites

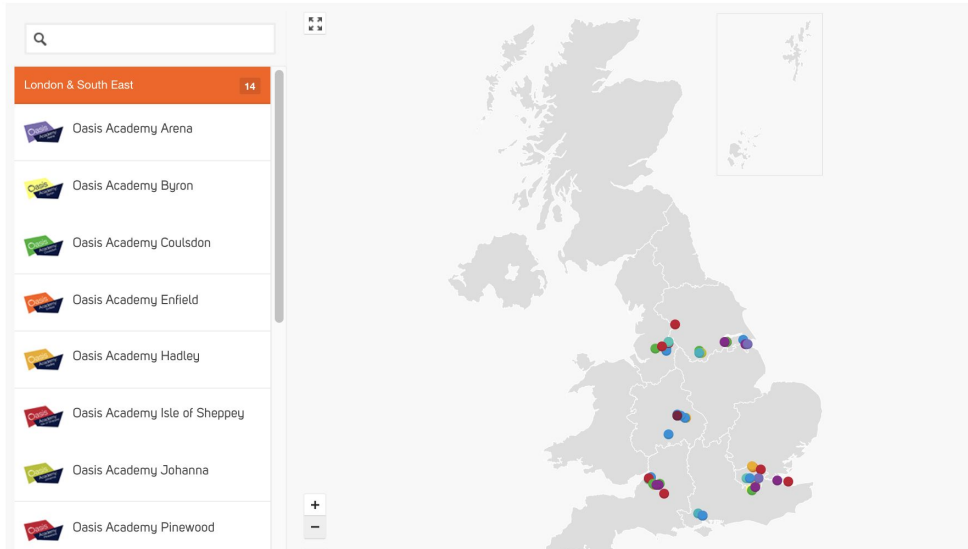
A custom school menu replaces a standard (and sometimes hard to use) drop-down with something more visual and informative. These custom menus make it easy to find individual school sites, and each school's relevant contact information.

In this example from [Oasis Academy](#), the navigation reveals the menu with a link access to each individual school's site, and basic information about each one.

National, Regional and Local

Every Academy within the Oasis Community Learning family benefits from the interconnectivity and shared practice of being part of a national family of 52 academies. In addition to this, academies are grouped into five distinct regions around England: The North, The Midlands, The South West, The South Coast and London and the South East.

Use the map below to search for an academy:

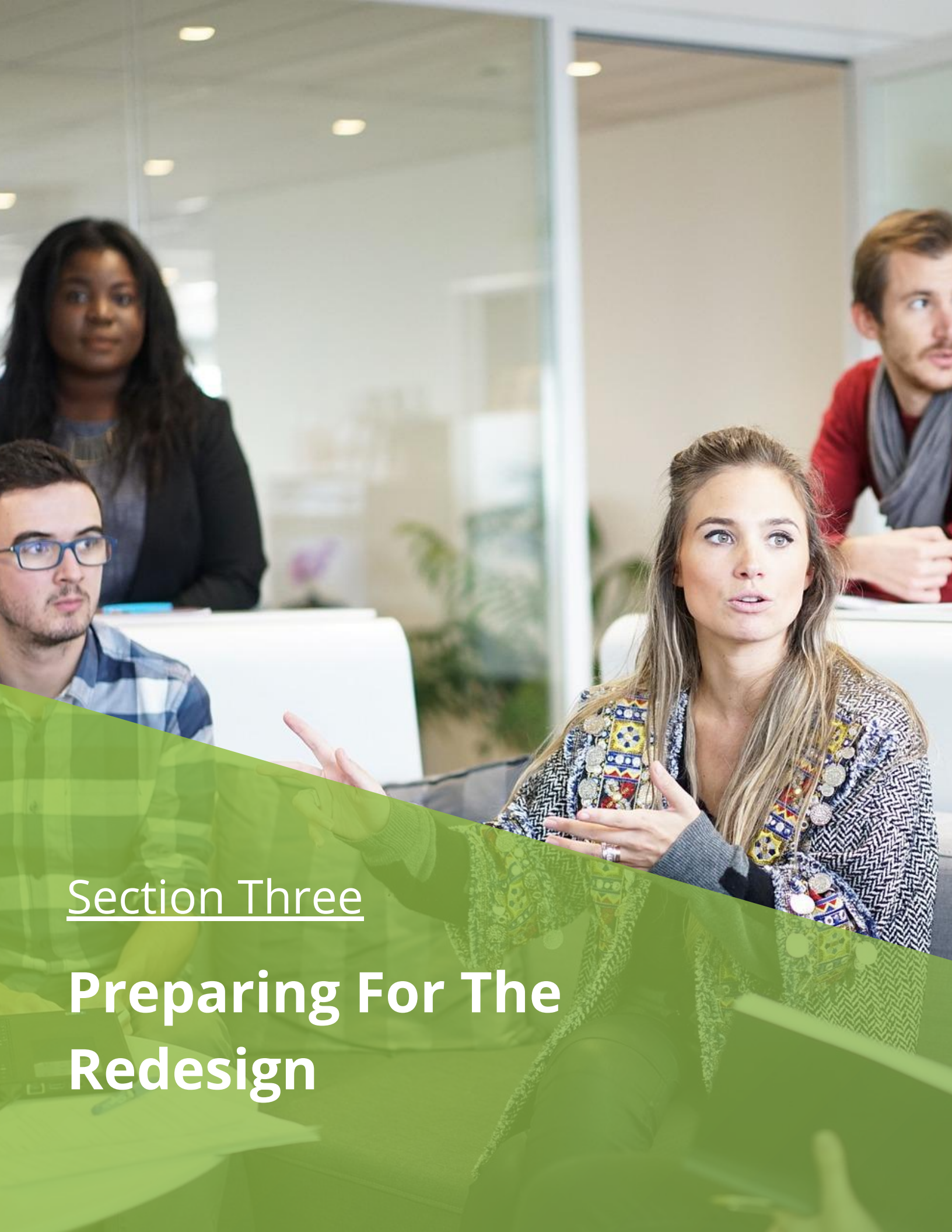


The screenshot shows a search interface for Oasis Academy. On the left, there is a search bar and a list of academies under the 'London & South East' region, which has 14 academies. The list includes Oasis Academy Arena, Byron, Coulsdon, Enfield, Hadley, Isle of Sheppey, Johanna, and Pinewood. In the center, there is a map of the United Kingdom with colored dots indicating the locations of the academies. On the right, there is a building icon and text encouraging users to find out more about what it means to become an Oasis Academy. At the bottom right, there is a vertical button labeled 'EXPLORE OASIS'.

WANT TO WORK WITH THE INDUSTRY'S MOST EXPERIENCED DESIGN TEAM?

Finalsite's design team works with more than 2,200 schools worldwide. Our custom design work has won us nearly 90 design.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Section Three

Preparing For The Redesign



Budgeting & Planning

It is essential to learn how to allocate your limited time, resources and budget.

Before you dive into your website redesign project, you need to take the time to assess your budget, set a realistic timeline, and determine who will be a part of the process, and then figure out what to do with all that! In this section, we'll share how to make the most of what you already have.

BALLPARK BUDGETING While every project is different — from the scope of the design to the software requirements — a good gauge for an average budget is 1-2 x tuition.

What Goes Into a Budget?

As exciting as it may be to think about all of the possibilities with creating a new website, you are no doubt asking yourself the most important question: What's it going to cost? And that's a good question!

Smaller schools with limited resources and larger schools with a lot of resources (but also, a lot of schools and students!) need to be sensitive to how best to use the budgets they're given.

Website redesigns incur two standard types of fees: **one-time fees**, and **recurring annual fees**. The **one-time fee** includes set-up costs, such as the design itself, data integration, content migration, and additional on-site training. The one-time fee will most likely also include the software cost for the first year.

The recurring annual fee includes your software subscription cost for the CMS, communication tools, and integrations you have selected. In all cases, your annual fee will be less than your first on-time fee. In addition to planned annual fees, you may also have other expenses that occur outside of software fees — such as consulting or obtaining additional assets.

THERE ARE SIX AREAS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE COST OF A WEBSITE:

1) Design Scope: Design is typically one of the biggest costs associated in the setup of your school's site. So, if you're working on a tight budget, finding a way to stay simple, but still achieve your goals, will be essential. Your design should be a **one-time fee**.

2) Functionality: Before you begin the redesign process (or even select a vendor) determining what you need your website to accomplish from a functionality standpoint is critical to determining your budget. A complete list of non-negotiables, and "wants" should be made.

Functionality is a broad umbrella that includes the **CMS**, additional software modules (like email and calendars), **hosting and data security, software integrations**, an app, compliance software, etc. Your functionality budget should be available year-after-year for the length of your contract.

3) Assets: Adding new photography or video to your website to make it *pop* may be an additional cost to consider during the process. This is a one-time fee and is not truly associated with the cost of your actual website, but an additional cost that should be considered.

4) Content: The migration of content is often an associated cost in a website redesign project, but can easily be avoided by doing it in-house. However, when working on a tight timeline, outsourcing this service may be an additional cost. This would likely be included in your one-time costs, unless ongoing consulting is required.

5) Consulting: A level of consulting should be included in the one-time fee for your design, which includes help with your sitemap, landing pages, UX, etc. If you require consulting outside of standard project deployment, this will likely be an additional cost.

6) Training and Support: Training is an important part of the contract you sign with your website provider. Training may be an additional one-time fee if on-site or custom training is required. Support is likely a component of your recurring fee, and will vary based on the level of support you have purchased from your vendor.



1. Design Scope

Ultimately, the cost of a beautiful design is a function of time: **creative** direction, **front end development**, **project management** and **training**. The aesthetic of the homepage doesn't necessarily translate to an "expensive" site.



Sites where the design is deep — meaning we are investing creative time on specific landing pages — can expand the scope, as can “special treatments” such as an interactive campus tour or a sophisticated social media mash-up page. In addition to the site’s actual design, quality consulting and project management will likely result in a higher one-time design fee, but the end-result is greater.

WHICH TYPE OF DESIGN IS RIGHT FOR MY SCHOOL?

Your school goals and overall budget will determine the type of design you choose. For example, a school working with a smaller budget may opt for a simpler design and splurge on functionality, while a school who cares about their online brand and presence will most likely opt for a more deep design scope. At Finalsite, we help you flesh out these details so that you spend your budget the right way.

“*I wanted people who used a science-based approach to website development, one that relied on statistics, not just beautiful design.*”
- Jak Blackwood, Marketing Manager, Royal Hospital School

WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE AND DESIGN SCOPE

One of the most common misconceptions about accessible design is that in order to be accessible (and compliant) the design must be dull and boring. However, that is not true.

At Finalsite, we believe that accessible design only offers us new opportunities to improve the user experience for everyone, while still being creative.

When beginning the design process, you'll want to be sure that your website provider is well-versed in building compliant and accessible sites, and has a formal Q&A process to ensure the site you launch meets WCAG 2.0 (and WCAG 2.1) guidelines for structure, functionality, colour contrast, etc.

Some key questions to ask, include:

- How many accessible designs have you launched?
- What is your process for making the design accessible?
- Are your designers and front-end developers trained in WCAG 2.0?
- Do you have any Certified Accessibility Specialists on staff?
- Do you have a formal Q&A process?
- Will you deliver us an accessible website?

[LEARN ABOUT FINALSITE'S APPROACH TO ACCESSIBILITY](#)

KEEP IN MIND...

Very often, schools plan for the “one-time” cost of designing and setting up the site, but the annual subscription cost can come as a surprise. We believe that success comes from not just a great new site, but from ongoing support, training and counting on a platform that evolves with the times.

Find a software platform that is modular enough to allow for small schools to find a solution that fits, as well as for large schools who have higher demands. Before you even select a vendor, make a list of your must-have functionality.

FROM OUR EXPERIENCE, HERE IS WHAT SHOULD BE AT THE TOP OF YOUR LIST FOR FUNCTIONALITY:

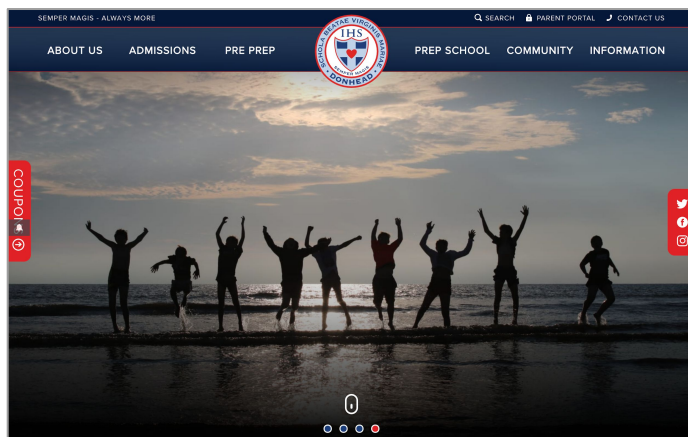
- An intuitive, flexible, drag-and-drop WYSIWYG interface to make page-building easy for admins of all skill levels.
- Granular permissions/tiered admin rights for pages and modules to ensure only permitted website admins can publish content
- Social media integration and moderation.
- Create Once, Publish Everywhere (C.O.P.E.) functionality for modules like calendars and news so that when an edit is made on the back-end in one location, it automatically is published site-wide.
- Advanced search capabilities to offer a simplified website experience.
- Integration with LDAP and Active Directory to simplify and streamline data.
- Alerts, subscriptions and emergency notifications.

3. Assets

Great video and photography make all the difference, so many schools will plan for photography and video in the new site, and will rely on contractors to do this work.

Schools can leverage staff, faculty and even students to help them pull together imagery that captures Their school. This is a more affordable approach, and often allows website visitors to get a more holistic view of your school because the photos are taken throughout the year by attending major events like competitions, sporting events, plays and end-of-year ceremonies.

Make a wise choice about photography and consider how it is integrated into your design. When investing a lot of your budget into a design, good photography should be a top priority as dark, **pixelated photos in a nice design can easily take away from what would otherwise be a great design.**



There are numerous free tools for aggregating all photos from your community, including Flickr, DropBox and even Google Drive. Getting all the photos in a single location will make it easy when it comes to adding them to your site.

4. Content

Website content has two main components: content writing and content migration. In both cases, content and content migration can be done completely free of charge — and that often yields the best result.

CONTENT WRITING

A great website has succinct and compelling copy, which takes time and skill. If you have someone who can do this in-house, you are in good shape. Most schools treat this as a collaborative effort across school website administrators, while others put it in the hands of a sole person. It is also possible to outsource a portion of the writing to expedite the process or to get a fresh voice. **Although it can be time consuming most schools tend to keep this portion in-house for budgetary reasons.**

CONTENT MIGRATION

When schools head into the redesign process, the first question we are often asked is: “how can we move the website over?” While there’s no reason we can’t do that, there is a reality to this seemingly simple request. When we work with a school who wants to launch a new website, we look at this as a real investment and a unique opportunity to review what you are saying to the outside world, and how you are presenting it. In other words, you shouldn’t just want to “move the website over.” You should use this as the prime opportunity to re-organise, re-write, and re-structure content from your old site.

We’ll dive a bit deeper into this in our Content Migration section of this eBook.

5. Web Accessibility

Web accessibility has quickly become a key component of required site functionality for schools. Because of this, you will want to ensure your website provider checks a few key boxes on your functionality checklist, including: 1) The ability to add alt text and video captions; 2) a WYSIWYG interface to easily structure pages; 3) simple tools for creating links.



Getting Website Buy-In

Once you know you need a redesign — what do you do first? Well, you need buy-in.

Getting buy-in is an important step in the redesign process, because even if you know that your community needs a new website, proving it to key decision makers isn't always easy.

In this section, you'll find some key tools, strategies and best practices for getting buy-in from your board and other stakeholders for a new website.

PLANNING AHEAD

Make a list of all the key decision makers, and map out what their top priorities and objectives will be. This way, you can approach the conversation ready to win them over, while also combatting any objections they may have.

How to Get Website Redesign Buy-In

CONDUCT A COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Completely research your school's competition — both neighbouring schools and relevant schools further afield. Who is their website provider? Is their website responsive? Do they use video? How do you rank in comparison in search engine results? Having a thorough understanding of what your competitors websites look like will give you some firepower for proving that your school's website needs an update.

PROPOSE YOUR OWN BUDGET

Before stepping into your meeting to propose your web platform, you should have an itemised list of costs for everything you'd like to include in your new website. This proves you've done your research, you know how the school community will benefit from it and how to achieve it with your proposed solution.



COME PREPARED TO COMBAT SUGGESTIONS

When it comes to your school's governing body, money matters, so when your proposed redesign is out of the budget, they're going to ask *"isn't there some way you can do this cheaper?"* or *"isn't there a free solution?"* and *"what are the pros and cons of choosing a proprietary CMS vs open source?"* Do your research in advance so that you have supplementary resources and materials to help win them over.

INCLUDE KEY STAKEHOLDERS EARLY ON

If you're a Director of Technology reading this, be sure to involve your communications team in your decision. If you're a Director of Communications or PR Officer reading this, be sure to involve your technology team. When these teams work together to find a solution, rather than work in silos, the ability to get approval — and ultimately a website solution everyone is happy with — is much easier because they felt involved from the get-go.

“ Technology and marketing have always worked together in the development of initiatives where it relates to students and parents at our school.. Our relationship is a creative collaboration that enhances any project we work on together. - Cissy Bowman, Mt. Lebanon School | PA

HAVE PROOF OF OUTCOME

If you have a preferred vendor (or two) ask them for case studies that prove the results of working with them — such as improved website traffic, happier parents, etc. When you have testimonials and case studies of schools like yours who have benefited from a redesign, it makes the project seem less daunting and more achievable.



How to Select the “Right” Vendor

One of the most effective ways to get buy-in for your redesign is by selecting a vendor that makes everyone happy and helps every department meet their goals.

However, picking the right person for the job isn't easy. You can't just look for someone who can provide a “fresh look.” It's essential to think beyond the immediate need of a redesign itself and use the opportunity to select a vendor that will fulfill the long-term needs of your school.

Keep in mind usability of the web management side, the website experience side, training, ongoing support, and thought leadership.

Yet, with so many choices ranging from large e-commerce site providers to small web design shops, the options are endless and the process of selection can be challenging.

Make choosing a website vendor simpler with four steps to ensure you'll be happy with the vendor you choose.

1. DO YOUR RESEARCH

Using Pinterest or another bookmarking tool like Evernote, start keeping track of sites you like, and be specific about what you like about them. Start by looking at school sites you enjoy, and be sure to bookmark a few non-school sites, too. Then determine whose work you like best. Does one vendor feature many parallax sites, while another seems to focus on splash pages? Take note of whose work reflects what you're looking for, and make a short list.

2. INTERVIEW VENDORS

It can be easy to be roped in by a gimmicky sales websites or splashy portfolios, so a thoughtful interview can be the best way to get the facts on vendors to best make your decision. Get your questions ready in advance and take good notes. A tender/formal requirements process is also common at this stage to ascertain which suppliers are the right fit for your project.

3. CALL REFERENCES

Speaking with schools like yours who have been down a similar path is crucial to seeing if a vendor is right for the job. And, while references tend to be the happiest customers, they'll likely be honest with you, so don't hesitate to call and ask tough questions.

By this point in your selection process you probably have a front-runner, but be sure to loop in a few colleagues to help you make your final decision. Not only will their opinion help you sway other decision makers, but fresh eyes and input can only help solidify your selection.

4. PRIORITISE NEEDS AND WANTS

Determining what you want and need for a project isn't always easy—and neither is prioritising those efforts. **On the following page, we've provided a website platform evaluation guide.** This guide is intended to help you weigh each essential item on your list by importance, but also compare key features you may not have considered yet — such as an on time deployment.

**FINALSITE IS THE PREFERRED VENDOR OF MORE THAN 5000 SCHOOLS
WORLDWIDE**

More than 100 UK independent schools and MATs have switched to Finalsite for our industry-leading designs, and software for website management, integrations and communications.

[LEARN MORE](#)

KEY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

What are the key goals and objectives the school is looking to achieve with the new web design and platform? Please select 3-5 objectives and rank them by importance.

Show Mission & Vision Fulfillment	
Build Confidence in the School/Group	
Reinforce/Reflect the Quality of the School	
Differentiate From Competitors	
Attract and Retain Students	
Improve Awareness of Program/Educational Opportunities	
Marketing: Showcase School Success	
Teacher/Staff Recruitment	
Communication with Primary Stakeholders	
Alumni Engagement	
Community Engagement	

TIMING AND PROCUREMENT PROCESS

What is your targeted "go-live" date? <i>Is your vendor backlogged? Can they handle your redesign at the time you need it?</i>	
Is there a drop-date for the project?	
Has budget for the project been established?	
Will this purchase require board approval?	
Will this purchase require you to do an RFP?	
What will your team's availability be (hours per week) during deployment?	
Once your site is live, how many hours per week will be dedicated to ongoing development and maintenance?	

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Roughly, to the best of your ability, give a weight to each relevant component of your purchase:

	SUGGESTED WEIGHT
Start-Up Cost <i>Design, Implementation, Project Management, Training</i>	15%
Annual Cost <i>Software & Hosting - Be sure to check for hidden fees!</i>	15%
Hosting & Data Security <i>Site Performance, Road, Lead Times, Uptime, Can they keep my data safe</i>	5%
Feature Set <i>What the platform needs to do in order for you to achieve your goals.</i>	10%
Ease-of-Use <i>Intuitive, Inline</i>	10%
Future Ready <i>Integrates well with other school adopted solutions, Modern infrastructure</i>	10%
Deployment <i>Able to start immediately and to complete the project on-time.</i>	10%
Design <i>Award Winning, Modern, Elegant, Responsive Templates, Able to set the site apart.</i>	10%
Subject Matter Expert <i>Demonstrates ability to help achieve goals, Thought Leader, Able to provide strategic guidance.</i>	5%
Support <i>Readily accessible when needed.</i>	5%
References <i>Independent Research & Supplied References</i>	5%
TOTAL	/100%



Redesign Planning

Once you've been approved for a redesign and you've selected a vendor, content strategy should begin immediately.

Redesigning is about more than just your website. When you redesign, it goes far beyond just a new look and feel.

An effective redesign is prefaced by planning, strategy and content creation. Redesigning is about more than just your website.

PLANNING 101

From content migration to determining website admins, there are quite a few to-do list items that should be planned and sorted out before, during, and after the website redesign process.

Website Redesign Project Considerations

1. FORM A WEB TEAM

Establish a web team. You'll need about 3-4 people who can plan, organise, manage, train, and make final decisions along the way. The team should have one real decision-maker, who has the power to keep everything moving along, while the rest of the web team aids in all website-related tasks.

2. DEFINE THE PURPOSE OF YOUR WEBSITE

Whether it's improving communications or re-branding your school, your goal will help make decisions about content and design during deployment.

3. CONDUCT A S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

A formal S.W.O.T. analysis — a thorough review of your school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, helps steer almost every decision you make for your content, design, software, etc.

4. EVALUATE YOUR CONTENT

Begin examining your content early to help plan out what the content migration process will look like. Evaluating content and deciding on a process early on will be key for keeping your project on-time.

5. SET A TIMELINE

Set a "publish date" for your desired "launch day" and then establish weekly check-in meetings with your web team to stay on track and talk through any issues or potential roadblocks. At Finalsité we use an online system which shows a GAANT view, weekly deadlines for both sides, and deadlines to make sure the project stays on track. We believe transparency with your web provider is key, and we highly recommend this if you don't want your site launch to take three years.

On the following pages, we discuss each of these in additional detail.

1. Forming a Web Team

A web team is a group of three to four individuals who will work together to plan, organise, and manage your website. Working alone or getting too many people involved can prolong the redesign process. A web team means you can share time and responsibilities with colleagues to lessen the workload, meet deadlines and meet the needs of other departments.



In general, your web team should have someone from communications, technology and a key decision-maker. Besides a marketing team member, you can also bring together members of other departments that may not typically work together, like technology. That way, everyone's needs are addressed and met.

Web teams bring together the niche skills of individuals at your school to get work done more effectively and efficiently. Providing web team members with designated tasks will create a workflow that saves time and gets work done without overlapping one another. For example a school's web team can consist of a webmaster, director of IT, a graphic designer and the director of communications.

During the redesign, your team should plan to meet on a weekly basis. If you don't have time to meet, ask the team to send a weekly update email about what they've been working on, what they hope to accomplish in the next week, as well as any hurdles.

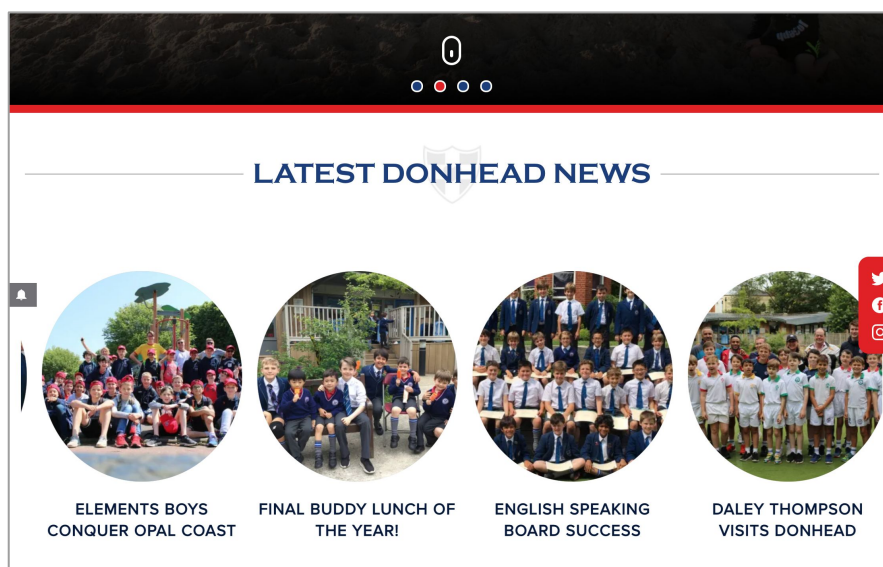
2. Determine Your Website's Purpose

Your website's purpose acts as a roadmap: without it, you and your website visitors will commonly find yourself lost, with no sense of direction, taking guesses as to which way is correct, losing valuable time and resources along the way.

MARKETING-FOCUSED WEBSITE: Schools who use their website for marketing still provide the latest news and upcoming events on their website, but provide all other information and resources to area elsewhere. Keeping these kind of communications separate from the school website offers two main advantages: enhanced privacy and organisation.

COMMUNICATIONS-FOCUSED WEBSITE: If you choose to use your website as your central communications tool, your main goal is to put the relevant information into your stakeholders' hands as quickly as possible. This is common among schools with a large amount of stakeholders who need instant communications. The most common obstacle with these websites is their tendency to be cluttered.

CAN WE DO BOTH? Yes! It takes an perfect mix of content and design to market the value of your school and share communications. On your homepage, share 1-2 news articles and 1-2 calendar events with links to "view more." Or, opt for "news & events" interactive element, to make news and events easily available in just one click, without clutter — like in this example:



3. Conduct a S.W.O.T. Analysis

Besides presenting your board with hard evidence and facts about responsive design and what your competition is up to, providing a S.W.O.T. — strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats — analysis will prove you've done a complete analysis of you website, your school, and the marketplace.

STRENGTHS: Start with the story of what sets you apart. What advantages do you have over other schools? What do you do better than anyone else? Do you offer a 1:1 program? What about study abroad opportunities? Are there well-known teachers on staff? What kind of programs do you offer that no other schools do?

OPPORTUNITIES: Think about trends—and not just in education—but everywhere. Consider how social media has changed the way you tell your school's story online, or how responsive design has changed the way stakeholders interact with your site. Grab the opportunities to shine in these new spaces, and you'll turn an opportunity into a strength. Good news — opportunities are everywhere.

THREATS AND WEAKNESSES: No one wants to talk about what can hurt us, but being aware of your weaknesses and threats can help to build website content to combat them. For example, maybe your school has a poor academic reputation within your state. Showcasing successful alumni, posting bright photos, writing a new mission statement, and constantly sharing the positive things happening in your school puts you in a position to stand strong against your potential threats and weaknesses.

4. Evaluate Your Content

1. HOW OLD IS THE CONTENT?

Content that's more than one year old — with the exception of your school's mission statement and other "evergreen" content — should be carefully reviewed.

2. HOW RELEVANT IS THE CONTENT?

With users' attention spans getting shorter, the content that's on your site should be crafted to engage your different audiences. Your content should be timely and interesting. Ask yourself "*Would I enjoy reading this?*"

3. IS THE CONTENT IN OUR BRAND VOICE?

Did you let numerous staff members write their own pages? While divvying up the work seems like a good idea to lighten your workload, over the years it can produce a variety of voices, tones, and messaging.

4. IS THE CONTENT ORGANISED?

With the prevalence of mobile, ensuring content is brief and scannable is key to ensuring parents can find the content they need. Organise your content in a way where it makes sense using a variety of heads, bulleted and numbered lists, accordions, photos, and even videos. For example, sharing a list of clubs available at your school alongside photos works better than text-heavy paragraphs.

5. IS THE CONTENT MOBILE OPTIMISED?

Going responsive isn't just about having a website design that looks great on mobile. Your goal should be to make a maximum impact with a minimum amount of words. Short headlines (about 60-75 characters) and a minimal amount of text will win you mobile conversions.

5. Set a Timeline

Every school's timeline differs based on budget, workload, tiers of approval, etc. And then, of course, someone on your team inevitably will quit or take a leave or a key decision maker will take forever to approve the homepage. **However, setting a timeline with milestones along the way will make it easy to stay on course.**

At Finalsite, we have a scientific approach to website launch timelines that we've developed over the course of 20 years in working with schools. If you work with us, you will be given a timeline based on your scope of work, with milestones along the way — and we'll work with you to ensure you accomplish them.

HERE ARE SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

Custom Design vs. Theme Design: A custom design likely means a longer deployment process, as more time is spent on custom treatments and enhancements. A template or theme design often leads to a quicker deployment process, because limited customisation is required.

Training: If you're implementing an entirely new CMS and web platform, training will play a key role in your ability to launch. We recommend starting training early. **Content & Asset Migration:** Depending on how much or how little content you migrate, your timeline will be affected. Assume 15 minutes per page, though some can take longer than others. We recommend beginning content as soon as possible.

Staffing: How many individuals you have working on your site will determine how quickly you're able to launch. More isn't always better.

Tips for a Successful, On-Time Website Launch

1. Don't focus on an exact *day*. It's easy to get hung up on an arbitrary launch date, such as the beginning of school. However, we believe that launching a site when it is ready is a better choice than launching it when you feel like you need to. Launching in the off season (summer, winter break, etc.) is often a better route than the "first day of school."

2. Build a timeline to structure your redesign process. Work with your project management team to create a redesign timeline that helps you stay on Set hard deadlines within your deployment process that include, for example:

- ✓ Develop a site map
- ✓ Rewrite old content
- ✓ Add new photos to your site
- ✓ Curate new content
- ✓ Migrate content
- ✓ Choose branding

3. Prepare content beforehand. Before heading into the redesign process, you may want to consider a complete content overhaul. Analyse your current website, decide which content to keep and what to ditch, and then prepare the new content — all before you start designing.

Having all your content ready will actually help you save time while building out your navigation, which is often a commonly time-consuming process.

Pro Tip: Create an organised shared folder of your content and task it out. When we redesigned Finalsité.com, we created a folder to hold all of our new content. Each folder was the name of an element in our top-tier navigation, and then each folder contained a separate word document that indicated each lower-level page. We then colour-coded the folders to task out each section of the site.

4. Create a formal approval process. We get it — it's not always easy to rewrite content and redesign a website, and it's surely not easy to get approval of that new content.

For many schools, the redesign process comes to frequent halts while they wait for approval from a Head of School. Before you head into the redesign process, set up a formal approval process with anyone who has say in the design, navigation and content. That way, if someone doesn't follow the process and are late to the game with edits, you can say "no."

There are two areas of approval that often involve different people:

Design: Set a hard deadline to have your homepage, landing pages and lower tier pages approved by. Then, about four days before each deadline, set up a single meeting with anyone who has say in the design and list out clearly defined edits to turn back around to your designer and project manager. That way, you'll meet the deadline to have your design done by — and it will already be approved. An experienced Project Manager and/or designer can play a critical role in facilitating conversations, which can go all over the place otherwise.

Content: set up a different approval process. If you have numerous individuals contributing to your website, ask them to upload content to your shared folder and notify you when it's complete. Then, you can always task it back out to the individual who wrote it to upload it to the site.

5. Let go of perfectionism. The best websites are updated and maintained over time — so don't waste time getting everything 100% perfect. Rather, make sure everything is there, and let your community know you're still smoothing things out post-launch.

6. Train your colleagues. During the redesign process, you'll be provided plenty of time for training, so take advantage of it. More importantly, pass along the knowledge to other members of your team who will be managing your website. Taking the time during the redesign process to host a training with anyone who will be updating your website will help you divide and conquer and upload approved website content quickly.



Section Four

Website Content



Content Migration

In most cases, content migration is the very first step of the website redesign process.

Remove outdated content; re-write content to be more web-friendly; move select pieces of content; make content accessible and write new content for information you feel is missing.

Content migration isn't just a process of moving content from here to there, it's an opportunity to optimise and improve hundreds of pages of content that have gone stale over the years.

CONTENT IS FLUID

Even after you've launched your new site, revisit your content often to make sure that the information you publish is helping you reach the original purpose of the site.

Choosing Content to Migrate to the New Site

When heading into the redesign process, the first question we are often asked is: *“how can we move the website over?”*

While there’s no reason we can’t do that, there is a reality to this seemingly simple request. When we work with a school who wants to launch a new website, we look at this as a real investment and a unique opportunity to review what they are saying to the outside world, and how they are presenting it. In other words, schools shouldn’t just want to “move the website over.” They should use this as the prime opportunity to re-organise, re-write, and re-structure content from their old site.

1. PURGE OLD CONTENT

Old content; long, wordy paragraphs; pixelated photos; entire pages that no longer serve a purpose: it’s about time they’re deleted. Purging content is the first thing you should do after you evaluate your website in its totality. While you’re evaluating, make a list of all the site pages or content you’d like to remove, why, and if you intend to replace it with something else. And while it may be hard to part with content you’ve worked hard on, you’ll feel better once you hit “delete.”

2. LET NEW PRIORITIES DRIVE SITE ARCHITECTURE.

In almost every case, the site map and architecture should be reviewed based on website usage, best practices, and organisational priorities. Review Google Analytics to find the most popular (and least popular) pages on your site. In almost all cases, there is never a 1-to-1 ratio for old site to new site content migration.

3. SIMPLIFY AND SHORTEN TEXT CONTENT AND ADD MORE VISUALS.

Web users read less and rely more on images, video, infographics and short, bulleted text. Moving lengthy content from an old site to a new site defeats the purpose of launching a site in the first place — which is to increase usage and improve the user experience.

4. NEW CONTENT SHOULD BE ORGANISED TO MAXIMISE ENGAGEMENT.

There is far more opportunity for wider and more interesting layouts than the standard “three column” layout of older websites — recognisable by text in the middle with the potential for a sidebar on the right and navigation on the left.

Modern design incorporates unique grids and panels that mimic more sophisticated publishing approaches. For this reason, there is not a simple relationship between an old page and a new page. More importantly, there are opportunities to collapse multiple pages into one, allowing users to get what they need in one place rather than clicking around. Aside from front-end design, it is also important to consider the potential that password-protected Portals offer you and your community. Portals allow you to distribute private information to your different audiences, without cluttering your website.

5. USE NEW, INNOVATIVE WAYS TO SHARE CONTENT

Don't just write new content; create new ways to share your content. Once you've made a list of the pages that need to be created or completely re-worked, you can then consider the optimal way to share that content.

FINALSITE COMPOSER PRO TIP:

If you're redesigning using Finalsite Composer, use shared elements and the copy-and-paste feature to easily share engaging content from one page to the next on your website with ease.

Opt for infographics to share fast facts, and videos to share your schools core messaging. Drop-down lists, accordions and tabs, make it easy to provide lots of new content without cluttering pages.

6. ISOLATE AND MOVE CONTENT BASED ON PRIORITY

Many schools often want a subset of content migrated – and that can sometimes make a lot of sense. Sometimes this subset is made up of the top pages; sometimes it's simply content that for whatever reason, “has to be” moved over. We recommend isolating this set, rather than moving the site wholesale. In the spirit of “one in, one out,” we believe that focusing on the right stuff to move will save everybody time and effort, and will lead to a better project in the end.

When Evaluating Content, Consider the Following

1. HOW OLD IS THIS CONTENT?

Content that is more than one year old — with the exception of your school's mission statement and other evergreen content — is subject to re-evaluation.

2. HOW RELEVANT IS THIS CONTENT?

With users' attention spans getting shorter, the content that's on your site should be crafted to engage your different audiences. Your content should be timely and interesting. Ask yourself, or: "would I enjoy reading this?"

3. WHAT IS THE VOICE OF THIS CONTENT?

Did numerous faculty members write their own pages? While divvying up the work seems like a good idea to lighten your workload, over the years it can produce a variety of voices, tones, and messaging.

4. HOW IS YOUR CONTENT ORGANISED?

Paragraphs, drop-downs, lists, photos: they all serve a purpose on your website. Organise your content in a way that makes sense. For example, sharing a list of clubs active at your school alongside photos works better than text-heavy paragraphs.

5. IS THE CONTENT MOBILE-OPTIMISED?

Going responsive isn't just about having a website design that looks great on mobile. Your goal should be to make a maximum impact with a minimum amount of words. Short headlines (about 60-75 characters) and a minimal amount of text will win you mobile conversions.

Tips for Writing Better Website Content

1. WRITE CONTENT WITH A PURPOSE

Whether you need to start with a completely fresh slate, or plan on revamping what you have, it's essential to go through each parent page and sub page on your website and write content that tells your school's story. Make it brief, to the point, conversational and enjoyable.

2. CREATE OR USE IMAGES THAT REFLECT YOUR TEXT

Take the time each year to go into classrooms and photograph students working in groups and teachers inspiring conversations. The same is true for campus and athletic events. Visual content is not just photographs. Lots of schools use infographics and call-to-action buttons throughout their website. Update your infographics to ensure they have the most up-to-date facts, and re-do your call-to-action buttons to match the text and colours of your new site.

3. FORMAT YOUR CONTENT AND IMAGES TO MAKE IT FLOW

Pictures and images should work together — not compete with one another. Whether you want to use drop down menus to organise FAQs, an infographic to provide some fast facts, or create a history timeline, your images and text should flow effortlessly within your design.

Formatting your content is equally as essential as writing the content itself. It needs to be organised in a hierarchy and provide enough white space so it's easy to read — you cannot just copy and paste text, upload a photo and hit "Publish." When you write your content, plan on using headers and subheaders to organise your text, and use photos when they build upon what you've written. (However, keep in mind that visual content is processed and retained much better than text content!)



Visual Content

More than ever before, photos and videos play a key role in your website.

The visuals that fill your website need as much attention as the text content, but are often an afterthought for many schools.

VISUALS AND ACCESSIBILITY

Ensure that you follow best practices for web accessibility compliance as you add visuals to your website, including ALT text and video captions.

Ensuring that you use high quality images and videos to showcase your school is a key piece of your new website, and you'll want to take the right measure to ensure you have what you need.

Selecting the Perfect Photos for Your Website

QUALITY

The photos used in the design of your school's website should be high quality. Whether you choose to hire a professional or find a parent with a nice camera to help out, the image quality is imperative to making your website pop!



CONTENT

Avoid creating slideshows of photos that make your school look like a summer camp or four walls and a roof. Variety is key! Your school's experience — from academics to architecture — should have an equal presence on your homepage. And remember, seeing people will always evoke more emotion than seeing places.



COLOUR

Choose photos that maintain your school's brand and colour palette to create cohesive design. Using photos that appear as though they are part of one design rather than a separate element provides a more impressive experience and can make your homepage pop. Use photos of students dressed in school uniform and merchandise, or colours that compliment your design.

CHARACTER

Ninety-four percent of first impressions are based on the way your site looks, rather than the information it provides — so take that into consideration as you choose each photo that lives in your web design. What makes you unique should be the first thing users see when they land on your site.



LOCATION

Before you decide which photos you want on your website, determine how their quality impacts the location on your site. While photos taken on a smartphone don't belong on a homepage due to their lack of quality, they do still have a home on your site. Use Flickr and Instagram accounts to house your "candid" photos taken by students and teachers, and share the photos with a branded hashtag, and have them stream right to a social media mashup page. Additionally, it is important to note all the places on your website that may need photos. Each location's photography may require different sizes and/or styles.



Want to Use a Hero Video? Follow These Tips!

Hero videos are replacing static photography across websites everywhere. These compelling and engaging videos shouldn't just be whipped together. They require planning and high quality footage to make your school stand out.

PLAN AHEAD: Before you get started filming anything, make a list of events you think will best capture your school's culture and essence. You can't stage a football team's win or students taking part in a colour run event — so be sure to include the dates of the events you would like to attend, and prioritise them. If you don't have the ability to plan ahead, that's okay too! Focus on the events happening every day, and the people that make your community unique. Chances are, you have dozens of amazing mini-stories happening every day you can capture!

ENSURE THE CONTENT IS EXCITING

AND DIVERSE: Include different aspects of academics, sports, student life, and your community in your filming process. Film people and things that are unique to your school to capture the true essence of your community, while capturing the attention of your website visitors.

EXAMPLES OF PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS.

Make sure you're using the right type of video in the right place on your website. Check out these websites for video inspiration:

[1. Royal Hospital School](#)

[2. RGS Worcester](#)

[3. Cranmore](#)

KEEP CLIPS SHORT AND SWEET: To keep site visitors' attention, each clip in your video should not last more than 2-3 seconds, and your video in its entirety should not exceed one minute. The purpose of this video is to keep your audience wanting more, not to bore them.

MAKE THEM BROWSER FRIENDLY: In order for your video to display properly in every browser, you'll need to export your video in the following three formats: .mp4, .webM, and .ogg. Luckily there's Miro Video Converter — a free tool that allows you to convert and export your video file into each of these formats.

Visual Content and Accessibility Compliance

PHOTOS

All photos on your school website should have ALT text. ALT text is what a website visitor's screen reader will read aloud to a website visitor, and therefore needs to be descriptive of the image being shown, but don't worry about getting overly descriptive.

Let's go over some examples based on this picture of a cupcake.

Bad ALT Text: cupcakes778.png

Acceptable ALT Text: cupcake

Good ALT Text: cupcake with sprinkles

Best ALT Text: Vanilla cupcake with colourful sprinkles

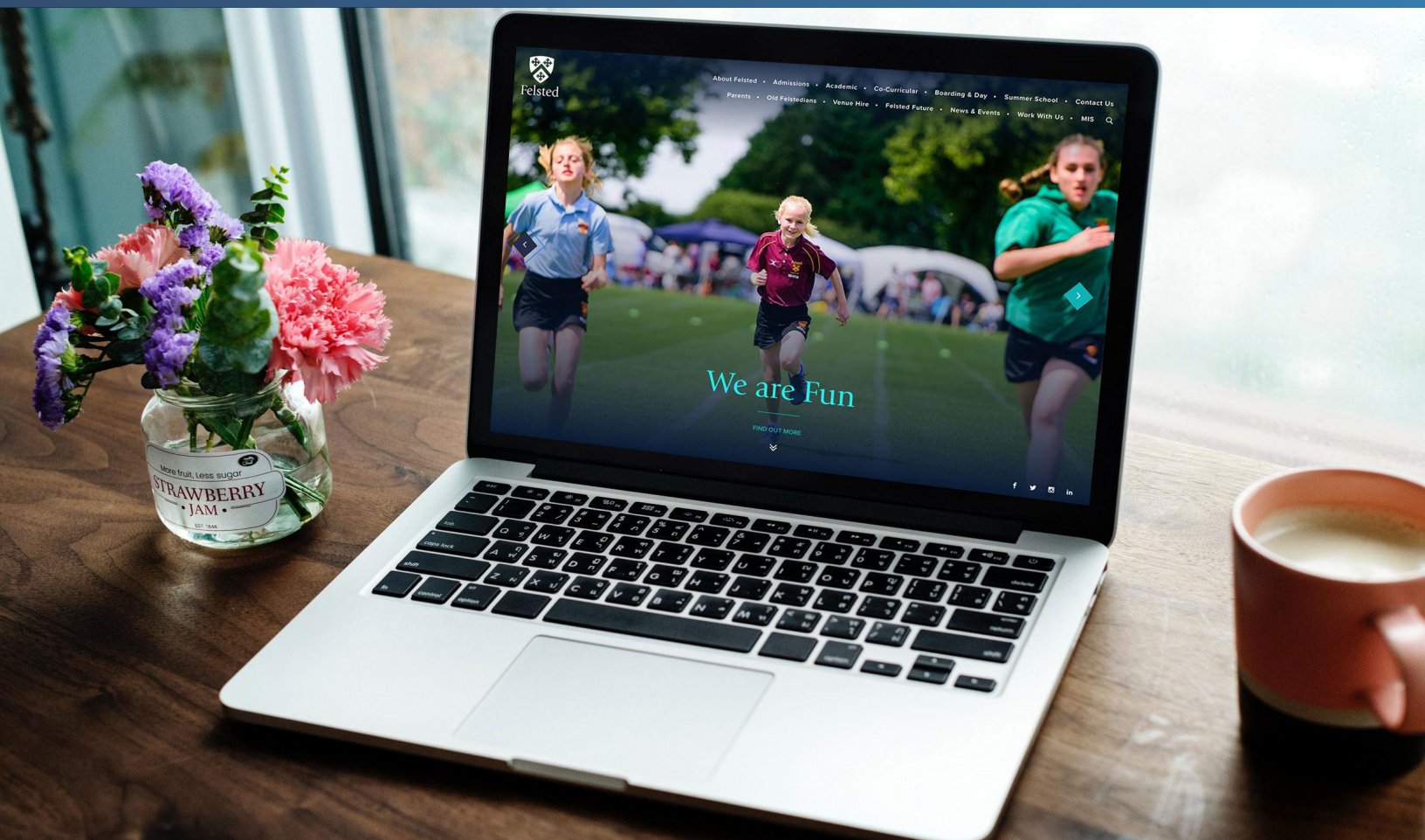


Overly descriptive, but still OK: Vanilla cupcake with white frosting and rainbow sprinkles on a white plate with a pink gradient background

In most cases, when you upload an image, it will either automatically have no ALT text, or inherit the text of the image file name. You will want to change this to something descriptive of the image, but you don't have to spend too much time being overly descriptive.

VIDEO CAPTIONS

Adding captions to your videos manually can be cumbersome, especially if you have a longer-length video. In Finalsité's Resources Manager, clients have the ability to upload and associate closed captioning (vtt) files when they upload videos. We recommend using 3Play Media to easily caption videos. Additionally, videos can easily be captioned when uploading to Facebook.



Content Implementation

Once you have the resources in place, it's time to begin the most important process: Strategy.

With your content in order, it's time to put your best face forward: implementing text and media content to create an engaging journey for website visitors.

In this section, you'll learn how to implement the content you've gathered and migrate it into a visually compelling, compliant masterpiece.

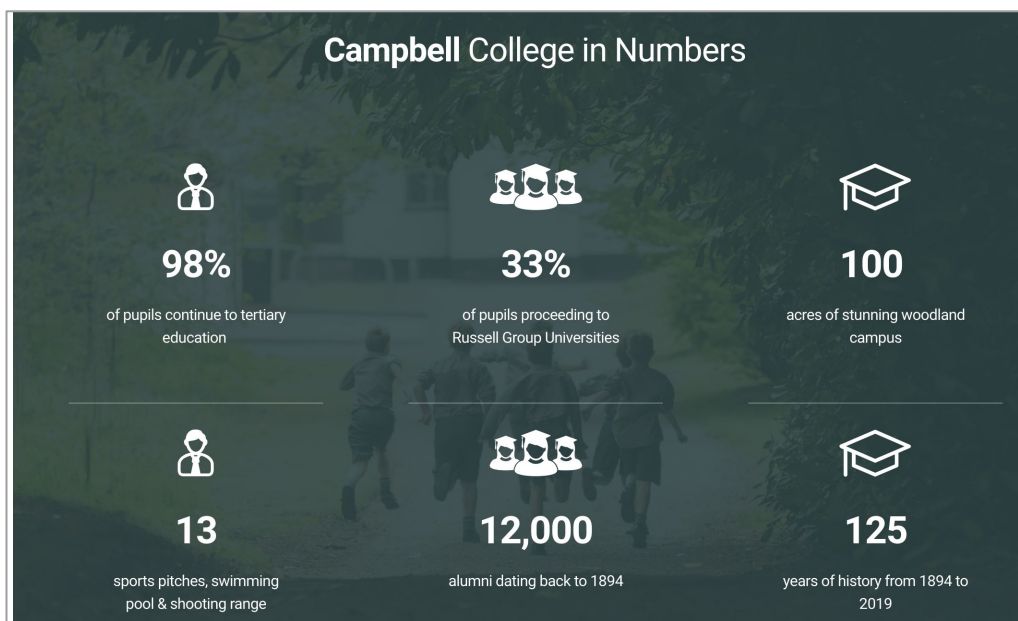
Homepage Content

When a website gets a redesign, or there's a plan to revamp the homepage content, it sometimes feels like every person from every department wants to weigh in on why their content should earn a spot on the homepage. This often leads to that same "kitchen sink" that lead to the redesign in the first place.

So what actually belongs on the homepage? Use the following guidelines to steer far away from the "everything but the kitchen sink" homepage.

IT SERVES A PURPOSE FOR MARKETING.

There's major disconnect between departments when it comes to defining the purpose of your homepage. Will it be used to market to prospective families, or share information with current families? Any content that doesn't sell your school's value, brand or mission, can go on a lower level page, or in a portal.



IT'S VISUALLY APPEALING.

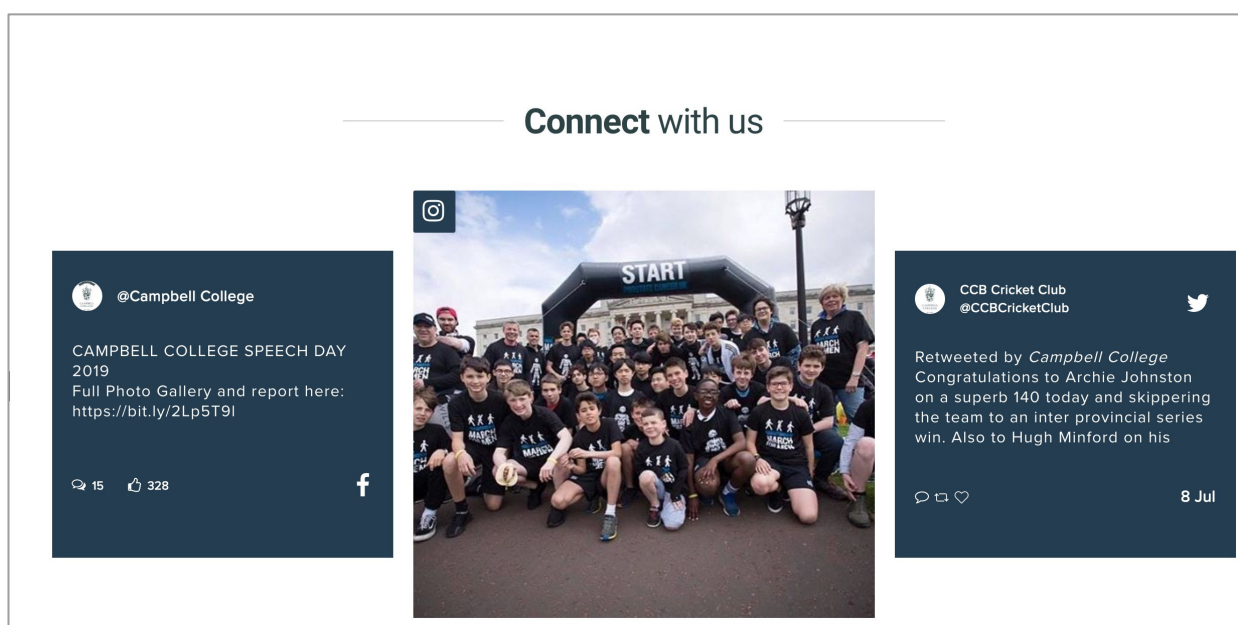
First impressions are 94% design-related. Content that enhances that design and first impression are essential to the success of your website. However, if the content that someone wishes to publish on the homepage doesn't add value (or completely clashes with the design and layout) it's okay to say "no."

IT CORRESPONDS TO WHAT WEBSITE VISITORS EXPECT TO SEE.

When a website visitor lands on your homepage, they expect to see certain content like photos of your school community, recent news events, links to enroll, so it's easy for them to navigate to their next step. However, when your homepage is cluttered with content they didn't expect to see there, like a lunch menu or summer reading list, it's easy to become confused and want to leave.

IT SHAKES THINGS UP.

Certain pieces of the content on your homepage should be crafted to be dynamic. Incorporating news sections, or featuring an "In the Spotlight" section will give you a place to always put new content. That way, during peak website traffic time, you can be sure that there's always something new displaying on your homepage. For example, Campbell College uses Finalsite Feeds to automatically aggregate hundreds of fresh new pieces of social media content right on their homepage.



Interior Page Content for School Groups and MAT sites

The design of individual school and interior pages are equally as important as your homepage design. Think of it this way: how often do you think people search for just your school name? More than often enough, they're searching for something specific about your school, such as tuition or sports.

Landing pages are the main pages, other than your homepage, that you'd expect website visitors to land on from search, social, or your main navigation. For most schools, typical landing pages are sports, calendars, news, and individual school pages.

For example, an individual school page is the main homepage or landing page for a school within your school. An interior page is any page that can be navigated to from each individual school's homepage or your school's homepage.

Maintaining consistency among each level of your site's hierarchy increases organisation, the user experience, and your school's brand.

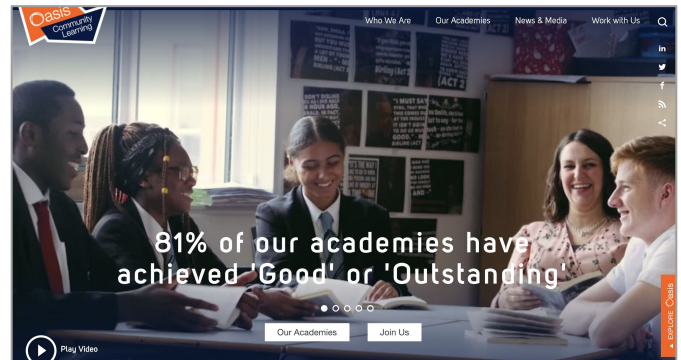
EACH INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL AND INTERIOR PAGE ON YOUR SITE SHOULD GET AN EQUAL AMOUNT OF ATTENTION TO ENSURE:

1. They're formatted in a textual hierarchy that makes information easy to find.
2. They have proper branding, and high quality photographs.
3. They ask users to take another step to continue exploring your site using a call-to-action button.

On the next page we'll take a look at how all three of these types of pages come together.

TIER 1: THE HOMEPAGE

The homepage sets the stage for design and navigation site-wide. With quick-access to school information and each individual school, this simplistic homepage make it easy to find the information site visitors want.



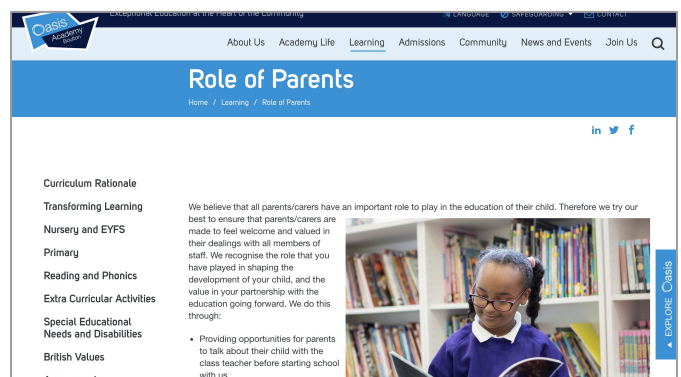
TIER 2: THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL PAGE

Whether you visit [Oasis Academy](#) page, or any other school page, you'll find the same layout and navigation accented by each school's colour and filled with school-only information.



TIER 3: THE INTERIOR PAGE

Too often these pages are completely neglected, but they house some of the most critical information site visitors come looking for. Oasis Academy keeps them organised and branded for each individual school.





Section Five

Search Engine Strategy



Overview of Search Engine Marketing for Schools

More families are making moves based on your school's reputation.

With more than 50% of today's families exercising school choice, and 60% of surveyed home buyers making moves based on school location, it's apparent that reputation and brand play a pivotal roll in your school's enrolment and success. In this section, we'll cover SEO basics that matter most to school.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Having a strong presence in search and ranking for key terms like "best schools in Kent," is key for increasing enrolment and growing brand awareness. Even though it's quicker or more expedient to ignore SEO and "do it later", the downside carries risk of losing out on important organic traffic.

Introduction to Search

Search engines play an important role in digital marketing, and Google is the major player in the search engine industry. Around 50-60% of our clients' traffic comes from search engines, with 80-90% of that search traffic coming from Google. Because search traffic makes up a large portion of overall website traffic, it is essential that your school understands how search works, and more importantly, how current and potential families are using search to learn more about your school.

UNBRANDED VS. BRANDED SEARCHES

Unbranded and branded searches are two fundamentally different ways that users can search on Google.

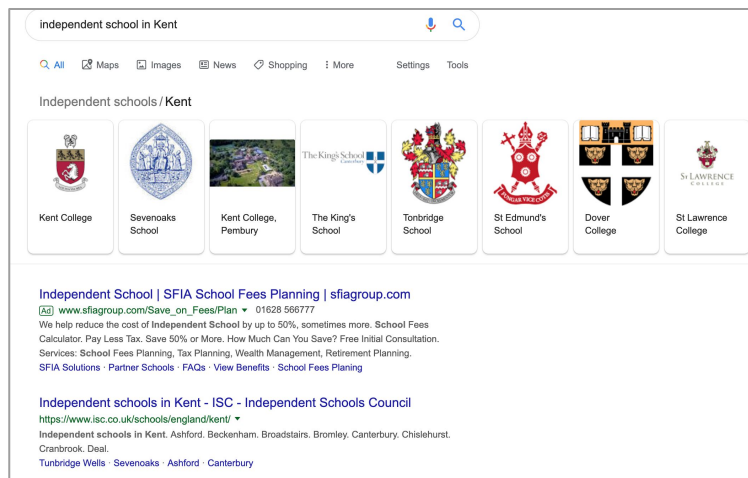
An unbranded search is when a user enters a search term like “schools in Kent.”

An un-branded search means

The user isn't looking for a specific entity and is instead searching for a category.

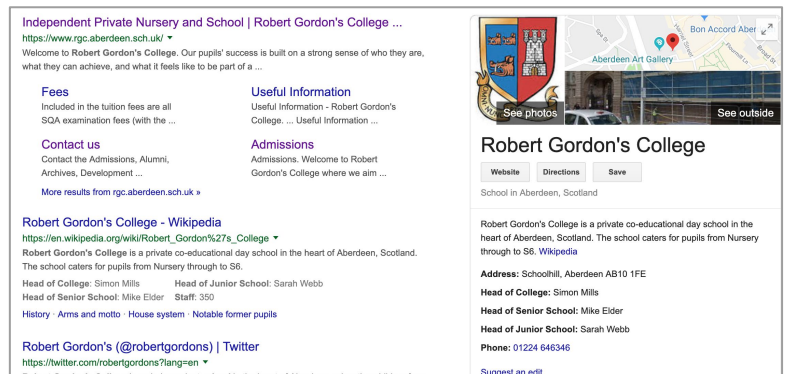
The difference in search results is important to notice.

With unbranded searches, you usually see a carousel and niche review websites in the search results.



A branded search, however, means the user is looking for a specific entity, such as “Tonbridge school.” If a user conducts a branded search, they will type the exact name of your school, as well as something even more specific such as “Tonbridge School fees.”

With branded searches, you often see the website of the school in the top spot with two columns of interior links. A knowledge graph (pictured on the right) with additional information about the school is often on the right-hand side of the page.



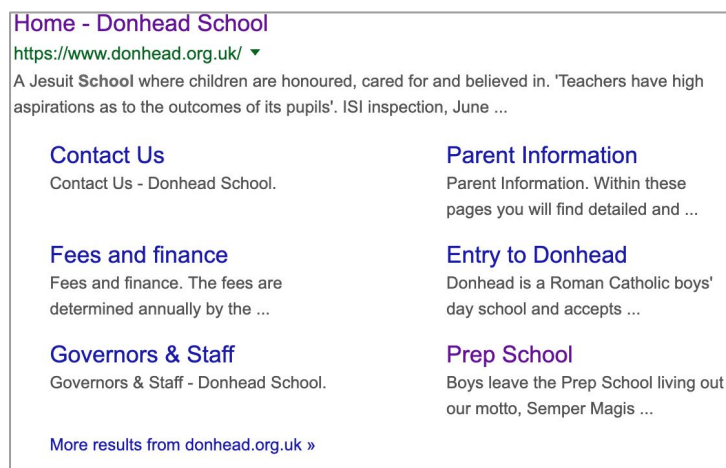
BRANDED SEARCH AND SCHOOL BRANDING

It goes without saying that “branded search” is rather critical to your school’s branding. Individuals conducting branded searches are often looking for specific information about your school, and expect a seamless experience when it comes to finding that information. So, when someone searches for say, “Royal Hospital School,” they want to be directed to the Royal Hospital Schools homepage. If they search for “Canford School calendar,” they most likely expect the first or second link in the Search Engine Result Page (**SERP**) to bring them directly to the calendar page.

Understanding search behaviour is very important for schools, especially when we’re dealing with individual school websites, as users expect to immediately find the information they searched for. When you are able to directly serve up content in an organised, well-designed fashion, it speaks highly of your school’s brand and communications.

UNDERSTANDING USERS IS IMPORTANT FOR SEARCH

It is important to understand why users are looking for your website. Take a moment and Google your school’s name. Does it serve up something that looks like what’s on the right?

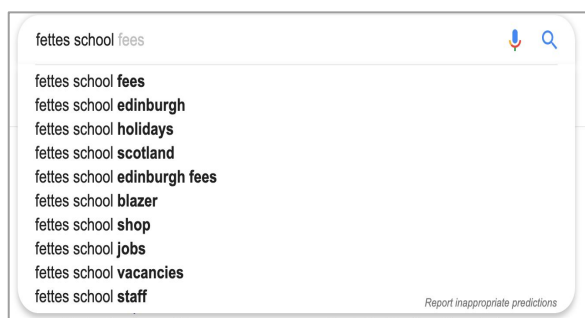


If you look at the two columns, you can see that Google provides additional links. Google makes link suggestions based on what others have searched for and information they feel searchers are looking for to improve the user experience for searchers.

These links can give you clues as to why or when people are looking for your content, and viewing the links listed on the search engines can help you determine where to add content that will appeal to users.

Another way to use search to understand your users is to view the auto-complete feature. As you type a search into the search bar, Google suggests terms that others have commonly searched for.

Seeing what people previously searched for helps you see the most important content on your site. These are the most important pages you should optimise for search to ensure they are easy to find.



WHAT SHOULD YOU PAY ATTENTION TO AND DO TO IMPROVE YOUR SCHOOL'S SEARCH PRESENCE?

Branded SEO has numerous components that schools should know about and pay attention to in order to improve the experience for searchers, as well as your school's overall online presence.

Local SEO: Your school or groups of schools have brick and mortar location/s, which makes implementing a local Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) strategy essential for your school.

Local search affects both branded and unbranded searches.

For **unbranded searches**, in the past, you may have seen map results that listed three locations. In a lot of cases today, carousels have replaced maps.

When users click on the school cards located in the carousel, they are taken to a branded search for that school to find additional links and information. For branded searches, local SEO is important because school names like “Royal Hospital School” are not unique, but are unique to your area. When your site is appropriately optimised, Google will serve up the local Royal Hospital School, rather than the one that is 3,000 miles away.

If you are looking to improve your performance in local search you should start with claiming your Google My Business (GMB) listings for every campus or school in your area. After you have claimed and verified your listing, you can clean up your listing and add additional information so that you have your best information presented when knowledge graphs appear.

Another option for local optimisation is to use a paid service like Moz Local to help manage your citation listings on various sites. If your address has changed and you have many listings, it may be worthwhile to invest in this service to help manage and update your listings.

Directories & Lists: Often on page one of Google Search or a SERP, you can find directories (such as The Good Schools Guide) and lists where you can view a variety of schools in the area you searched. Understanding where you are listed and which directories and lists show up when users search will help you understand how to put your best foot forward in the directories. You will want to look through directory sites to ensure your name, address and phone numbers are consistent.

Language: Understanding the language individuals use when searching helps you as you add content and optimise your website. Google AdWords has a free tool called the Keyword Planner that you can use to help determine the search volume for keywords relating to your school. Knowing which words users search for frequently will help you create new content for your site.

Branded Presentation: To have the best results page when users search for your school, there are a few key elements that you need to optimise. A typical result for your school may look like the following. Within the listing below, we can see a title, meta description and six additional links.

Titles can be up to 55 characters long and should incorporate the name of your school. The meta descriptions can be up to 4 lines long or about 300 characters. Within these meta descriptions, You can incorporate additional information about your school like your size or location. These descriptions should be general and not seasonal since you won't want to update them every season.

Felsted School: Private Independent School in Essex, Near London

<https://www.felsted.org/> ▼

Our private school in stunning North Essex offers a holistic education that develops the character of every child. Learn the **Felsted** difference today.

Fees

Felsted aims to keep its fees as low as possible and sits at a ...

Contact Us

If you need to contact a member of our staff, check the full list. From ...

Work With Us

If you're looking to work in a productive, rewarding ...

[More results from felsted.org »](#)

About Felsted

Understand what Felsted boarding school stands for with our quick ...

Prep

Ask any child in the Prep School what my favourite word is and ...

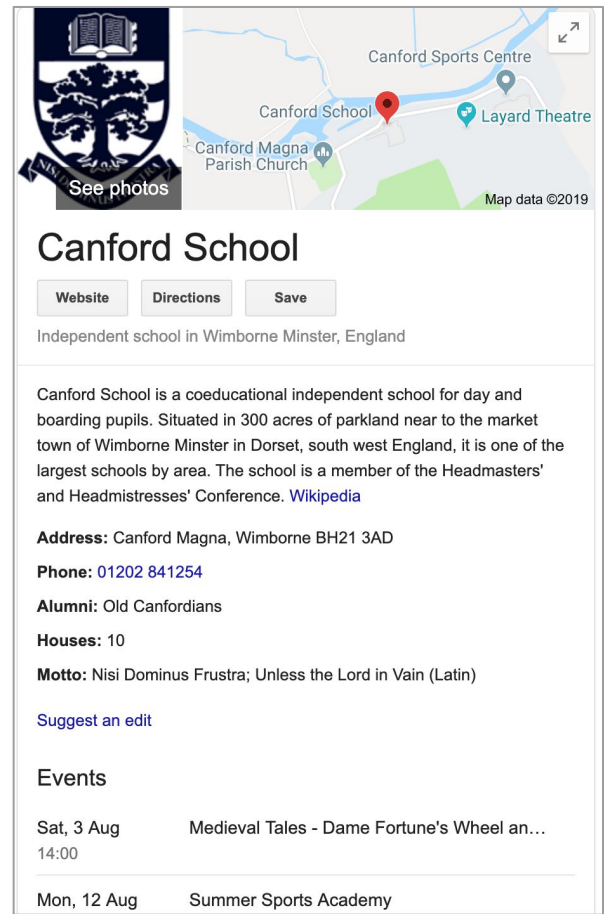
Admissions

Learn more about our straight forward admissions process for ...

Although Google decides what to show for the title and meta description, having a good title or meta description implemented on your site can help influence what appears. The only way you can remove a page from Google is to delete a page from your site or, if you use Finalsite Composer, you can use the "hide from external search" option to keep the page on your site, but remove it from search engine results.

Another way you can create a better branded presence is by ensuring you have a great knowledge graph. A lot of the information that appears in your knowledge graph is based on the information you provide in your Google My Business. Ensuring your address, phone number and location are accurate in your GMB account is an ideal place to start.

Within the **knowledge graph**, you will notice three different sources of reviews. These reviews from directories and social media are important and highly influence users. Many users say they trust online reviews as much as they would trust a friend!



Canford School

Independent school in Wimborne Minster, England

Canford School is a coeducational independent school for day and boarding pupils. Situated in 300 acres of parkland near to the market town of Wimborne Minster in Dorset, south west England, it is one of the largest schools by area. The school is a member of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference. [Wikipedia](#)

Address: Canford Magna, Wimborne BH21 3AD
Phone: 01202 841254
Alumni: Old Canfordians
Houses: 10
Motto: Nisi Dominus Frustra; Unless the Lord in Vain (Latin)

[Suggest an edit](#)

Events

Sat, 3 Aug	Medieval Tales - Dame Fortune's Wheel an... 14:00
Mon, 12 Aug	Summer Sports Academy

One way you can get more reviews is to reach out to individuals you have a great relationship with and ask them to leave a review. Another way is to send out surveys using a net promoter score. In your survey you will ask “on a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to recommend this school to a friend.” Any individual who responds with a 9 or 10 will probably leave a great review and is someone you should ask to leave a review. With more reviews, your rating won't be impacted as much from one negative review.

SEO vs. PPC: What's the Difference?

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

Because the search engines don't publish a playbook for ranking well in organic search, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the art and science of making it clear to the search engines that you are a good resource for people doing the searches they care about.

Search engines are constantly updating their algorithms to reward high-quality sites that will satisfy the searcher's intent and to punish those sites that are trying to "game" the system. Therefore, it's important to focus on SEO strategies that are consistent with great user experience and authentic representation of what it is that you do.

- ✓ Give every page a Title Tag that is roughly 55 characters. These help display preview text in search.
- ✓ Use meta-descriptions site-wide that are descriptive of your school, compelling, and contain 155 characters or fewer.

PAY-PER-CLICK ADVERTISING

Online advertising (AKA Pay-Per-Click, or PPC) takes many forms, but we believe that the foundation of a good PPC campaign for schools is laid in the text advertising space on search engine results pages. These ads give you a high level of control over who sees your ads, what they see in the ad and on your site after they click, and what you spend to make all of this happen.



Section 6

Launching Your Website

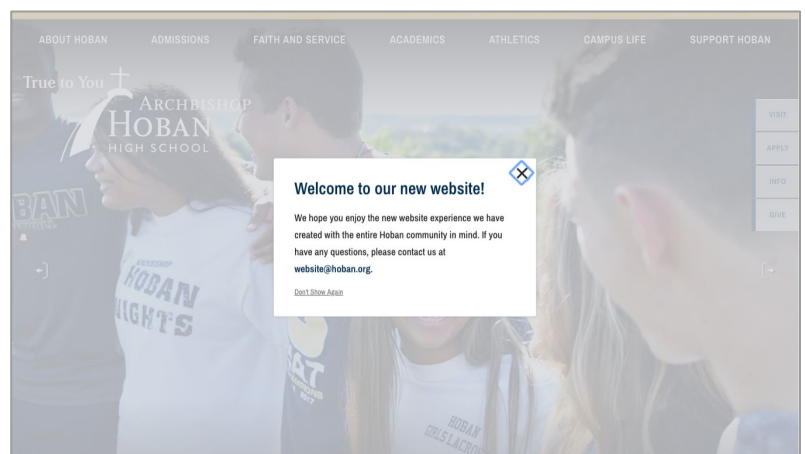
Tips for a Stress-Free Launch

HAVE A SOFT LAUNCH

Just after your website launches, we recommend keeping it quiet until you are 100% confident it is ready. While we'd like to believe that the "Publish" button works magic, chances are there will be kinks. We recommend launching over the spring or during winter break, but never "peak" times for website traffic, like the beginning of the school year. Launching during this "off-season" also allows you to make the necessary updates while you still have time.

MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT

Before you get back to the boring calendar updates, it's time to sit back in (hopefully!) receive praise from your community. Send an email to your community; post on social with a related hashtag that encourages families to share their thoughts; or shout it from the top of roof on the first day of school — whatever works for you!



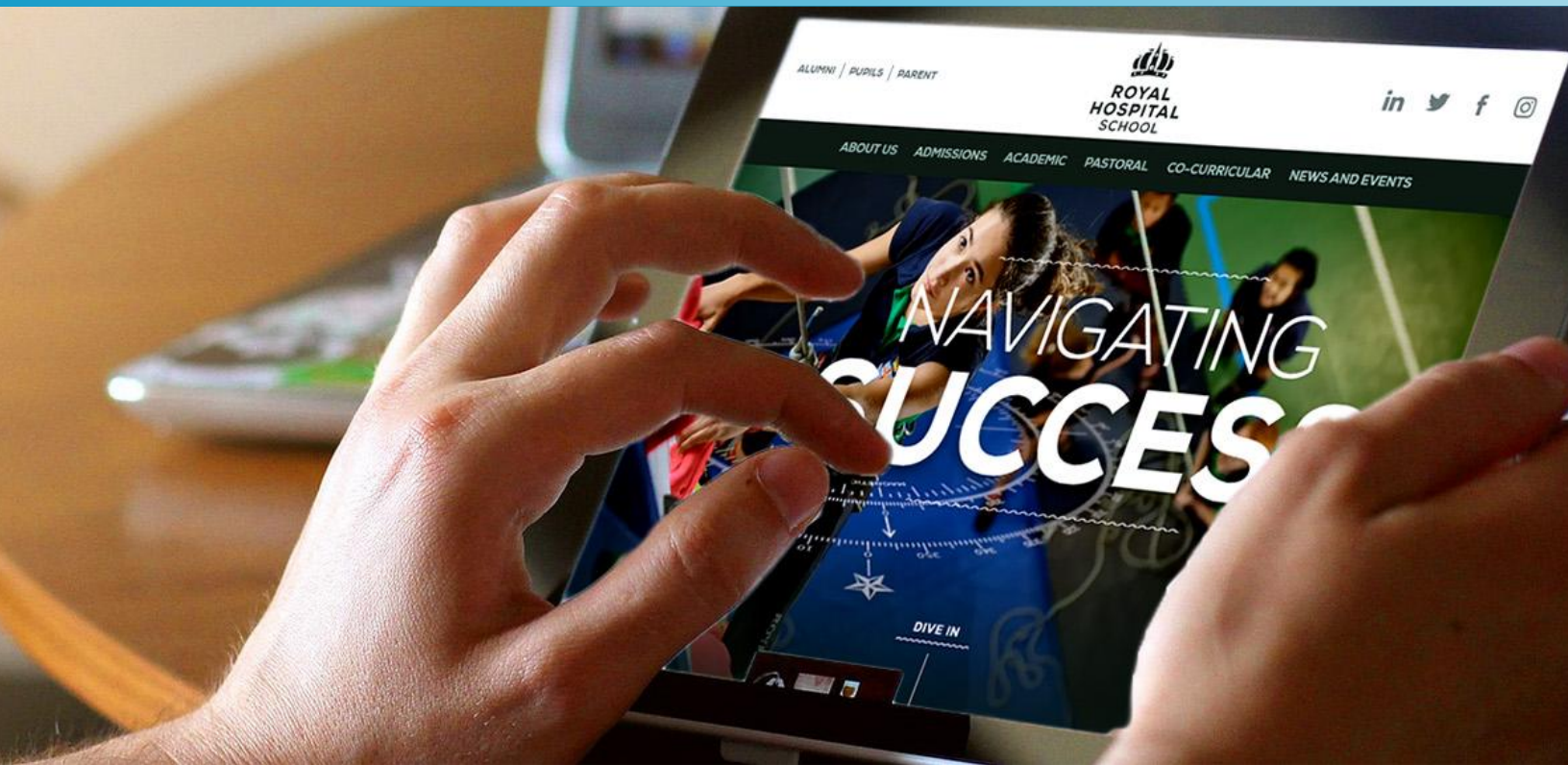
TRAIN YOUR ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, PARENTS AND STUDENTS

Nothing is worse than handing your team a new tool and not detailing how to use it and how they can benefit from it. Once you launch, provide community members with details on how to access the information they need. For admins, you'll need to provide training on how to edit website pages, meet branding requirements and/or submit them for approval.



Section Seven

Website Upkeep



Website Upkeep

A website isn't a set-it-and-forget-it project.

Website maintenance is a never-ending job. To keep your website up to the standards of your community, prospective families and search and design trends, it requires constant fine-tuning.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Once the website launches, your work doesn't end. Now it is time for constant improvement, upkeep, and ensuring content remains fresh.

In this section we cover case studies and answer your content management FAQs in regards to post frequency, accessible content, and more.

Three Tips For Maintaining Your Website

TIP 1: USE DATA TO DRIVE PROJECT GOALS

Make sure you use website analytics and incorporate website-related questions in parent and staff surveys to ensure they are meeting their needs. Whether using Google Analytics or another tool, know that if you are going to adjust content, design, navigation, etc., it is important your decisions are based on the data available to you.

TIP 2: ANTICIPATE YOUR NEEDS

You're busy, so be proactive in your web team meetings. If you know there are upcoming events and content needed, it will be less time consuming and disruptive when you need to develop a new web section or a new focus for your homepage news.

TIP 3: STUDY THE MARKET

Your team may find it useful to take inspiration from what other schools (and other types of companies) are doing with their websites. Discussing the look, feel, unique tools, content, and more can often lead to new ideas for your own site.

Another great way to study the market is to keep up with industry best practices and trends. We provide hundreds of resources for schools on [The Finalsite Blog](#), in our online resource library, and at live online and in-person events throughout the year.

Measuring Website Performance

Launching a website without analytics is like heading on a cross country trip without a roadmap. Take the time to set up a Google Analytics account (we do that for all our clients at Finalsight!) and keep an eye on website performance.

KEY METRICS TO KEEP AN EYE ON INCLUDE:

Bounce Rate: This metric is the percentage of visitors who come to your website and then navigate away after only visiting one page.

Top Exit Pages: Unlike a “bounce”, when a user visits your site and barely views one page, an “exit” is when a user visits multiple pages and then leaves your site.

Top Entrance Points: These are the most popular ways people are entering through your site. For school, other than the homepage, top entrance points include calendars, news and fees.

Traffic Sources: Monitoring how people are getting to your site can also help you determine which of your campaigns are bringing in the most traffic.

THERE ARE THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRAFFIC SOURCES:

Direct Visitors: Users that visit your site by directly typing your url in their browser address bar.

Search Visitors: Users that visit your site based on a search query.

Referral Visitors: Users that visit your site because it was mentioned on another blog or site.

Long-Term Content Management

You change the oil in your car, reluctantly workout at the gym after your workday, and if you miss your pet's annual check up at the vet you feel completely guilty until they can fit you in next week.

While these things seem completely unrelated they have one major thing in common: they are all investments, and are essential to your health and happiness that they stay in tip-top shape for as long as possible.

The same is true for your website. It needs maintenance, attention and updating — constantly.

Your school's website is the cornerstone of your brand, marketing and communications, and a one-time investment of time isn't going to cut it. It's the home for your news, calendars, games, forms, lunch menus — the list goes on and on.

Since you're short on time already, we compiled some of our most frequently asked questions about content management to help you prioritise what needs updating, and when.

Managing Your Website: FAQs — Answered!

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I SWITCH UP MY VISUAL CONTENT?

Photos: Some schools like to switch up photos whenever they get new ones from an event, while others have it scheduled into a maintenance plan. You should update homepage slideshows and header images at least annually. Photos that are not integral to your design — like photo albums from plays, alumni events, and sports events — can stay on your site longer. As long as you're continuing to add photos, older ones can stay put.

Videos: Videos are evergreen content, especially compared to the rest of the content on your website. And typically, they're also a much bigger investment. Plan on switching up your main marketing video every 2-3 years.

Text Content: You should review your text content at the same time you review your photos. A slight cleanup should be done annually. However, we recommend a complete text overhaul with any website redesign.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I POST NEWS AND EVENTS?

You should update your news events frequently and consistently. Be timely. No one wants to read about something months after it's happened. During the summer months when there isn't as much going on, plan to post student and staff spotlights, as well as important community information the community needs to know.

HOW "EVERGREEN" ARE MY STUDENT TESTIMONIALS?

Student testimonials should be switched up yearly. No excuses. Think about it this way: if a family is considering your school for a couple years (or admissions seasons) seeing the same four student stories (that they may not even relate to) doesn't make as much of an impact.

Your Website and GDPR

About GDPR Guidelines

Under the GDPR, the definition of personal data is quite broad and will cover anything that points to their professional or personal life, including names, photos, emails IDs, bank details, social networking posts, medical information, or computer IP address.

Given the complexity of the rules set out by the GDPR it is not surprising that many schools are overwhelmed with understanding their obligations. While Finalsité cannot provide you legal advice specific to your organisation's obligations, we can assist you with further information on how to help you manage your personal data more effectively - internally and externally:

1. Know what you have, and why you have it
2. Manage data in a structured way
3. Know who is responsible for it
4. Encrypt what you wouldn't want to be disclosed
5. Design a security aware culture
6. Be prepared – expect the best but prepare for the worst

What is Finalsite Doing to Comply with GDPR?

The GDPR aims to bring coordination across the EU regarding data privacy. There are many aspects to be considered to ensure full compliance for data controllers and processors irrespective of their location. The Regulation will affect many companies differently, particularly those such as Finalsite who are required to hold and process large volumes of personal data.

Our role as a data processor of your personal data is one that we take seriously. In response to this, Finalsite has expanded its security and legal teams with the intent of designing and undertaking on-going assessments of all aspects of our business to ensure that we are able to account for all the personal data in which we are instructed to process.



As a data controller you can be confident that as a result of these constant reviews, Finalsite will continuously be updating all of our existing procedures which are in place to ensure our compliance with the GDPR.

However, continuing to provide our data controllers with robust business processes for the protection of personal data is only half of the solution we provide. In addition, Finalsite has made a considerable investment in our technologies and infrastructure to ensure that we operate our platform in a secure, high-integrity operating environment to further strengthen your personal data protection.

About Finalsite

Finalsite is the leading provider for over 5,000 international and independent schools and colleges in more than 80 countries with a team of professionals who care deeply about their work and who value a lasting partnership.

The company's marketing and communications platform and consulting services transform how schools engage with community members, recruit students and staff, and fundraise; while managing the complex requirements around data privacy, accessibility, hosting and security.

Schools partner with Finalsite for its award-winning website design, robust content management system, innovative inbound marketing tools, data integration, training, support and marketing consulting. Year after year, Finalsite achieves 95% client retention through its commitment to support, product innovation, and its focus on driving industry trends, marketing strategy and best practices.

CONTRIBUTORS :

MIA MAJOR

As Finalsite's Content Marketing Manager, Mia shares innovative and helpful content that helps schools create captivating online experiences that increase brand awareness, student and faculty retention, and school-to-home communications. With more than five years experience in the industry, Mia has written more than 200 articles, eBooks, and reports about best practices for schools on a variety of topics from social media to web design.



RONIQUA GERALD

Roniqua started working at Finalsite in 2019 as a Marketing Executive and previously worked in TV broadcast operation and media for seven years. She has recently completed her Masters in PR & Communications and has since developed relationship management skills and strategic partnership development. Roniqua takes great pride in understanding each clients' goals to provide the best results.

