



ST GEORGE'S
BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL ROME

THE LEARNING REVIEW

2026



Contents

- | | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|--|
| 04 | Introduction - <i>Mary-Clare Startin</i> | 44 | Use of Graphic Organisers in IB Business Management - <i>Michelle Gardner and Martin Herben</i> |
| 05 | Foreword - <i>Marco Gemelli</i> | 48 | The Feedback Frontier: How Year 11 Navigated the “8-Mark” Wilderness - <i>Veryan Blake</i> |
| 06 | It’s Lonely at the Top - <i>John Knight</i> | 51 | From Student Voice to School Change: Creating Belonging Through DEIBJ - <i>Alessia Boromei</i> |
| 08 | From Blame to Empathy: Munro, Reason, & Bronfenbrenner for School Leaders - <i>Mary-Clare Startin</i> | 53 | Implementing a Consistent Spelling Framework in Key Stage 2 - <i>Kirsty Michel</i> |
| 13 | Authentic Leadership: Clarity, Courage, and Heart - <i>Emma Navin</i> | 58 | Vocabulary Routines for Inclusion in Key Stage 3 - <i>Niki Sweetnam</i> |
| 15 | The Importance of “Fierce Conversations” - <i>Fran Vulpiani</i> | 61 | Enhancing Student Organisation and Belonging in Year 7 - <i>Richard Lancaster</i> |
| 17 | Embedding Action Research at St George’s - <i>Marco Gemelli</i> | 65 | Consistency Beats Complexity: Why Technology Only Works When Students Know What to Expect - <i>Fernando Gonzalez Navarro</i> |
| 20 | The Power of Community - <i>Rachel Johnson</i> | 68 | More Than “Congratulations” - <i>Lauren Bell-Brown</i> |
| 23 | Dual Coding: Graphic Organisers and Embodied Cognition - <i>James Blackburn</i> | 70 | When In Rome - <i>Jack Nicholls</i> |
| 25 | The Science of Remembering: How Collaborative Quizzing Boosts Learning - <i>Elvira Lee</i> | 71 | A Journey of Connection, Creativity and Joy at St George’s - <i>Morgan Godden</i> |
| 29 | The Machine and The Mentor - <i>Richard Porteous</i> | 73 | Autism: The Importance of Being Experts in The Individual - <i>James Blackburn</i> |
| 31 | The Effect of Project-based Learning Compared with Teacher-directed Learning on Attainment in Science Classes in Secondary Schools - <i>Anna Lucia Di Renzo</i> | 75 | Reframing Misogyny: Engaging Boys and Men as Part of the Solution - <i>Vicky Walsh</i> |
| 34 | Identifying and Developing Lines of Inquiry in IB Visual Arts Practice - <i>Greg Morgan</i> | 77 | From Idea to Impact: wellbeing in LSJS - <i>Nicola Willson</i> |
| 39 | Positive Reinforcement in Boys - <i>Raniero Bei</i> | 81 | Define the Shift: Rote vs Enquiry-based Learning - <i>Emma Navin</i> |
| 42 | What Makes an Excellent Junior School Library - <i>Andy Johnson</i> | | |

Introduction

Mary-Clare Startin | Vice Principal & Head of Senior School



“The breadth and ambition of this year’s contributions are impressive in their scope.”

Welcome to this year’s edition of *The Learning Review*. This publication has come to represent something genuinely distinctive about our teaching and learning community and reflects that teachers at St George’s do not only deliver an education but they seek to interrogate, reflect upon, and improve it. It is testament to our commitment, not only to serve the students at St George’s, but to contribute to the wider body of educational research that informs the teaching community.

It is fitting, in particular, to dedicate this June 2026 edition of *The Learning Review* to Mr Marco Gemelli as it will be the final one he will oversee. This publication has been something of a ‘labour of love’ for him and I hope it will continue after he leaves to take up his position as *Rettore* at UWC Adriatic, as a fitting legacy to his commitment to elevating the academic and pedagogical foundations of our profession in service of providing the best possible educational experience for our students.

The breadth and ambition of this year’s contributions are impressive in their scope. This volume captures thinking and learning from our Junior and Senior school classrooms, from trainee teachers taking their first steps in the profession to experienced Heads of

Department, Heads of Phase and Senior Leaders. You will see that colleagues across the full breadth of our school have engaged with and undertaken academic research and applied it to the questions that matter most in our context. The topics explored in these pages, from harnessing the power of artificial intelligence to deepening our use of data, to how ecological systems theory can create a more empathetic response when things go wrong, to the nuanced and vital role of praise in motivating students, reflect a teaching community that is intellectually curious and committed to evidence-informed practice.

It is equally encouraging to note how many of these contributions grew from the professional development opportunities we have cultivated in school: working parties, Action Research projects, Professional Learning Communities and CPML: it is gratifying to see that these structures have created the conditions and contexts for the thinking you will find in this publication.

I hope these articles inform, challenge, and motivate and that they serve as an inspiration to see research not as an add-on to our professional lives, but the foundation of them.



Foreword

Marco Gemelli | Senior Deputy Head of Senior School and Director of Studies



“If we want to model the Learner Profile attributes we aim to develop in our students, we need to take risks and keep developing ourselves.”

It is with some trepidation that I start writing the Foreword for this issue of *The Learning Review* as I cannot help thinking that it will be my last one. Somewhat unexpectedly, the first sentence of a book I read many years ago comes to mind:

‘It is the saddest night, for I am leaving and not coming back.’

But abandoning the old is a necessary prerequisite for discovering the new. If we want to model the Learner Profile attributes we aim to develop in our students, we need to take risks and keep developing ourselves, both personally and professionally. And this is exactly what I intend to do as I leave the well-known shores of Rome for the bora-swept coast of Duino.

This issue of *The Learning Review* offers plenty of examples of teachers who keep developing themselves, and it is particularly pleasing to see that this happens at every stage of teachers’ careers, from trainee teachers to experienced teachers, to middle and senior leaders, in Junior and Senior schools. As well as the quality of the writing, which is commendable, it is worth noting the sheer number of articles written specifically for this publication, or published elsewhere and reproduced here. The fact that *The Learning Review* now includes more than 25 articles, the highest number ever, and twice the number we had just five years ago, shows that more and more teachers consider professional development and professional learning something which is worth investing time and energy on - I could not be happier about this.

This issue is divided into five main sections. In the first one, on *Leadership*, senior leaders reflect on their own experiences leading schools; the second one, on *Action Research*, contains articles written by colleagues who took part in the programme we run with support from Joanna Rankin (University of Oxford), Nick Startin and Bogdan Popescu (John Cabot University). The third section includes reports written by teachers who took part in this year’s COBIS Programme for Middle Leaders (*CPML*), the course led by Fran Vulpiani and Matt Woodhead; the fourth section comprises three reflection pieces written by our Teaching Together in Europe (*TTE*) trainee teachers. The last section is made of articles written by colleagues who have independently engaged with research and reflection.

I would like to thank Enji Kana for helping me keep to deadlines and for her editorial support; and of course all colleagues who have taken the time to engage with evidence-informed practice, try something new, and write about it.

I have thoroughly enjoyed editing *The Learning Review* for the past few years and I sincerely hope that it will continue to thrive in future.

Thank you for reading.

It's Lonely at the Top:

Reflections on Three Years as Principal

John Knight | Principal (2023 - 2026)



“I realise that leadership is not about having all the answers. It is about the quiet resilience found in our teams, the courage to embrace new ideas, and the grace to move past conflict.”

When Marco asked me to contribute a piece on leadership for this year's *Learning Review*, my initial ideas came unstuck when I realised that all my go-to leadership texts are currently somewhere on an Arctic shipping route to Malaysia (it's a long story), leaving me without my usual academic references. However, this hiccup forced a more personal reflection. Instead of quoting the latest management gurus, I looked back at the mentors and colleagues who shaped my journey.

Leadership is often described in grand, strategic terms, but in the day-to-day life of an international school, it is defined by the relationships we navigate. Here are four lessons drawn from my three years as Principal at St. George's and my previous years of leadership in international education.

1. Navigating the “Loss of One's Peers”

During my time at the British School of Brussels (BSB), I interviewed Neil Ringrose, then Head of Primary, for an essay as part of my Master's degree. He shared a quote by Thomas Sergiovanni that has stayed with me ever since: “*The first and most difficult implication of leadership is the loss of one's peers*”.

This transition is one of the most profound challenges a leader faces. I remember moving to BSB in 2006, stepping back from a high-pressure Deputy Headship in a UK state school to become a Maths teacher. It was a period of immense professional pleasure; I could focus purely on the craft of teaching and, crucially, enjoy a beer

with colleagues after work without guarding my words.

When I was promoted internally, that dynamic shifted. There is an undeniable change in gravity when you begin managing those who were once your desk-mates. However, I've found that while you may lose the “casual” peer group, you gain a different, deeper level of camaraderie within your Leadership Team. You go through the “trenches” together with tough parental meetings, staff grievances, and strategic crises. These shared trials create a unique bond of trust and confidentiality.

Advice: Value your inner circle. Trust them, confide in them, and allow them to do the same. This support network is the antidote to the “loneliness at the top.”

2. The Power of “Yes”

When I was appointed Head of Secondary at BSB, the Principal, Melanie Warnes, offered me a deceptively simple piece of advice: “*Try to say yes*”.

In leadership, saying “no” is often the path of least resistance. It maintains the status quo, avoids the messiness of change, and keeps your to-do list manageable. However, Melanie wasn't suggesting I become a people-pleaser or ignore policy. She was talking about fostering a culture of agency.

When a staff member approaches you with a new initiative or a creative tweak to a curriculum, a “yes” (even a “yes, if...”) signals that you value their professional autonomy. It requires more work as you have to consider wider impacts

and consult stakeholders, but it is the way a school moves forward. A leadership style built on “yes” transforms a school from a static institution into a place of learning.

3. Mastering the “Short Memory”

Nearly twenty years ago, I worked under Dr. Brenda Despontin. In her very first staff meeting, she made a statement that baffled me at the time: *“I don’t hold a grudge”*.

As a Principal, I finally understand why that was her opening gambit. Schools are emotional environments. We have difficult conversations where passions run high and feelings get hurt. We aren’t robots, and it’s healthy to show humanity in those moments. However, the true skill, one rarely taught in leadership workshops, is the ability to walk out of a heated meeting, make a decision, and move on without resentment.

My time in Italy has been a masterclass in this. Here, it is culturally normal to express intense emotions and then sit down for coffee ten minutes later. As long as the disagreement remains respectful, a leader must demonstrate that a “no” or a debate today does not color the relationship tomorrow.

4. Assuming Positive Intentions

My final reflection comes from Sue Woodroffe, a former Principal of BSB, who frequently reminded her team to “assume positive intentions”.

When you are under pressure, it is incredibly easy to view staff resistance as a personal attack or an attempt at sabotage. Sue’s wisdom is a shield against that cynicism. If a teacher is challenging a strategic decision, they are usually doing so because they care about their students or their workload, not because they want you to fail.

If you can identify the “why” behind the resistance, you often find a valid concern that you might have missed. By assuming positive intent, you turn a potential conflict into a consultative process that ultimately results in a better plan.

Conclusion: The Strength of the Collective

As I look back on my three years at St. George’s, I realise that leadership is not about having all the answers, especially when your books are halfway across the globe. It is about the quiet resilience found in our teams, the courage to embrace new ideas, and the grace to move past conflict.

International schools are transient by nature, but the lessons we learn from one another are permanent. By trusting our colleagues, staying open to “yes,” and always looking for the positive heart behind a difficult conversation, we don’t just survive the “loneliness at the top”, we build a community where everyone, leaders and teachers alike, can thrive.

From Blame to Empathy:

Munro, Reason, and Bronfenbrenner for School Leaders

Mary-Clare Startin | Vice Principal & Head of Senior School



“Leaders take responsibility for creating conditions in which reasonable actions by competent people are likely to yield reliable outcomes.”

At 11:05am a parent emails the Head of Year to say they'll collect their Y9 child at 12:45pm for a last-minute medical appointment; the Head of Year has been teaching and does not see the email until 11:55am. They pass the information to the attendance secretary, who checks SIMS to see who is teaching the student to email the message. On SIMS, the student is timetabled in C3 with Dr Y.

However, Dr Y has been called away for an emergency and asked Mr X in C2 to watch their class. Mr X decided to collapse the class into their own group in C1. At 12:20pm, having not received a response from Dr Y, the secretary goes to C2, but the class is not there. Meanwhile, the parent arrives at the security gate at 12:45pm, expects their child to be there, and becomes increasingly irate when they are not located quickly and it appears no one knows where their child is.

So, who is at fault: the parent for not using My School Portal? The teacher who left without alerting everyone who needed to know? The colleague who moved rooms without logging it, or the secretary for not warning the parent the message had not reached the student?

In reality, everyone in this process made a reasonable decision given their circumstance and perspective: the parent knowing this was an extraordinary request bypassed the parent portal and used an email address they knew would go directly to a member of staff; the teacher who had to leave suddenly made a pragmatic, if unrecorded,

decision, as did the teacher who rather than cover two rooms brought the students together, and the attendance secretary relied on SIMS and sent the email, and went to the room, in accordance with the information there. The question should therefore not be, “Who made the wrong decision and who is to blame?” but “Why did our systems and processes not allow for those reasonable decisions?”

As part of my MA in Advanced Child Protection and Social Policy I have been introduced to the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, Dr. Eileen Munro and James Reason on systems theory. Whilst I have been engaging with these theories through a Child Protection lens, studying them has alerted me to a paradigm shift that every leader needs to consider when seeking to mitigate and make improvements after adverse outcomes.

For decades, inquiries into serious safeguarding cases were linear: following the narrative until a mistake was identified, a person found and blame assigned. The Systems Approach recasts this: the mistake is the starting point, not the conclusion; it assumes staff are well-intentioned and capable and it asks “What context made these capable, well-intentioned people think this decision was the right one to make at the time?”

The systems approach does not avoid difficult questions: it demands deeper reflection. However, it does so from a place of empathy for the practitioner, with understanding of the pressures they

work under and an openness to reviewing and adapting structures which may be creating a context in which mistakes are more likely to happen. By understanding the “root causes” and the reality of frontline work, we move from a culture of finger-pointing to a culture of sense-making. It still requires a commitment to honest self-reflection but it ensures that reflection is grounded in empathy rather than blame.

Furthermore, research highlights that we are significantly influenced by the outcome when reviewing events. This makes us prone to overestimate how much people could have anticipated the negative outcomes of their actions at the time (Fischhoff, 1982): a view supported by Reason (1990) who highlights that those “blessed with both uninvolved and hindsight” (p.214) are prone to “slip into a censorious frame of mind” (ibid.).

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory, as developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), counters this mindset as it provides a structure through which the interacting factors within a child’s life and a practitioner’s role can be examined. In a Child Protection context, the structure is presented as a series of concentric circles radiating out from the child’s most direct influences within the microsystem to the more abstract chronosystem, relating to factors that emerge or change over time. Within an education environment, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory also

offers leaders a lens for seeing the nested, interacting contexts that shape everyday practice. At the microsystem level sit classroom routines, teacher-student interactions, and the digital interfaces staff use to take attendance or assign work. The mesosystem comprises relationships between these people or systems. The exosystem covers organisational policies and budgetary constraints. The

macrosystem encompasses cultural norms about accountability and sector-wide compliance and the chronosystem captures how these layers shift over time: new IT systems, staff turnover or policy updates that change thresholds or workflows. Through Bronfenbrenner’s model, we are able to understand the context of a school and the behaviours of those within it more holistically.

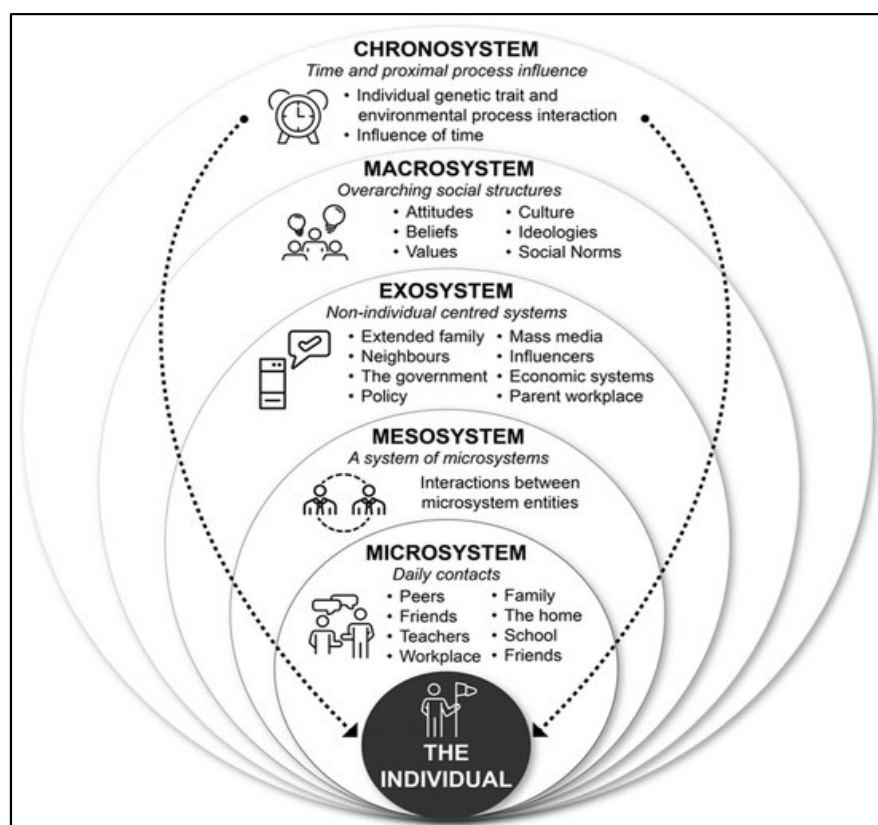


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory model. (Main, K., Bouton, B.D., Pendergast, D. and Whitaker, N. (2025))

The ‘Swiss Cheese Model’

Bronfenbrenner’s approach can also be used alongside Reason’s (1997) latent-condition model or ‘Swiss Cheese Model’ which seeks to understand how a series of events or decisions could have circumvented the checks, safeguards and ‘defensive layers’ designed to prevent significant errors occurring within an organisation.

Reason’s model posits that any one defensive mechanism may have flaws within it, but if there are numerous layers in place, the likelihood that a series of decisions or actions would align with the specific weakness in each area is small. For example, a rushed recruitment process leads to an under-qualified teacher being appointed, who teaches an outdated GCSE specification to their students and completes an incorrect coursework task which is only identified once it is received

by the exam board. In most cases, a mitigating or defensive layer would have prevented this at some stage. It would only be if latent conditions within each layer align (the full recruitment steps not being followed; qualifications not being checked by HR; the HoD not reviewing the teacher’s planning; the KS4 coordinator not having a moderation meeting and the exams officer not checking the syllabus codes on the coversheets) would the serious error occur.

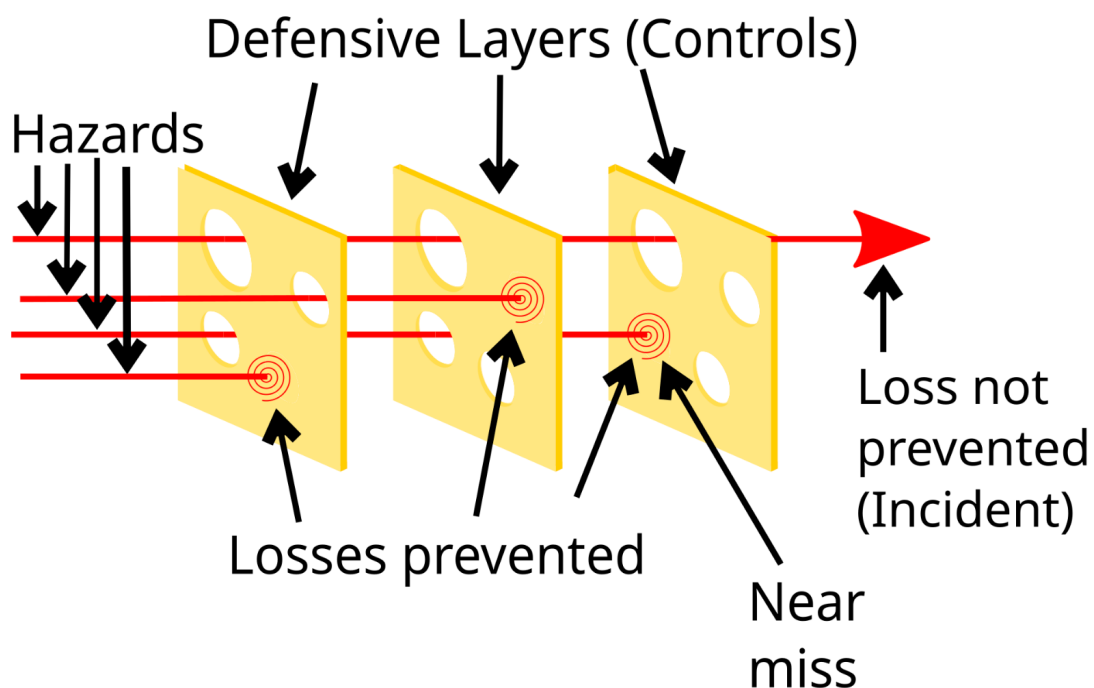


Figure 2: Swiss Cheese Model of safety incident causation (after Reason,1997a) Source: “Swiss Cheese Model” by Ben Aveling, [Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

The challenge for leaders, therefore, is not to create perfect systems, but to know where the weak point within any one system or procedure is and seek to ensure that an identified weakness (an underqualified teacher) is mitigated by further strong defensive layers (a supportive HoD and a clear moderation process).

Why a ‘chronology-and-blame’ approach does not lead to solutions

The traditional, chronological review—assembling a linear timeline up to the point of failure and identifying the misstep can be appealing. It creates a clean narrative with a clear ‘bad actor’. Yet this approach is prone to hindsight bias and “person-centred” explanations that personalise error while masking structural flaws and contributing factors. Munro (1990) posits that common errors of reasoning flourish in retrospective accounts with what Butler & Drakeford (2011) describe

as “the Olympian advantage of hindsight.”(ibid, p.127) : overconfidence in what should have been noticed, failure to appreciate uncertainty, and the tendency to judge decisions through the lens of the undesirable outcomes rather than by the information available at the time.

A systems investigation is not anti-accountability but it shifts accountability toward the design and maintenance of safer systems. Leaders take responsibility for creating conditions in which reasonable actions by competent people are likely to yield reliable outcomes. Reason’s (1990, 1997) work further clarifies why person-

focused remedies (reminders, retraining, admonishments) rarely prevent recurrence. His ‘swiss cheese’ imagery is an important reminder that adverse outcomes are largely caused by routine failures (Ferguson, 2025) rather than an individual’s extraordinary actions. The warning for school leaders is clear: after an administrative failure, schools often tighten rules, extend checklists, or increase performance monitoring, adding to busy teachers’ existing workload. However, these responses can create a veneer of control whilst leaving the underlying obstacles and complexity largely unaddressed.

Constructive accountability in practice: translating theory into administrative routines

So, how can leaders apply a systems approach to reviewing errors or mistakes? Fundamentally it means changing both questions and routines.

- Instead of “Who missed the step?”, ask “What aspect of our systems or tools made the error possible?” or “Where do processes between teams create handover risks?” Through this approach, attention is directed to the latent conditions which if aligned, create a series of weaknesses that can lead to a serious error (Reason, 1997).
- Map the series of events and systems across Bronfenbrenner’s layers. In the example given this might include identifying microsystem friction (the change in the student’s teacher and classroom could not be captured in ‘real time’), mesosystem gaps (unclear guidance on who should communicate what to

whom, by when and via what methods) and exosystem constraints (My School Portal not communicating directly with teachers who are with the students).

- Highlight how reliable systems support student development. Administrative reliability serves learning and wellbeing goals: it is not ‘busy work’. Administrative instability—missed interventions, mixed messages, avoidable, procedural errors—can undermine the predictable environments within which children thrive.

This approach both protects staff morale and reframes leadership work around designing systems that make desirable actions easy and undesirable outcomes hard to reach rather than finding a culprit to blame for errors.

Culture, inquiry, and ethics

Adopting a systems lens also entails cultural work. Butler and Drakeford’s (2011) reading of inquiry culture warns that in high-stakes environments, the appetite for blame can displace learning. School leaders can mitigate this response by modelling responses that distinguish between well-intentioned human error and wilful violations, and by treating honest reflection as a resource. Munro (1999) shows how professionals’ reasoning is shaped by uncertainty and pressure, therefore leaders should acknowledge these ambiguities and invest in support and reflection that reveal potential, localised gaps in capacity or competence before they harden into incidents. Equally, Reason (1997) reminds us that organisations drift toward failure when time or resource pressures slowly erode the quality of defensive layers, creating more ‘holes in the cheese’, so

leaders must be vigilant and ensure that key positions and procedures are understood, visible, measured, and resourced.

Three Actions for Educational Leaders

- Conduct a termly systems review. Don’t just focus on incidents but also ‘near misses’. Ensure you hear from colleagues and students from across the school’s “ecological system”.
- Replace reminders with redesign. Rather than continue to issue reminders in relation to a procedure which routinely does not work, redesign the procedure itself.
- Connect administration to core purpose. Brief staff on why reliable, predictable administrative systems support the school’s core purpose: developing students. Whilst systems and administration can seem pedantic, helping everyone understand why they matter is likely to create greater buy-in and help them function optimally.

Conclusion

Chronologies establish what happened; they are necessary but not sufficient for deep learning. If leaders stop reviewing at the moment where a person makes a mistake, they can miss the conditions that made that error likely. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory helps leaders see those conditions across levels and over time; Munro reveals how professional reasoning is shaped by uncertainty and organisational context and Reason prompts us to consider redesign rather than simply adding further administration. Taken together, these perspectives support a more constructive and empathetic

accountability: one that asks not only “Who did what?” but “How do we create systems so that ordinary, pressured work tends toward the right thing happening?” In schools, that is both an empathetic stance toward staff and a practical commitment to creating reliable environments that enable young people to thrive.

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Authentic Leadership: Clarity, Courage, and Heart

Emma Navin | Head of La Storta Junior School



“At its core, leadership is the commitment to develop people and inspire them to do great things.”



After 26 years as a Headteacher across five contextually different schools in multiple countries, and within Junior School communities ranging from 200 to 900 young people, I have come to a simple and enduring conclusion: being a Head is the most rewarding job in the world. It is also one of the most demanding, because it asks not only for skill, but for one's very self.

I was recently asked to describe, in a single sentence, what leadership means to me. My response was this:

“At its core, leadership is the commitment to develop people and inspire them to do great things.”

The lives of young people matter deeply and the culture we create as leaders shapes not only their education but also their sense of self, belonging, and possibility.

Over time, I have come to anchor my leadership in three simple principles: Relationships, Authenticity, and Role Modelling.

Relationships sit at the centre of leadership, influence is not positional, it is relational. Strong schools are built on trust, mutual understanding and a genuine commitment to people.

Authenticity - Leaders who are open, honest, and human create

environments where others feel safe to contribute and grow. Authenticity fosters credibility.

Role Modelling reminds us that leadership is visible. We set the tone through our actions, and if we expect integrity, kindness, and commitment we must model them consistently ourselves.

Collectively, these principles provide a practical and moral framework for leadership that is both grounded and sustainable.

Relationships as the Core of Influence

Leadership influence is built through relationships grounded in integrity, trust, and respect for the dignity and worth of others. Without this foundation, leadership becomes transactional and ultimately limited. Strong relationships require empathy, warmth, and consistency. They require leaders to listen as much as they speak and to value individuals not only for their contribution, but for who they really are.

In a school this matters deeply. When staff feel trusted and respected they are more likely to collaborate, innovate and invest in the shared vision. When students feel seen and valued they are more likely to engage, take risks, and thrive.

Building such a culture requires intentionality. It means bringing together diverse talents, aligning them to a shared purpose and ensuring that everyone understands their role within it. Vision is not something imposed; it is something built collectively.



Authenticity: The Foundation of Leadership

One aspect of leadership, for me, is authenticity and leading with integrity. It is important that I remain grounded in who I am and stay true to myself, even in the face of complexity and daily challenge. This does not mean being inflexible; rather, it means being aligned where values, words, and actions consistently reinforce one another.

Too often, leadership is framed as something to emulate: a set of behaviours to adopt or replicate. In reality, I believe the most effective leaders are those who are true to themselves. Authenticity builds trust, and trust is the currency of leadership.

However, authenticity does not happen by accident. It requires reflection and self-awareness. Before we can lead others, we must first understand ourselves - our values, our motivations, and the impact we have on those around us. It is this sense of self that we bring to every interaction. If we are unclear or inconsistent, others will sense it.

To be authentic is to become the best version of yourself, not a version shaped by expectation or expediency. This takes courage: the courage to be visible, to be human, and, at times, to be vulnerable.

Your School Reflects You

One of the most powerful truths of leadership is that your school reflects you. Not perfectly but

unmistakably. The tone you set, the standards you uphold and the way you treat others ripple through the organisation. Culture is not defined by statements on a wall but by daily behaviours. What is noticed, what is valued and what is modelled. If we want schools where everyone matters, where dignity is respected and where students thrive, then we must embody those principles consistently.

Presence: Where Authenticity Becomes Visible

Presence is a central and often an underestimated element of leadership. It is through presence that authenticity is experienced. Presence is more than physical availability. It is the quality of attention we give to others and the ability to be fully engaged, to listen deeply and to respond with clarity and empathy. It is emotional, intellectual and relational. Through presence, leaders communicate a simple but powerful message; you matter. Presence connects values to action. It is how trust is built and sustained and how influence is developed over time. Without it even the most well-articulated vision remains distant and abstract.



Courage and Reflection

Authentic leadership requires courage; the courage to make difficult decisions, to remain values-driven under pressure and to hold to what matters most. I can remember many years ago when

someone shared this quote with me and it really resonated.

We cannot discover new oceans unless we have the courage to lose sight of the shore - Andre Gide

Being courageous is the ability to make bold, principled decisions and act with integrity, authenticity, and confidence, particularly when facing uncertainty, risk, or adversity. Leadership also requires self reflection. A useful question for any leader is: Who is the best Head you have ever known and why? The answers rarely focus on technical expertise. More often they centre on integrity, humanity and the way that leader made others feel - valued, supported and inspired.

Conclusion

Leadership at its best is an act of service. It is about creating a community where everyone matters, where relationships permeate everything and where young people are given the very best opportunity to flourish. Authenticity lies at the heart of this work. It is not an optional quality but an essential one linking integrity, relationships, presence and influence into a coherent whole unit.

As Maya Angelou stated *"People will never forget how you made them feel."*

And as Eleanor Roosevelt observed, *"To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart."*

In the end, authentic leadership is not defined by what we say but by who we are and how that is experienced and viewed by others.

The Importance of “Fierce Conversations”

Fran Vulpiani | Deputy Head - Staff and Student Development



“Listening deeply and learning reflectively enables leaders to build sustainable, globally-relevant teacher-development pathways.”

“Life is curly. Don’t try to straighten it out.” (Scott, 2002) The curliness of life and the messiness of leadership (Sinek, 2014) is something to be embraced and not to be afraid of. If your hair wants to curl, let it curl! (Don’t force it to be straight if the Roman humidity has other ideas!)

This year is my second year as Deputy Head: Staff and Student Development. I learnt that patience and creating the right environment for others to learn and lead is critical; with space and time we can discover that “the answers are in the room.” (Scott, 2002) In order to get to this point, we need to accept the “ground truth” (a military term that means the actual reality rather than the official reality!) This is honesty; it is essential that we avoid blame and accusations regarding why the “ground truth” is our current reality. Honesty is full disclosure (including multiple perspectives) with good intent, to find a solution, to develop

in a positive way so that staff and students gain.

It was a great honour and highlight of my year to present at the 44th COBIS Annual Conference in London with Victoria Pugh (COBIS Director of Education and Professional Learning) and Dionne Ross (International Teacher Development Lead at the University of Sunderland.) Our session was entitled: Building Global Pathways for Teacher Development. In the planning and preparation for the session, the discussions we had were thought-provoking and impactful. The theme of the conference was: Listen. Learn. Lead and this framed how we approached our session. Its purpose was to explore how listening deeply and learning reflectively enables leaders to build sustainable, globally-relevant teacher-development pathways.

Building Global Pathways for Teacher Development

Victoria Pugh – COBIS Director of Education and Professional Learning
 Dionne Ross - International Teacher Development Lead
 Frances Vulpiani - Deputy Head (Staff and Student Development) St. George's British International School, Rome








Empathising with the senior leaders in our session, we offered a structure to pin development ideas to:

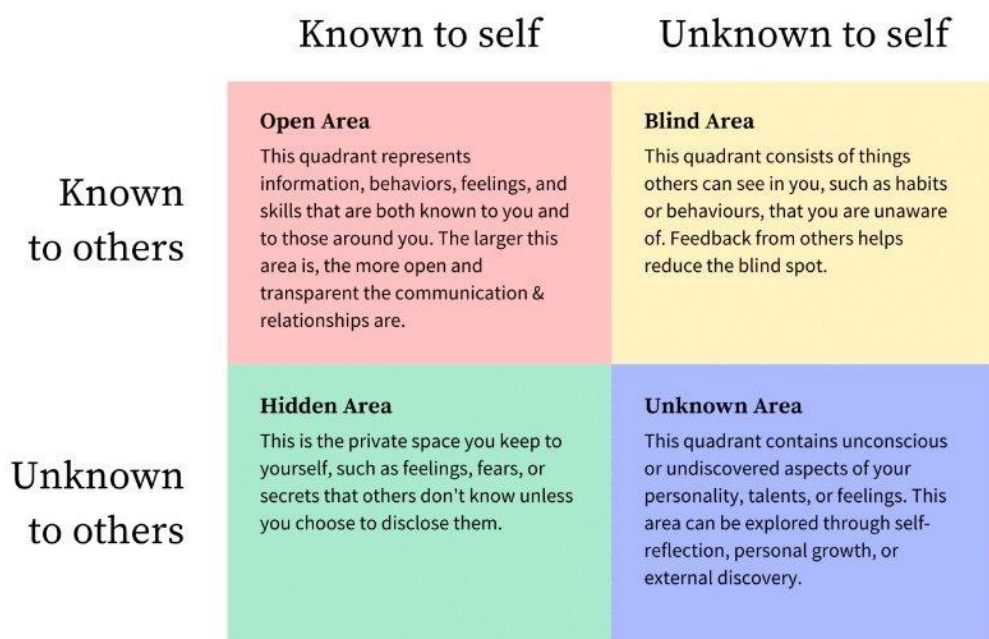
- Early Career Teachers and teachers new to teaching in our school context: establishing teachers, developing trust and openness to learn.
- Emerging middle leaders: building confidence, taking ownership and daring to lead.
- Enhancing middle leaders' skills: reflecting on leadership, identifying strengths and development areas, seeking feedback.

- Emerging senior leaders: offering opportunities to lead, encouraging job shadowing, developing networks.

The pathways are strengthened by: a coaching culture, clear, kind leadership (Brown, 2018), strong teams, psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018) and creating the right conditions for learning.

We started with the why (Sinek, 2011) as we wanted to inspire the leaders in our session to take action: why is teacher development so important? When a teacher feels invested in through teacher development, it: increases self-confidence; enhances motivation; encourages the sharing of ideas;

builds supportive networks and ultimately improves students' outcomes. Before we can develop others, we need to have a good understanding of ourselves and with this at the centre of the session, we explored the psychological tool of the Johari Window (Luft and Ingham, 1955) This is a tool that I use regularly to encourage self-reflection. We need to examine the "ground truth": step forward with courage (from the French word coeur for heart.) We need to increase our open area (the area that is known to both ourselves and those around us.) The larger our open area is the more open and transparent the communication is and our relationships are.



Sounds simple? The tricky part is how to reveal your hidden area and "rumble with your vulnerability." (Brown, 2018) Finding the courage to put aside your emotional armour, own your part of the story and listen with empathy, rather than reacting defensively to protect your ego. Equally tricky is tackling your blindspot: these are those habits and behaviours that others recognise in you yet you are unaware of. "There is something within us that responds deeply to

people who level with us" (Scott, 2002) and before we get to this response, we have to invite the feedback and be open to receive it. If we share information about our feelings and experiences (reduce the Hidden Area) and seek feedback from others (reducing the Blind Area) the Open Area can be expanded. This leads to increased trust, better communication and enhances team effectiveness.

Embrace the leadership mess (Sinek, 2014) and accept that life is curly (Scott, 2002); leadership is a bumpy journey. We need to master the courage to interrogate reality. There are no formulas to follow but a continuous process of listening, learning and leading - with lots of fierce conversations along the way! (Scott, 2002). It is important to accept that we do not have all the answers; we must seek guidance and adapt. If we manage the environment

and create psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018) we can create a trusting, supportive culture where people can ask questions and admit mistakes without fear and our teams will naturally step up, collaborate and deliver together.

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LEADERSHIP

Embedding Action Research at St George's

Marco Gemelli | Senior Deputy Head of Senior School and Director of Studies



“Action research is problem-focused, context-specific and future-oriented.”

As any middle or senior leader knows, either from direct experience or because they have read Kotter's (1996) seminal book, *Leading Change*, driving and embedding change within any organisation is fraught with difficulties and setbacks, and schools are no exception. This case study focuses on the recent, seemingly successful introduction of action research at St George's, which has come about after years of repeated failures. So what was different this time round? Let's go in order...

What is Action Research?

Action research is an increasingly popular approach used by teachers interested in carrying out small-scale research in educational settings. It is a cyclical process which can be divided in the four phases of Observe - Plan - Act - Reflect (see image below).



https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Action-Research-Cycle-and-stages_fig1_348443775

The teacher starts by identifying an area they want to improve and a project aim (**Observe**). They then review the relevant literature, plan strategies to address the issue, choose their data collection method and identify the success criteria and milestones (**Plan**). The third phase involves applying their planned strategies, collecting relevant data for triangulation, analysing their data and formulating conclusions (**Act**). The fourth phase sees the teacher evaluating what was successful and identifying barriers and challenges (**Reflect**). Crucially, the teacher is then expected to repeat the cycle, honing their strategies, revising their plan, collecting and analysing more data and formulating more refined conclusions.

According to Hart and Bond (1995, cited in Blaxter et al, 2006, p. 69), action research is ‘problem-focused, context-specific and future-oriented’, ‘involves a change intervention’, ‘aims at improvement and involvement’, ‘involves a cyclic process in which research, action and evaluation are interlinked’ and ‘is founded on a research relationship in which those involved are participants in the change process’.

One of the main advantages of action research is that it is empowering: the teacher is the real driver for change, they are in charge of the process from start to finish and can aim to positively affect their own students in their own context. In order to succeed, they need to be reflective, critical, systematic in their data collection and diagnostic when evaluating their own teaching practice. Now, it is plausible to assume that teachers want to improve their practice, that they possess the reflective skills needed to identify an area for improvement, that they are able to collect and analyse relevant data, and change their practice. So why

had our earlier efforts to embed action research failed?

Why earlier attempts had failed

St George’s senior school SLT had been trying to embed action research in teachers’ practice since at least 2019, when I became Deputy Head and Paul Ryan was the Head of Secondary. Both of us clearly saw the advantages of this approach, as did other colleagues who, having completed a Master’s degree, were already familiar with it. We repeatedly tried to nudge colleagues to engage with action research, but despite some wins - over the years a few colleagues did carry out individual projects - we never managed to secure extensive buy-in from staff. Reflecting on this through Kotter’s (1996) lens, I now frame these earlier failures within a framework where we had failed to establish a sense of urgency: colleagues probably saw it as a ‘nice to have’ rather than an essential tool for self-improvement, and decided to invest their time in other ways.

When Mary-Clare replaced Paul in 2023 we tried to resurrect this initiative. We included it in our Strategic Plan to give it greater visibility. Following Sinek’s (2011) often-quoted mantra, ‘start with why’, we revisited the advantages for teachers: agency, empowerment, ability to initiate change. We included teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders in the discussion. We offered a financial incentive to enable colleagues to buy resources, collaborate with other teachers and visit other schools. In one-to-one conversations several colleagues would appear to be interested, but then another year would go by without any significant change: nobody had taken us up on our offer.

An unexpected help from a friend

I had almost given up on the idea that St George’s teachers could ever be persuaded to engage in action research when, over the February 2025 half-term break, I watched a COBIS webinar enticingly titled *Manageable, Meaningful and Sustainable Action Research*. In that webinar Paul Ryan (yes, him!) and Elizabeth Penn, a colleague from his new school (Hartland International), detailed the steps they had taken to engage a significant number of teachers in action research in less than two years. So it could be done! What was their winning recipe?

“Probably the single most important decision we took was to allocate time to this project.”

Crucially, they had not tried to do it alone. They had joined a larger project run by the Centre for Education Action Research (CEAR) and partnered with the University of Birmingham, which provided external support, as well as with a range of other schools in Dubai. They had also provided in-house support by nominating a school representative who helped track the progress of all projects through periodic one-to-one or small-group meetings. A light-touch output - which could take the form of a podcast, an academic poster, an article or a presentation at a University of Birmingham conference - had helped make the whole thing manageable in the eyes of colleagues.

Spurred by this webinar, I spoke again to Mary-Clare and we decided to give it another go.

Why it worked this time

Probably the single most important decision we took was to allocate time to this project: eight Monday after-school sessions throughout the 25-26 academic year were specifically devoted to action research, thereby signalling to colleagues how much we valued the project.

Following Hartland's example, we secured external support from academics: Joanna Rankin, who was then a PhD student at the University of Oxford, led a useful initial session before the end of the 24-25 academic year to help colleagues choose their focus, while Dr Nick Startin and Dr Bogdan Popescu from John Cabot University led well-received sessions this year on choosing data collection methods and ethical considerations; analysing data; synthesising and presenting findings. Fran, Mary-Clare and I also offered in-house support and made ourselves available to discuss ideas for projects throughout the year. We, too, offered a range of possible

outputs which included running a CPD session at departmental or school level and writing an article for this publication or a peer-reviewed journal such as the Chartered College of Teaching's Impact.

Colleagues' incredibly positive response really surprised us. We had finally cracked the nut! Over thirty members of staff across Junior and Senior schools expressed an initial interest, and roughly half of them engaged with the process for the whole year. The next section of The Learning Review includes articles written by most of these colleagues and, together, they testify of the many positive changes that we as reflective practitioners can make to our own practice in our own setting.

Next steps

As we plan to continue promoting action research at school for the next academic year and beyond, we need to build on this year's successes, celebrate the good practice already in place (and one of the aims of The Learning Review is to do precisely this) and identify ways to support colleagues even more effectively, with a view to increasing the proportion of colleagues able to sustain engagement for the whole year.

One aspect worth revisiting next year is the cyclical nature of action research, as this is an essential part of this approach which has not perhaps been fully understood and actioned. Finally, an exciting development would be to broaden the dissemination of our findings beyond the school confines, by promoting colleagues' participation to national and international conferences and contributing to blogs such as Leeds Beckett University's *CollectiveED*. But I'm afraid this will now be somebody else's job!

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The Power of Community

Rachel Johnson | Year 6 Class Teacher, Curriculum innovation Lead



“Leaders take responsibility for creating conditions in which reasonable actions by competent people are likely to yield reliable outcomes.”

Education is changing—we’re moving away from keeping different age groups separate and focusing more on integrated, cross-phase collaboration. This action research project was all about measuring the real-world impact of pairing our Year 12 students as student mentors with Year 6 students. They worked together on student-led community initiatives designed to make the world a better place. This action research project sought to systematically measure the impact of pairing Year 12 student student mentors with Year 6 students in student-led, world-improving community initiatives.

The fundamental research question driving this study was:

To what extent does participation in interdependent community projects influence student-reported mental wellbeing and the mastery of adaptive communication competencies?

Putting Theory into Action: The Power of Peers

The entire project was built on two core ideas:

- **Social Constructivism:** The belief that we build knowledge most effectively by interacting with others.
- **The Protégé Effect:** The simple truth that “to teach is to learn twice”.

Our central hypothesis was that if we gave the students autonomy—letting them choose and manage their projects—it would boost their engagement, confidence, well-being, and their ability to teach adaptively. This approach connects perfectly with the idea that the deepest learning requires student agency and happens best in “Real-World Contexts” that offer “Value Beyond School Walls”.

Methodology and Engagement

A mixed-methods design was used, following the students’ development over one academic year through our “Community In Action” lunchtime club sessions.

We looked at several key data sources:

- **Engagement:** Voluntary attendance records showed Year 6 averaged 96% and Year 12 averaged 85%, only not attending due to other commitments (residentials and competitions, university entrances)
- **Surveys:** We used pre and post surveys (Year 12 Bounce Together Trial and Year 6 PASS Data) to track changes in confidence and attitudes toward learning.
- **Qualitative Data:** We gathered ongoing observations, analysed how students interacted with external stakeholders, and reviewed their final outputs (like presentations and films) to see adaptive learning in action.

- To simplify mentoring and encourage a cohesive common purpose, we grouped students based on shared interests and goals.

Key Findings: Impact and Learning

The results clearly showed that this integrated model significantly boosts confidence and adaptive learning skills:

- **Mentor Confidence Soared:**
The Year 12 Pre and Post Survey showed a significant shift towards the “Strongly Agree” category for almost all leadership competencies. The student mentors became much more authoritative and confident when actively facilitating, particularly when speaking to or questioning the younger students.
- **Resilience in Action:**
The groups frequently demonstrated great resilience and adaptive instruction when faced with real-world problems. For example, one group had to change their original “hunger banquet” plan due to implementation issues. They smoothly pivoted their mission (with a little persuasion!) and successfully installed a previously purchased JNRC football table in the school, which showed flexible, “extended abstract” thinking.

- **The Tech Surprise:**
Interestingly, our observations noted that the Year 6 students were often more capable than we expected. They took the lead in creating the final documentaries because they had more time and a greater awareness of the available software and its capabilities.
- **Tangible Results for the Community:** The projects achieved significant, measurable outcomes:
 - They raised **1,100.60 Euros** in total for three charities (Caritas, Noi e Loro, and UNWRA).
 - They collected **217 pairs of winter socks** for the Joel Nufama Refugee Centre.¹
 - They successfully raised awareness of the litter around the school and worked with staff, students, and another local international school to clean up their school neighbourhood.

The Challenge of Measurement and Future Focus

While the findings proved that student-led, cross-age projects boost agency, engagement, and adaptive communication—just as our theory suggested—trying to assess internal outcomes like well-being were challenging.

There was a critical gap where the Year 6 students’ self-reported data

showed a reduction in confidence in some areas, even though our observations indicated they had increased capability. This aligns with feedback we’ve received from international partner schools and suggests that broad, self-reported data might be unreliable and may not truly capture the depth of learning. This could be because the self-reported data was collected outside of club times and was general about their feelings in school, rather than being connected to the club; other outside influences may have skewed the results.

To make this project even stronger and more sustainable in the future, we need to focus on a few things:

- Conducting a literature review earlier.
- Making sure our research tools clearly align with the specific construct of adaptive instruction.
- Implement structured leadership training for the Year 12 student student mentors.

Overall, this study highlighted the incredible potential of cross-phase community projects, but it also hammered home the need for a more intentional and rigorous research design to accurately prove the profound impact they have.

If you are interested in supporting these community projects next year, please contact myself, Emma Denton or Veryan Blake.

Take a look at the projects below:

Charity/Cause	Aim of project	Results
Joel Nufama Refugee Centre	To help collect socks for their Winter gifts to the guests. Target: 200 pairs of winter socks.	217 pairs collected. Visit to the centre to deliver the socks and learn more about what they do.
Noi e Loro Animal Shelter	To raise awareness and funds for a new building to house dog kennels.	Manned a store selling Christmas cards at the Winter fair. Visited the animal shelter. Sold Easter eggs. Raised 457 EUROS in total
“Rice Banquet” / JNRC Football Table	To raise awareness for world hunger (axed). To enable a football table purchased to finally be used.	Football table is in position, balls have arrived, but the mechanism needs fixing. Resilience commendable from the students.
Litter Picking in local area	To make a more pleasant environment and build community spirit.	Invited the town council and the rubbish collectors to support, as well as a local Italian school (no response) and an international school (Rome City Institute)
Caritas	To raise awareness of the homeless in Rome. To raise funds.	Sold Jubilee Christmas baubles at the Winter Fair. 198 Euros raised.
UNWRA	To raise awareness of Palestinian children. To raise funds to support their work in schools and hospitals.	445.60 euros raised from cookie sales in December.



Dual Coding: Graphic Organisers and Embodied Cognition

James Blackburn | SEN (Second in Charge)



“The greatest impact was on students with the least confidence, suggesting that graphic organisers are an effective way of meeting the needs of students.”

One of the most fascinating aspects of dual coding is how many different ways there are of visualising learning and supporting comprehension and communication. This year, as well as my own research, there have been a number of projects running across the school investigating graphic organisers while exploring other ways of visualising the classroom such as embodied cognition.

As part of the action research process, we have been investigating the effect of graphic organisers on the attainment of year 7 students in English. We have used graphic organisers to teach, revise and study the knowledge organiser content of the year 7 English curriculum. We found that the experience of the students matches the research in their ability to understand, organise and remember the information (Cavaglioli and Goodwin 2021, Cavaglioli, 2019). However, though the data collected show that some students did improve on average across the final two knowledge assessments (which were taught using graphic organisers), the nature of the classroom and the range of variable factors involved in summative assessment mean that we cannot directly attribute student performance in tests to the use of graphic organisers. What the research does show is that the use of graphic organisers, as part of a wide range of visual classroom strategies, has a positive impact on the students' understanding, learning and ability to recall through categorisation (Goodwin and Caviglioli 2022).

Elsewhere, there has been some lovely work taking place across the school by different teachers across a range of departments. In Business Management, the focus of their action research was the impact of graphic organisers on student independence. They found that the greatest impact was on students with the least confidence, suggesting that graphic organisers are an effective way of meeting the needs of students who find learning challenging (you can read their article in this issue of *The Learning Review*). The English department has been using the work of Tony Buzan to inform the use of mindmaps for year 12 revision of texts. Teacher observation of the process identified that students were capable of making a greater number of connections within the text than previously. Geography and ESS have been using AI to dual code slideshows that support teacher expertise, modelling and students' independent access to content. In German, Key Stage 3 and 4 students have been using organisers to revise and study lesson content.

The responses of students would suggest that the connections made visually by graphic organisers increase students' ability to apply what they have learnt because they can see how it all connects together. Professionally, there has been a need to explain dual coding to the students, but anecdotally the process has been favoured by students with learning needs. Teacher feedback has only noted that the use of graphic organisers and other dual coded strategies must be used in tandem with a

broad range of strategies, which tallies with the research of David Goodwin and Oliver Caviglioli and the outcome of my action research. The most important realisation was that, although graphic organisers support whole class discussion and teacher input, they are most effective when the students make them themselves.

Alongside graphic organisers, we also explored other dual coding strategies that support student engagement. One of the most compellingly instinctive strategies is **embodied cognition** which theorises that our bodies and our brains work together to support our cognition and memory. Movement is therefore an underused resource in our classrooms and carefully planned gestures can support cognition (Murphy Paul, 2021, Turner, Goodwin and Caviglioli 2022).

The movement of our bodies is a crucial part of how we think, especially when considered against the fact that at any given moment there is far more than we are capable of processing consciously (Murphy Paul A, 2021). Our bodies and our brains work together to do this. Consider the fluency and complexity of sign language. Consider the way very young children learn to gesture and sign before they can speak. Consider the way we use our hands to sketch what we are saying, or to support us in finding the words to say what we mean. Or, at an even more fundamental level, the unconscious way our bodies move and readjust themselves to manage our sensory and interoceptive responses (Turner, Goodwin and Caviglioli, 2022).

However, our education system values stillness as a sign of effort and engagement with learning (Turner, Goodwin and Caviglioli, 2022). Our students spend the majority of their day sitting in

classrooms, in an environment that requires minimal movement. This stillness can increase cognitive load and our ability to regulate attention, movement and behaviour when asked to remain still appears to diminish, especially when the natural urge to move is ignored (Langhanns and Muller, 2017). We are well aware of the positive benefits of movement on health, mood and wellbeing, but recent research suggests that movement supports cognition (Turner, Goodwin and Caviglioli, 2022)

In terms of practical classroom application, our instinctive gestural fluency means we can design gestures to support our explanations (Turner, Goodwin and Caviglioli, 2022). By carefully choosing a gesture to match a teaching point, we can support our students' understanding and memory by giving them a visible and physical gesture that corresponds directly to the concept or piece of knowledge. Again, come back to the idea of sign language. Each sign has a specific meaning and is easily and quickly understood. If we assign gestures to what we are teaching, and repeat that gesture, we are dual coding our explanations while at the same time using movement to support our comprehension and memory.

Gesture also scaffolds our students' ability to express their fledgling understanding of new ideas. By providing students with a movement, we can continue to provide the verbal support required for students to express their understanding, while being able to see that they are beginning to understand when they use the correct gestures in response to our questions. As part of my investigation into the application of dual coding in the classroom, I have been planning for gestures and building them into my teaching. This has evolved beyond specific activities that include the students

gesturing into more natural, almost self-conscious movements, to support my own explanations or responses to questions.

Gesture also allows for us to create a multi-sensory, communication-rich setting. Multi-sensory learning is a staple of special educational needs teaching and personal experience tells me that multi-sensory learning is an effective way of teaching in mainstream settings. By engaging as many of the senses as possible in the classroom, we support the brain to engage and understand what we are teaching on a variety of levels. Connections can also be drawn to the way students can be supported to explain their thinking by tracing a graphic organiser with their finger as they explain their ideas (Caviglioli and Goodwin, 2021).

Embodied Cognition appears to be a natural, almost instinctive method of communication that we possess. A key principle when designing classrooms and spaces for young people with learning needs is to create multi-sensory, communication-rich and visual spaces where the temporary nature of spoken language is supported. By assigning gestures to key parts of knowledge and encouraging the students to use them while discussing and revising and to mimic them while we are teaching, we have another visual tool that supports the creation of a language rich, visual space for all of our students. By employing a strategy that pairs careful thought with what is natural and instinctive, we allow for the visualisation of thinking.

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ACTION RESEARCH

The Science of Remembering: How Collaborative Quizzing Boosts Learning

Elvira Lee | Teacher i/c of Psychology



“This research aims to explore the potential beneficial outcomes of testing.”

Introduction

Amidst contemporary educational discourse concerning the influence of standardized testing on student wellbeing and the effect of grade-centric approaches on genuine learning, this research aims to explore the potential beneficial outcomes of testing by utilizing quizzes as a pedagogical tool.

The forgetting curve, as conceptualized by Ebbinghaus in 1885 following extensive experimentation on memory, posits that newly acquired information is exponentially lost over time unless it is revisited. Contemporary research has established a biological basis for memory function. Through repetition and practice, neural connections and synaptic efficiency are enhanced, thereby facilitating the consolidation of long-term memory. Conversely, connections that lack reinforcement are attenuated, leading to the decay of learned information (Forgetting Curve - an

Overview | ScienceDirect Topics, n.d.).

Spaced repetition, a technique suggested by Ebbinghaus, is designed to enhance the retention of information in long-term memory through the systematic review of materials at increasing intervals (Birmingham City University, n.d.). Studies have consistently demonstrated the efficacy of this method in educational contexts (Kang, 2016).

A complementary practice is **active recall**, which is defined as the deliberate retrieval of information from memory, contrasting with the passive rereading or restudy of material (Birmingham City University, 2025). This practice has been established as an effective method for improving long-term memory retention. In a comprehensive review of both laboratory and classroom experiments, Roediger & Karpicke (2006) observed consistent positive effects of “testing

effects” on long-term memory. Testing, which necessitates active recall, demonstrably enhances performance. Psychologists have posited that the combined effect of spaced repetition and active recall contributes to this enhanced retention, though the precise mechanism remains under investigation. The practice of testing, however, is subject to a divided view: proponents argue that it improves performance, encourages material review, and may mitigate test anxiety, while critics contend that an overemphasis on scores can detract from the genuine learning process.

This current study, postulates that low-stakes quizzes can be advantageous, as they leverage the principles of active recall and spaced repetition without the inherent pressure associated with the scores of a formal, summative test or assessment.

A meta-analysis conducted by Yang et al. (2021) identified comparable evidence regarding quizzing effects, yet concurrently highlighted areas for further investigation, including the mechanism of collaborative quizzing, which involves administering quizzes to students in small groups. Collaborative quizzing may affect student learning differently due to its inherently discursive nature, potentially activating distinct cognitive learning mechanisms. Extensive research on the influence of discussions on learning has consistently demonstrated benefits, such as enhanced test performance, by enabling students to monitor comprehension, synthesize information (Schmidt, 1989), and cultivate analytical abilities. Consequently, exploring the impact of collaborative quizzing to determine any supplementary learning advantages is a logical progression.

Aim

The current study aims to investigate the extent to which low-stakes quizzes, specifically comparing individual versus collaborative quiz formats, can enhance the learning of Year 12 IBDP Psychology students within a naturalistic classroom environment. The IBDP Psychology course is introduced to students only in Year 12, meaning that students lack prior exposure to the subject’s foundational knowledge and vocabulary. Acquiring the necessary vocabulary, concepts, and theories within this limited timeframe can be challenging, often leading to inadequate consolidation into long-term memory.

It is hypothesized that collaborative quizzing will significantly improve student test scores compared to individual quizzing, as the discussions may enhance the connections between previously acquired knowledge and permit students to clarify the deficiencies in their understanding. The outcomes of this investigation are anticipated to be valuable in informing instructional practices for psychology educators, as well as teachers of subjects of a similar nature, regarding effective instructional methods to implement in their classrooms to boost learning.

Procedure

The independent variable manipulated in this study was the method of quizzing: collaborative versus individual. Group sizes ranged from two to three individuals, depending on student attendance on the day of the quiz. A quiz was administered following the completion of each topic, resulting in a total of six quizzes throughout the duration of this research. Most students maintained consistent attendance throughout this period;

however, a small number of students missed one out of the six administered quizzes.

The overarching Psychology IB curriculum mandates that students learn a theory, evaluate it, and apply it to real-world scenarios. These low-stakes quizzes were designed to promote the active recall of this knowledge and these skills. The 15-question quizzes, which included multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank items, were initially generated by AI and then proofread by the teacher. This step ensured that the questions comprehensively covered the breadth and depth of the theory and were directly relevant to the content taught. Quizzes were given to students between two and four days after the necessary content for the area of study had been completed.

The dependent variable was students’ performance measured using two 24-mark topical tests consisting of short-answer questions that mirrored actual IB psychology examinations. Each test was administered approximately four weeks after the completion of three topics that had been followed by either individual or collaborative quizzing. The psychological topics selected for the use of this research were standardised as best as possible in terms of difficulty. In addition to the test, a questionnaire was administered to gather students’ subjective perspectives on the quizzing methods.

The sample consisted of 15 students enrolled in the first year of the IBDP psychology course. All but one student had no formal prior education in psychology. A repeated-measures design was employed, ensuring that all participants experienced both conditions (individual and collaborative quizzes).

Findings

A. Test Scores after Individual Quizzing (Test 1) and Collaborative Quizzing (Test 2)

Median scores between Test 1 and Test 2



The bar graph displays the median scores of the IBDP Year 12 psychology students ($n=15$), on the first test, administered following individual quizzing, and the second test, administered following collaborative quizzing. As demonstrated, a four-point difference is observed between the medians. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that collaborative quizzing yielded significantly higher scores ($Mdn = 18$) in comparison to individual quizzing ($Mdn = 14$), $Z = -3.28$, $p < .001$. This outcome

supports the research hypothesis, suggesting that collaborative quizzing may enhance learning and consequently increase test scores. Following the implementation of collaborative quizzing, students demonstrated higher test scores, suggesting that the combination of spaced repetition, active recall and peer discussion facilitated the synthesis of information which may have enhanced understanding and long-term retention.

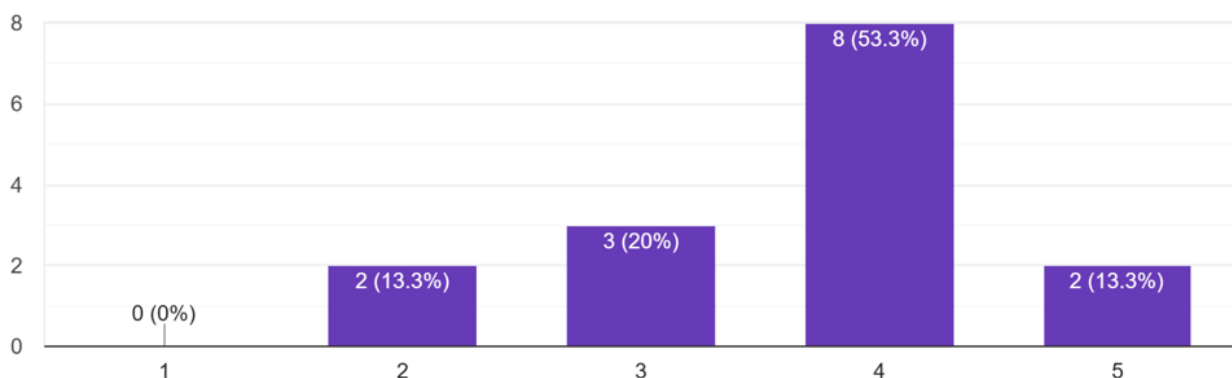
B. Student Perceptions of Quizzing

A brief analysis of the student questionnaire data indicates a high perceived utility of the low-stakes quizzing process among the Psychology students. Out of 15 students, 10 (67%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the regular quizzes were helpful for their overall learning. Specifically, students frequently commented on how the quizzes forced them to review and recall material regularly, check their understanding and identify gaps, aligning with the principles of spaced repetition and active recall.

Furthermore, when comparing the two methods, 10 of the 15 students (67%) indicated a preference for the collaborative quizzing format. The most common justification for this preference was the opportunity for peer-to-peer discussion, which students felt enhanced their understanding, promoted deeper thinking and provided immediate clarification of concepts. Additionally, students thought that collaborative quizzes were more fun and reduced individual pressure. This subjective data supports the quantitative findings, suggesting that students not only performed better after collaborative quizzing but also perceived it as more valuable for their learning.

The Multiple-Choice Questions and Fill-in-the-Blanks quizzes were helpful to my learning.

15 responses



Discussion

The findings of this study support previous research regarding the quizzing effect, and the role of active recall and spaced repetition in strengthening long-term memory. Students achieved significantly higher scores following collaborative quizzing compared to individual quizzing, suggesting that the addition of peer discussion may enhance the benefits already associated with active recall and spaced repetition. These findings align with the work of Roediger and Karpicke (2006), who proposed that retrieval through testing improves long-term retention, as well as Schmidt (1989), who highlighted the cognitive benefits of discussion-based learning. Collaborative quizzing may have enabled students to clarify misunderstandings, strengthen connections between concepts, and elaborate upon prior knowledge through discussion with peers. As humanities subjects often require students not only to recall theories but also to evaluate and apply them to real-world contexts, these collaborative discussions may encourage deeper processing of information, thereby improving performance on later assessments.

One strength of this investigation was the use of a repeated-measures design, in which all participants experienced both the collaborative and individual quizzing conditions. This reduced the influence of participant variables, such as differences in prior academic ability, motivation, or study habits, as each student acted as their own baseline.

However, one limitation was the relatively small sample size of only 15 students from a single IB Psychology class, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts or groups of students. Additionally, group sizes varied slightly depending on attendance, which may have influenced the quality

and quantity of discussion within each collaborative condition. Lastly, the improvement in Test 2 scores may be partly attributed to the students' enhanced understanding of the assessment conditions and strategies following Test 1. Despite these limitations, the study provides promising evidence for the educational value of collaborative quizzing as the benefits were shown across a mixed-ability group. Additionally, the quizzes and assessments reflected authentic IB content and were integrated into regular classroom instruction, meaning the findings are likely to be applicable to real educational contexts.

Overall, this action research involving 15 Year 12 IBDP Psychology students demonstrated that collaborative quizzing resulted in significantly higher subsequent test scores than individual quizzing ($p < .001$). Furthermore, the students favoured collaborative quizzing and found it to be more beneficial to their learning. This suggests that collaborative quizzing may be an effective pedagogical tool for promoting active recall and conceptual synthesis within the humanities.

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The Machine and The Mentor:

Reimagining Value in an AI Era

Richard Porteous | Teacher of English (Second in Charge), TOK



“Top-end students may benefit from more ‘intellectual risk-taking’ to maintain their passion.”



“Game-changer” is what I said aloud to an empty English office when I realised that Google Gemini, our school’s paid-for AI programme, can access the entire St. George’s Google environment. It can read your emails, browse your folders, and analyse your spreadsheets –you simply have to begin your command with @Workspace. That means teachers can now work with data in complex ways, without knowing lines of code, just by knowing which questions to ask. Hey Gemini: how does the Year 10 Bounce Survey compare with the English assessment data sheet and the SEN Register? My PPD project this year focused on underattaining boys’ experience in English lessons, and their wider experience of school. My work seemed suddenly to be accelerated by the AI.

As a humanities teacher, I asked myself some reflective questions: what did the power of Gemini say about me, and my own value? All the work I had been able to do as a mere individual human suddenly seemed narrow. After a few hours of prompt engineering, I seemed to have the power of a team of data scientists at my helm. I was saving time—but was I also relinquishing a level of creative, intellectual control?

And yet, the sheer speed and effectiveness of the machine soon quieted these reservations. Gemini yielded some great insights about how different factors (SEN, nationality, gender, CAT scores) correlated with Bounce survey responses. Previously, it might have taken days, or required paid expert consultation, to yield this kind of material. I encourage you to try it

for your Department or class, too. At the bottom of this page is the QR code to a long prompt template I made for you as a freebie.

Regarding Year 10 English, and with a focus on boys’ attainment, Gemini pared this snapshot down for me from its 10-page report:

- **The High-Potential “Enjoyment Gap”:** Students predicted to achieve Grades 7-9 rated “Skill Acquisition” highly (4.27), but their “Enjoyment” score lagged at 3.81. This suggests top-end students may benefit from more “intellectual risk-taking” to maintain their passion.
- **Literacy’s Direct Link to Attainment:** Habitual readers have a current attainment average of 4.75, compared to 4.25 for non-readers. This 0.50 grade difference provides a tangible data point for “Reading for Pleasure” interventions.
- **Targeting Psychological Safety for Mid-Ability Boys:** Mid-ability males with no SEN needs reported a lower-than-average score of 3.50 for “feeling safe to make mistakes”. This demographic may require more explicit “low-stakes” classroom strategies.
- **Pedagogy Favorites by CAT Bracket:** Students in the highest CAT brackets (115+) frequently cited “Unseen Poetry” and “Essay Structure” as favourites, whereas mid-to-low CAT students favoured “Group Presentations”.

As Second in Charge of English, these findings help me confirm intuitions and provide concrete justification for parents about the link between reading and attainment. They encourage me to shape the ongoing English focus on SIBS (“silent invisible boys”) around strategies for fostering low-stakes, supportive classroom environments.

But what surprised me was the conversation that ensued when I shared my findings with a more experienced colleague and mentor. As well as focusing on drawing conclusions, they suggested a more personal approach: simply identifying which particular students emerged with surprising profiles and talking with them individually to find out how they see the issue. In their view the machine’s analysis was an instrument to use—not an end-goal in itself. The machine can synthesize but not transform; it can curate but not cure. This simple insight is now part of a simple new departmental policy: to talk to more students, more often, about their feelings and thoughts about English. In a recent Department meeting we reviewed the Bounce survey responses, and focused not on comparing classes, or on clever interpretations, but on productive ways to begin conversations with individual students, including boys who report that they never read for pleasure, or who are tempted to use AI for their writing.

Now, as I write, this human, personal way of responding to Bounce survey data seems obvious. But why was my colleague’s intuitive assumption so surprising to me at the time, when I had been sitting for hours drawing conclusions with Gemini? I realised it was because I had been totally focused on being productive. The product was a conclusion, a document, hours of saved time. As I knew from my doctoral research

into the literature and philosophy of machines, there is something about being productive that is itself somehow machinic. Fostering open communication channels with students, by contrast, is unmistakably human: it is a process, or a group-habit embedded over time. Its results are not immediately measurable. It is never ‘done’.

My initial feeling of just wanting to get something done made me approach the data, in other words, like students who might be tempted to use ChatGPT to write their essays. Like them, we teachers often operate in what feels like a “productivity debt”, underwritten by a systemic feeling that our value is measured solely by tangible output. Like some of our students, we dream of a computer that could help us create work; and, in this way we, like them, start to focus on product rather than process.

To understand why we—and our students—can become focused on “product” rather than “process,” it is helpful for me, as an English teacher, to look at the history of how English itself was professionalised. Our students’ ChatGPT usage connects directly to the coming-of-age story of the English Literature discipline itself. I’m sure other disciplines have their own version of this narrative, too, as we navigate the educational aftermath of the twentieth century—the century in which, according to intellectual historian Joseph North, the subjects taught in schools became focused on examination and productivity.

I came across the work of North, then a Yale Fellow, when I was finishing my PhD on modern literature and machines. He shows how in the first phase of English (1920s-30s), schools focused on aesthetic and emotional appreciation; the point was to cultivate intelligent, sensitive habits of mind in a process that never

ended, and was hard to test. This is the era of “literary criticism”. During the late 1980s, English found a way to become relevant to a rapidly expanding university sector by advancing scholarly, logical arguments—this is the era of “literary scholarship”. This moved the goalposts from the cultivation of selves to the production of polished essays. This version of English is productive and, crucially, possible to grade. In fact, I like it a lot, and my publication record and approach to teaching is closely aligned with this scholarly version of English. However, the scholarly essay is impersonal and predictable enough that a machine could do it plausibly well, particularly for the kinds of essays that might be set in a secondary school. As AI becomes ever-more accessible, teachers have to acknowledge and respond to this fact.

In the case of English, the availability of AI does not mean we throw out the scholarly essay. But as it becomes possible for machines to generate these essays, students need more than ever to be reminded that the value of their English lessons is found in their messy thoughts, their emotional responses, and their instincts about which questions are worth asking. One of the many strengths of our department is that we balance many styles: we play, we act, we wonder, we reflect, we critique, we err. It is crucial to recognise that these qualitative experiences—all of them forms of play, arguably—are not just ungradable luxuries, but the engine of scholarly excellence. A student who has been authentically transformed by a text will always write a more original, rigorous essay than one simply mimicking a machine’s logic. And although I’m borrowing this vocabulary from literary studies, I’m sure a parallel argument could be made about most school subjects.

By hurting those human processes and experiences we are also modelling, for our students, ways of approaching work in a technologically transformed era. I try to remind myself of that at the same time as I continue to use AI for insights.

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ACTION RESEARCH

The Effect of Project-based Learning Compared with Teacher-directed Learning on Attainment in Science Classes in Secondary Schools.

Anna Lucia Di Renzo | Head of Biology, Examinations Officer



“Project-based learning may support students in remembering, understanding, and applying.”

This small-scale classroom enquiry explored whether project-based learning could improve Year 8 science students’ retention and application of knowledge compared with a more traditional, teacher-directed approach. The focus was not only on whether students could remember information, but also on whether they could apply it to reach more abstract levels of understanding.

Project-based learning allows for individuality in content and pace as well as promoting a number of skills such as research and presentation. In a meta analysis search which included 48 studies filtered from over 1000 consulted, the effect size of project-based learning was found to be 86% more effective in science education than traditional learning approaches. (Baleman, 2018 p2). In particular, Baleman found that the mean effect size is greater in Biology studies than in Chemistry and Physics studies (Baleman, 2018 p8) as well as the mean effect size being greater in secondary school learning

than in primary schools (Baleman, 2018 p9).

A study was therefore planned to involve a full year group of 80 year 8 students (mean age 13), divided into four teaching groups with four different teachers following the same syllabus. A baseline was identified for each group by comparing the number of students achieving each of four levels where the highest is 4, in a test on the topic of light, undertaken before the project-based learning. In the group destined to undertake the project research, composed of 22 students, 27% achieved level 4, 41% level 3, 32% level 2 and 0% level 1.

Subsequently, one group dedicated 6 hours to a project based learning task on Plant Growth. Students produced posters to respond to the “assess yourself” task from Pearson Active Learn Exploring Science, topic 8B Plant Growth. The task prompt is below.

“Tracey and Mark are opening a shop called ‘Plant Food’, which will sell seeds, fruits and vegetables. They want people to be able to buy things but also to be able to sell produce that they grow in their gardens or allotments. The shop needs a poster and a website. These could: explain how to interpret the scientific names of plants; describe how to grow plants from seeds; describe how and why plants make seeds and fruits; describe how we can use different parts of plants; explain why it is important to maintain biodiversity when growing plants.”

Following the project, students completed a one-hour assessment under test conditions. They were asked to respond to the prompt by reproducing and applying the information they had researched. The students produced their posters on a blank page, without access to materials in supervised conditions. The task was designed around different levels of achievement, with students able to access higher levels by recalling more detailed and abstract content and by applying their understanding accurately.

The standard achieved was judged on a scale of 4 to 1 using

the descriptors provided by the authors of the digital book the task was taken from: Exploring Science International Year 8 Assessment Support pack. The students also took the standard test on the same topic, provided by the same authors.

The outcome of the open ended assessment task where 20 students sat the assessment was 80% level 4, 10% level 3 and 10% level 2. Many students scored higher in the open assessment than they had in the traditional end-of-topic knowledge test on the previous topic. Particularly significant was the progress of students who had not previously accessed the higher grades. Many of these students were able to reach higher levels in this assessment, suggesting that the process of researching, selecting, organising, and presenting information had supported deeper retention.

The intention was to compare the results across four teaching groups. However, an attempt to compare outcomes with other groups was problematic because of variability in instruction and teacher editing of the end-of-topic tests used

across groups. These variations meant that the comparison could not be considered a fair test. Future research would need to be more tightly structured, with consistent teaching approaches, shared assessment criteria, and standardised testing conditions. Even so, the findings suggest that project-based learning, when used within a clear framework, may support students in remembering, understanding, and applying scientific knowledge more effectively.

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Appendix

Images of pupil’s work produced in timed, supervised conditions as assessment of the project

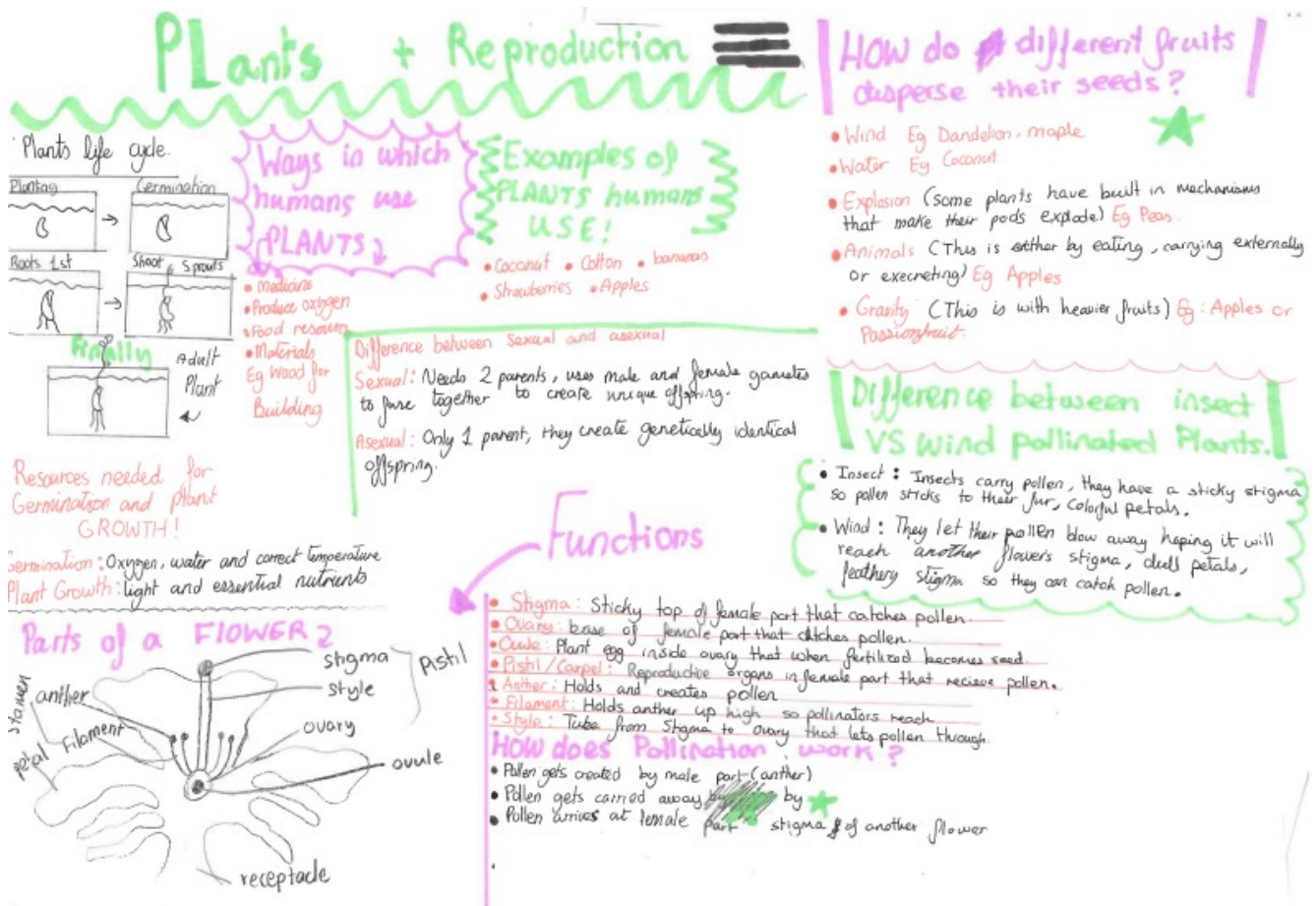


Image 1 L.M. Plants and reproduction

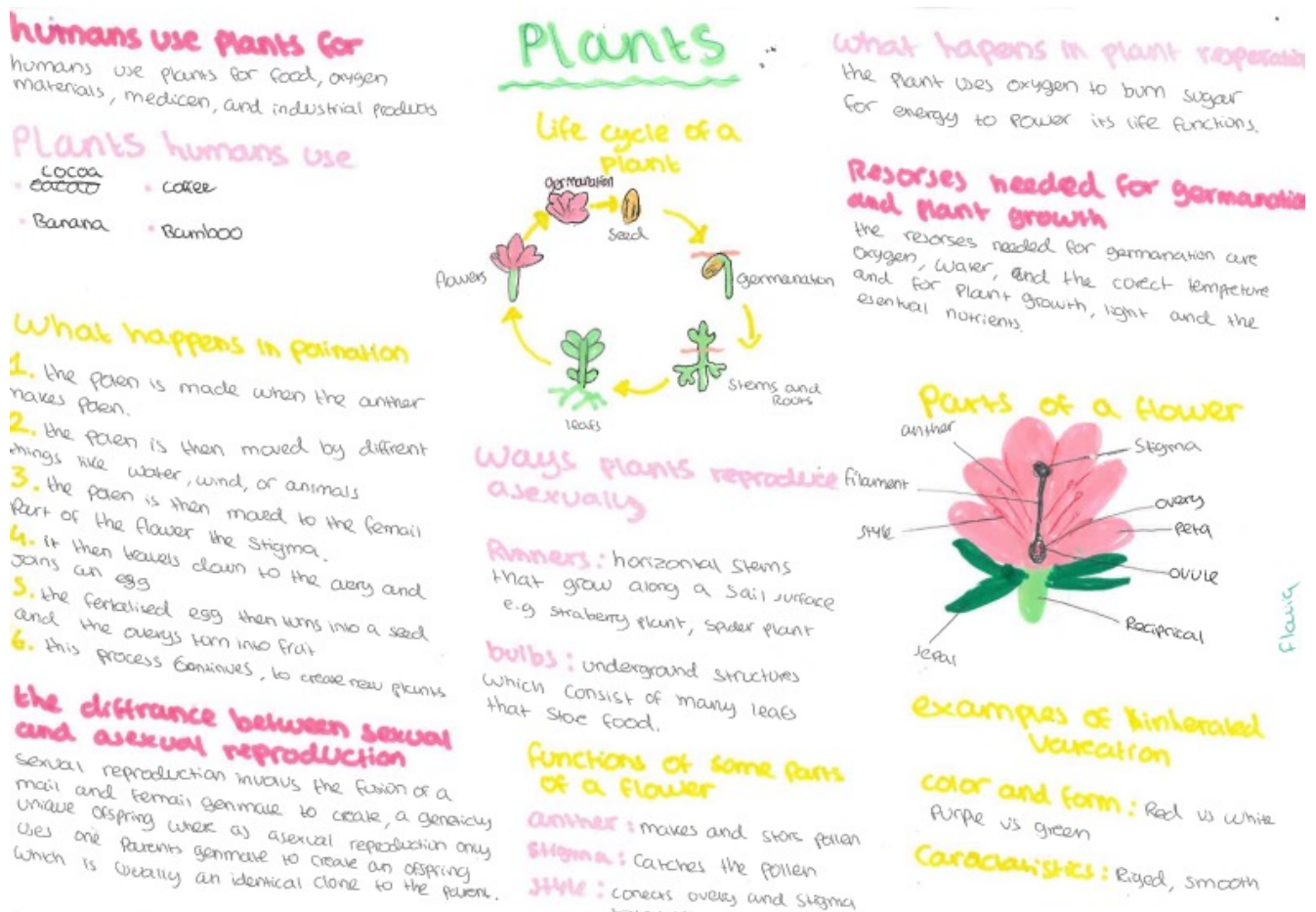


Image 2 E.T. Plants and reproduction

Identifying and Developing Lines of Inquiry in IB Visual Arts Practice

Greg Morgan | Head of Art and DT, Lead Teacher for Creative Projects, Director of UAL Foundation Diploma



“Cultivate students’ ability to utilise visual media as a speculative instrument.”



Experimental drawings by Y12 IB Artist developing LOI imagery and ideas

Introduction

My intention for my SGBIS Action Research project centered around applying the visual practice methodologies, outlined in Graeme Sullivan’s seminal work: ‘Art Practice as Research’ (2005) as a means to engage with Studio Habits Of Mind based approaches, in relation to the 2025 IB VA Inquiry Portfolio and Artist’s Project components. This study potentially provides evidence to help measure the impact of my work in co-authoring both of these components for the IBO.

Purpose

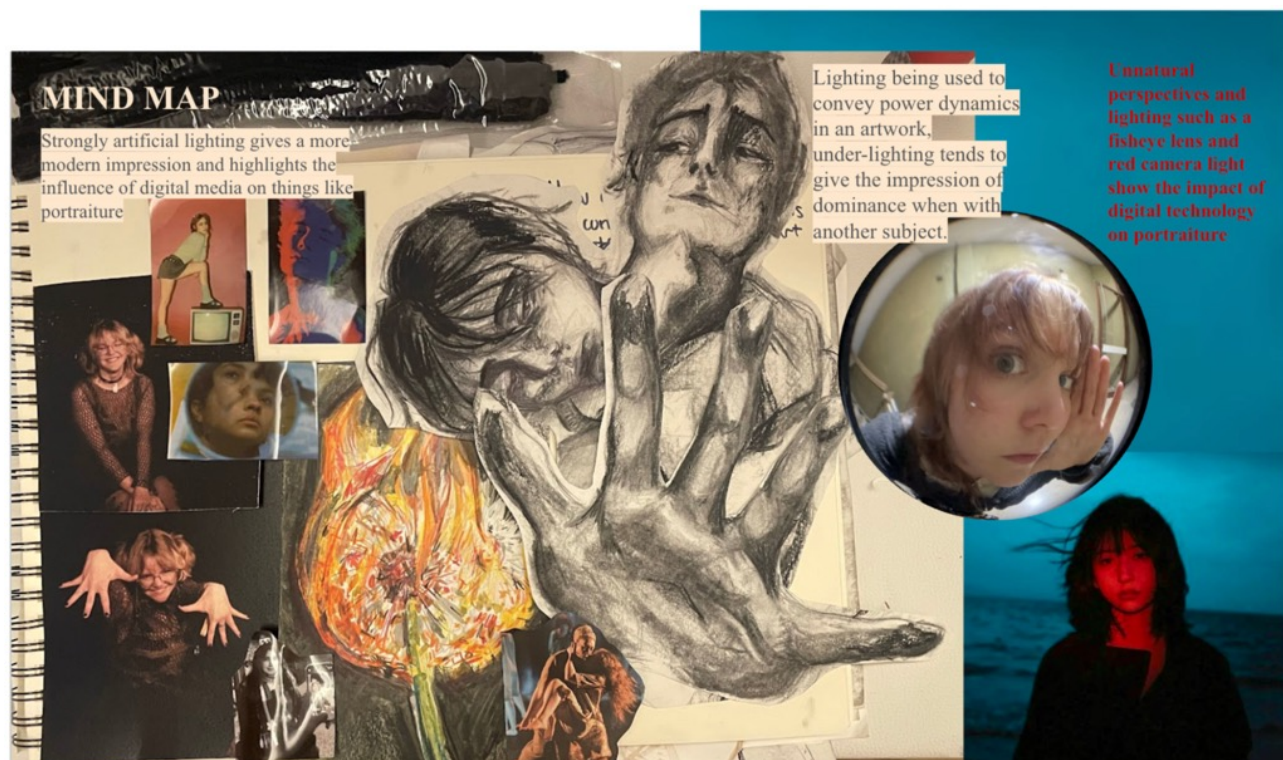
As a visual practitioner, I wish to continue research carried out in my two previous Masters degrees, and ongoing work for the IBO, in which I explored visual art making strategies to undertake and record

diverse forms of research. I sought to expand my own creative practice, whilst strengthening student engagement and success with two innovative aspects of the new Visual Arts specification.

From a pedagogical perspective, this initiative is significant as it aims to cultivate students’ ability to utilise visual media as a speculative instrument for generating varied Lines Of Inquiry (LOIs). This approach seeks to shift the educational focus toward the process of exploration and away from a singular emphasis on producing summatively graded, “resolved” artistic outcomes.

The LOI explained (website resource developed for this project)





Example SGBIS Y12 Visual Arts Journal Page: Student explores LOI 'Impact of lighting to convey power dynamic'

Methodologies

I struggled with the AR model during my MA in Education. It contrasts significantly with the archetypal, open ended strategies of Art and Design practice. It was certainly not a system that I sought to revisit during my second MA in Illustration.

Social science and educational AR projects traditionally rely on empirical, systematic, and interpretive frameworks to study human behaviour and institutional practices, from an objective or reflective distance. As an Artist-Teacher, I am more drawn to Graeme Sullivan's visual arts-centric research methodology, which reframes artistic practice itself as the primary site of knowledge production.

AR typically employs structured qualitative or quantitative methods to solve specific problems or understand social phenomena, through linguistic and statistical data. Sullivan's "Art Practice as Research" paradigm asserts that the

studio process is inherently a form of critical inquiry, where the artist-researcher generates dynamic, non-linear, and visual knowledge. This leans towards the case study approaches, that I found relevant within my final MA in Education dissertation and much of the research for my MA in Illustration

I initially intended to produce the entire project with no written element whatsoever. In my ideal version the project would develop and exist somewhere between postmodern ethnography and a composite/multifaceted artwork in its own right (!)

Initial intentions

Adhering to the Action Research (AR) framework as strictly as I could manage, I intended to apply and compare two distinct approaches within the early stages of the DP one visual arts course, that would enable students to begin to identify and develop lines of inquiry (LOI) for their Art Making Inquiries Portfolios. Regarding longitudinal comparison of data; I am working with the

inaugural SGBIS DP VA cohort to navigate this new Visual Arts specification. Consequently, it is not possible to measure their success, development, or creative outcomes against the benchmarks of previous years.

Approach 1

The first approach centred on the use of two weeks of open ended, studio based workshops employing unfamiliar media and approaches to engender ideas and imagery. These included cyanotype photography and drypoint engraving. Media with which (crucially for the purposes of this project) I was also unfamiliar. This IB VA cohort includes several very high achieving GCSE artists. I hoped that being forced to work in unfamiliar ways would help us step outside of our comfort zones, in terms of idea and image generation. It was intended that in the first cycle this would help to generate formal or visually inclined lines of inquiry.



Student Journal page showing development of ideas through experimentation with cyanotypes

Approach 2

The second approach built upon my own extended experimentation with photography over the previous summer, as a means to identify possible lines of inquiry. Students would undertake photographic research without preconceived ideas of themes and direction. They would subsequently analyse the work that they had been inclined to create, in order to identify their innate areas of interest. It was intended that this cycle would particularly help to generate conceptual or thematic lines of inquiry.



Greg Morgan 2025. Photograph from LOI series : How do I exist as both observer and observed in the age of digital media?



Y12 Student Journal page developing themes and ideas prompted through photography

Unforeseen circumstances

When planning these projects I had not anticipated the high rate of absence for Year 12 students in the first weeks of the Autumn term. Important events including MUN, Duke of Edinburgh and Umbria trips, plus some significant timetable complications, eroded the lesson time available to the students and myself at this foundational stage of their course.

Adapting the project

I was forced to reshape the AR project into a case study that might generate transferable approaches to LOI development. I focussed on the use of photography as a stimulus to identify and develop conceptual and thematic LOIs. I was able to salvage some time to experiment with cyanotypes with a pair of students who did not participate in the Umbria trip. They subsequently taught the process to their peers.

Modelling the identification of LOIs

A key task that I undertook alongside the students was a purposeful, reflexive review of our own recent photography and pages from our sketchbooks and journals. We arranged these images into visually or conceptually linked subgroups. These pages formed the basis for critiques that spawned a series of possible LOIs that were then developed further within Visual Journals and through resolved artworks.

[Example GM modelling of task 1](#)

[Student 1 response example](#)

[Student 2 response example](#)

[Student 3 response example](#)

LOIs generated through this exercise included:

- How can colour display emotions that form alone cannot show?
- How can I represent physical and metaphorical gaps in my art?

- How has society been engineered to associate different forms, shapes, and colours, with varying genders?
- How can nuanced interactions between individuals express their otherwise uncommunicated desire for connection within a polarising society?
- How can I use graphic design aesthetics to expose the gap between edited online personas and the emotional realities behind them?

These raw LOIs were subsequently recursively tested, developed and refined across media including: paintings, printmaking, film/video, installation, bookmaking, stop motion animation, performance, mask making, sculpture, ceramics, jewelry casting and fibre arts.

Perhaps the clearest evidence that the project is on the right track, came in the form of a meeting between two of my Y12 VA students and Dr Sabina Sorrentino, during her recent visit to SGBIS. Sorrentino's many roles for the IBO

include overall authorship of the 2025 VA curriculum, particularly including refining the concept of LOIs.

The students explained the processes that had led to their various ‘Lines of Inquiry’ project outcomes that were installed on the F floor corridor. My subsequent discussions with Dr Sorrentino and the students indicated that they were on the same page in terms of understanding and outcome.

So what are we left with?

The development and associated outcomes are documented within these student-centric websites, tasks and research that I created to support the project. Please note that you will need a SGBIS Google account to access these sites and resources.



[LINK GM \(Google Site\)](#)

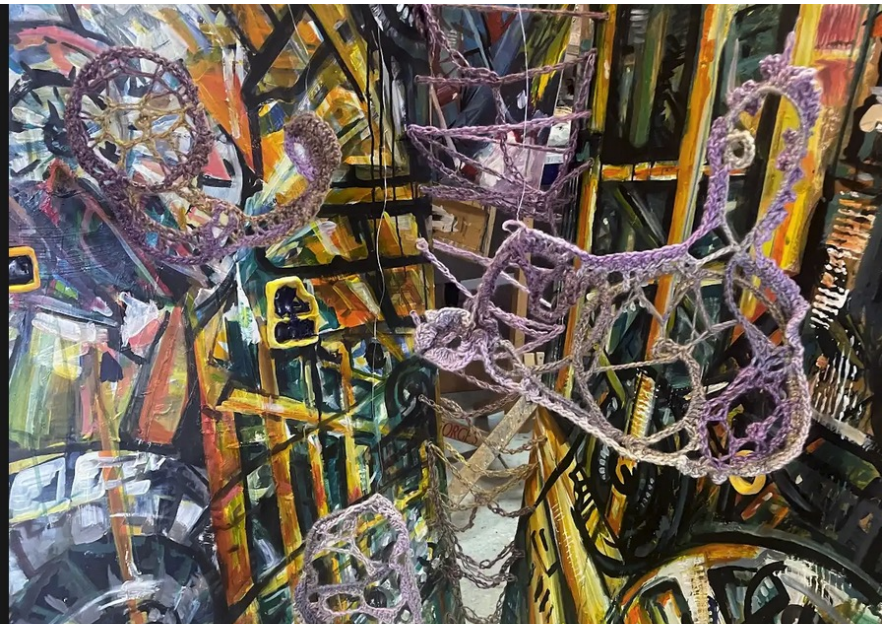
[LINK \(Student tasks\)](#)

[LINK Lines of Inquiry VAJ Task](#)

[Example student work](#)



ROBERT MICKELSEN is a skilled artist who uses the medium of glass to create intricate sculptures. He manipulates the molten glass into either extremely organic and flowing forms, which are allusive to forms often found in nature, but he also exploits the rigid and mechanical forms that he can produce with the glass. This leads to Mickelsen's organic biological structures, including Great Sea Anemone and Skyvansil. These forms mimic stereotypically female or nurturing silhouettes, directly supporting my Line of Inquiry into whether gender can be non-verbally communicated through abstract form. I will apply his use of reflective surfaces and flowing line to my upcoming glass sculpture designs to evoke a sense of living, breathing anatomy within a rigid environment. On the left side of this page, I used the inspiration which I obtained from Mickelsen to initiate some designs for my own hypothetical glass sculpture. I tried to mimic the reflective aspect of glass, as well as pulling different forms from Mickelsen's art.



Student VAJ and resolved artwork derived from LOI process

What next?

This is not an elegant or resolved piece of Action Research. Hopefully it can be of interest as a work in progress.

I am delighted with the discussions that this open ended approach to LOIs has engendered. The 2026-27 IB Art class is larger than usual at 15 students. This has allowed me to reflexively refine these emerging ideas and approaches across a

group representing a particularly diverse array of aptitudes and inclinations.

I hope to continue to refine and develop the collaborative approaches begun in this initial rough draft, with future IB VA cohorts. It will also provide possible directions for the initial stages of our new UAL Foundation Diploma course.

Positive Reinforcement to Increase Boys' Behaviour and Engagement

Raniero Bei | Head of MFL, Head of Italian A, Head of TOK



“A safe and generally happy classroom environment has often led to groups of boys being particularly dominating.”

During the course of these many years as an Italian teacher in our school, I have predominantly taught classes of Italian A (advanced, first language), whose students are all Italian and feel particularly “at home” as they can express themselves in their own language and share more openly their views. This comfortable setting, which always had the advantage of having a safe and generally happy classroom environment, has often led to groups of boys being particularly dominating and causing behaviour issues which often led to underperforming and lower achievement. This has been particularly evident when the class had 2 or 3 boys, generally close friends with each other. Therefore, when we were given the opportunity to carry out an action research project I decided to focus on **The impact of male group behavior on learning outcomes.**

Initially, I wanted to focus on a sample of boys from different year groups (2 per keystone) and I picked some boys from Y9, Y10 and Y12-Y13, and planned to gather some feedback from their teachers about their general behaviour in class. However, I was soon made aware of the issues with this group selection, both from an ethical point of view and the presence of confirmation bias. Thanks to some valuable initial feedback, I realised that I was starting from the assumption that the group was a problem before data collection and was selected on the basis of my judgment of boys who are usually problematic and are generally seen as “naughty boys” or underachieving. At the same time, I realised that the sample was too big to allow me to come to some

conclusions and tangible results in the time frame available.

I therefore reset the whole field and decided to do a case study on 2 boys I teach only, one in Y12 and one in Y13.

Literature review

Thanks to my critical friend, who had explored the same field in his project last year, I looked at similar case studies in the UK and read some articles which showed how behaviour patterns were connected to low attainment in IGCSE. The starting point was the same: boys who can be disruptive and express it verbally and with body language and a dominant presence in the classroom, which often leads to underachievement. The outcome of these studies showed that some strategies were successful, particularly:

- Verbalising success
- Accountability for others
- Public praise
- Change of seating plan

With this background of existing literature, my critical friend's project on similar scenario, I used the following methods to conduct my research:

Methods

Before starting I talked to the boys, explained the field and scope of my research and gained their consent. I used three methods to gather qualitative data on their present performance:

1. Interviews: I interviewed both students separately before starting

the project, after explaining the aims and obtaining their consent. The interview went around these questions: a) Think about a recent lesson where you felt really interested and time seemed to fly by. What exactly was happening in that class, and what were you doing that made it feel that way? b) In a typical lesson, what are the main things that usually cause you to lose focus or lose interest in what's being taught? c) What type of activities or types of lessons do you think help you to stay focused and engaged? d) How much do you think the people sitting around you, or the way the teacher interacts with you, changes how you behave and work during a class? e) Think about the different ways teachers talk to you during a lesson—whether they are praising your work, explaining something, or correcting your behavior. What kind of tone or approach makes you want to focus and do well, and what kind of approach makes you want to tune out or give up? These questions were the starting point of an open discussion.

2. Observations of students in all their lessons: I observed each student in all their diploma classes, and gathered my observations looking particularly on where the student was sitting and next to whom, his general engagement and level of distraction, his participation in discussions and activities, and the way the teacher approached them (how and how many times during the lessons).

3. Questionnaire to the teachers observed: after the observations, I sent the teachers the following questions:

Do you have a seating plan for him, or does he sit where he wants?

How often do you address him during a lesson? Is this usually for positive or negative reinforcement?

What do you think makes him less focused or distracted?

What strategies do you think are more effective to keep him focused and on task?

Any other comments?

Not every teacher responded, but the answers received helped me to gather further evidence of the teachers' perception of the 2 boys.

Findings

The initial aim of my research was to identify ways to reduce the dominance of boys' behaviour in my classroom, and find strategies to reduce this. When interviews were conducted, both boys felt more engaged when they were working on their own and they found the topics interesting. As one boy was in Y12 and the other in Y13, it was evident that the boy in Y13 showed more motivation, being towards the end of his diploma and nearer his exams; this came out both the interviews and in the observations. I would summarise my findings with the following points and strategies:

Seating plan

Both students said they worked better when sitting on their own or with a seating plan where they were not next to a friend. Both students sat next to a friend when they could and this was an evident cause of distractions, also confirmed by the teachers' responses after the lessons. This is a simple but important strategy which I have implemented with both boys. The boy in Y13 sat away from his two friends for the remaining months of the school year and this increased his participation, attention and focus. The boy in Y12 is now sitting

at the front without distractions and on average, he now contributes at least twice per lesson and takes regular notes, compared to the scattered ones he had before.

Teachers' positive reinforcement When students were asked question e), they both said that, throughout their years in senior school, they often felt as "bad students" or that some teachers "did not like them". This was more evident in the Y12 student and less in the Y13 student who said that he had that feeling "only with subjects he enjoyed less" and, consequently, a more difficult relationship with the teacher. This was confirmed by my classroom observations, where in some lessons he was contributing more, appeared more at ease and smiling, while in others he appeared more tense and less proactive. The student in Y12, instead, had this perception in all his lessons. In the lessons observed, three teachers called him at least five times during the lesson, addressing him for negative reinforcement, such as: "Can you please stop doing that?" "Where is your book?" "Stop talking, please" "Why are you not taking notes?" . The student in Y13 was reprimanded only three times in all the lessons observed, to keep him focused and, once to ask him to sit with a different partner. In some lessons, particularly maths and Biology and ESS, both students worked on their own and quietly made some good contributions, but this was not praised individually or in front of the class. This observation made me realise that I often had the same attitude towards both students and sometimes used the same wording or sentences to address them. The teachers who answered my questionnaire after the observation, confirmed this attitude: "I aim to praise where praise is due, however, on reflection, I give lots of prompts like "xxxxx how are you getting on?", "focus", "quiet please" etc... or "He doesn't appear to have his mind in

lessons at all, he is almost always focused on something other than the work. “

Overall, my observations showed that students had a similar experience in all lessons, and mine was not different as I initially thought, due to the sense of “familiarity” of being in an Italian safe environment, and all teachers had the same approach towards them, which often caused the same reaction from the students.

Outcomes and reflections

The process and outcome of this action research project have been a positive and useful reflection on my teaching practice, and it led to the following conclusions:

- My cultural assumption that boys tend to be less engaged or misbehave in my classes because they are Italian natives and therefore more at ease was wrong. What seems to increase the issue is the greater likelihood of them being with their peers, creating a sense of reliance on one another. This can be addressed by seating them apart and encouraging them to work independently from each other.
- The tendency to be less engaged or to misbehave increases when they feel they are not good enough, are always being picked on, or believe that their teachers do not like them.
- Praise and positive reinforcement naturally increase their participation and, consequently, their interest in the subject.

- A mental shift on the part of the teacher from a negative to a positive approach, which can be hard at the beginning, gradually changes both students’ and teachers’ perceptions and creates a climate of collaboration and respect.

Since the end of my project I have implemented these strategies, not just with the two boys in my case study, but with others in lower year groups, and this has started to have a positive impact on my daily experience and practice, showing that a change of perspective and small steps can make a difference in teaching and learning.

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What Makes an Excellent Junior School Library

Andy Johnson | LSJS Librarian



“The creation of a dedicated Junior School library, as a result of the school relocation, gave us an opportunity to renew and rethink the purpose and use of the library space.”

What I really wanted to call this article was “How can a school library be compared to a Mars Bar?” Those of a certain age will remember the advertising slogan A Mars a day helps you Work, Rest and Play. These were my three intentions for the use of our new library space.

The creation of a dedicated Junior School library, as a result of the school relocation, gave us an opportunity to renew and rethink

the purpose and use of the library space. Despite limitations on space and budget resources, we wanted to create a welcoming area where young readers would develop a love of reading and understand how to use it as a reference point to supplement their classroom learning.

The first step was to ask the children “What makes a great library?” and from those responses the library was brought into being.



The Background

Historically, both the junior and senior schools shared a library space, with a section dedicated to junior school books. This served the purpose of a lending library, but was restrictive in terms of it being a resource of limited availability to junior school pupils, as each class was allotted a time period just once a week, or fortnight.

The relocation of the Junior School into a dedicated building, gave the opportunity to rethink how the library was used and provide more occasions for children to use it.

The Problem

We wanted to identify if, in the face of modern technology and Internet resources, was there still a need for books and indeed a library at all? This has been a question asked for some years as the Internet has grown, with alarming research titles such as “Are Libraries Necessary? Are Libraries Obsolete?”

Having a blend of adults within the school, some who remember life before the Internet, and some who have only ever known the Internet, gives a perspective of traditional against modern methods of reading and research. Hence I took on an action research investigation on how to make the new library more than a room full of books.

Making the strong link between traditional paper books and modern technological access to learning would, we hoped, hold back from library obsolescence.

We wanted to make the library an appealing place to visit and learn in - not only following close classroom curriculum tracks, but to encourage children to enhance their own interests and discover new reading topics and genres.

One research example was focussed on how the modern library is no longer a few shelves of outdated dusty books, but a learning vehicle with the whole of the Internet able to support its function:

‘As libraries move into the future we will continue to see a blend of the old and the new. Libraries have evolved to respond to new needs, employing new technologies, but have kept the essence of what they have always been—a community resource, responding to whatever their community needs.’

Silka et al (2013)

By blending these two themes together, we saw the opportunity for our new library space to become a school community learning hub where traditional book-based learning could be supplemented and enhanced by modern technology

So, what did we do?

We wanted to put the child at the centre of this project, so very early in the school year each class was asked the question “What makes a great library?” The question was then subdivided into ‘Must, Should and Could’ sections so that answers could be made more specific about what is absolutely necessary down to the inspired ideas that could add a touch of magic to the experience of a visit to the library.

Small groups shared and recorded their ideas and the results were collated.

What did we find out?

Analysis of the results of the survey showed a gradual increase in reading challenge by specific author or theme of books, which would support the notion that children will grow into a specific taste for genres of reading material. Surprisingly all of Key Stage 2 requested that comic-style books were available in the library. These we typically refer to as ‘graphic novels’ but include the classic large-page comic style such as Asterix and Tintin through the novel style Dog Man and Babysitters Club and on to the children’s novel-style of Captain Underpants with illustrations on every page.

A common theme of the results from all classes was to do with the library environment and how to make it a welcoming space. Consequently the mood of lighting and furniture was recognised as vital to make the space different from their normal classroom setting. This observation was supported by a ‘favourite reading place’ competition where children submitted photographs of themselves reading at home - cushions, blankets and soft toys were very much in evidence.

The second survey was conducted when the library had been operational for some 2½ terms, and therefore can be used as a reasonable yardstick for this cohort of children who would remember their former limitations and be able to compare that with what their ideas had contributed to.

Conclusion

Analysis indicates that we have largely succeeded in making the new library a place that children enjoy coming to and are satisfied with the book choices available. The observed evidence of increased

footfall of library users indicates that the facility has been readily added to the children’s toolkit of learning opportunities. The library is a busy room with: regular class visits across all ages, use as a daily classroom, a ‘quiet space’ for individualised, small group and 1 to 1 learning, lunchtime and after school club activities

Further investigation into the merits of Graphic novel texts is a possible next step. Whilst some may be sceptical about how useful a comic strip may be for developing a reader’s imagination, there is research evidence to suggest that they do have a use.

“Research shows reading graphic novels leads to improved reading and comprehension skills for all students. And studies demonstrate that children and teenagers who read graphic novels have improved, more positive attitudes towards reading.”

The Conversation 03/05/2026 (online)

Again, as observed in our library, the Graphic novel shelf is very popular amongst all age groups and children are seen to work through a full set of books.

Deliberate ‘moving on’ strategies have been employed in the library with a Read Something New campaign during book week and the production of a Next Steps book list to help developing readers move into reading more chapter-style children’s fiction. During International Week we will run the popular ‘Drop Everything and Read’ campaign - but with the additional twist of encouraging the use of mother tongue books / other language books / and inviting parent readers to read traditional tales in home languages.

The experience makes me want to reflect on the year, sit back and enjoy a chocolate bar ... a Mars Bar perhaps?

Use of Graphic Organisers in IB Business Management

Michelle Gardner | Head of Economics & Business Management

Martin Herben | Teacher of Business Management & Economics



“Metacognition is the learner’s ability to be aware of, reflect on, and direct their thinking.”

1. Google Gemini, prompt “is there an article that links the use of graphic organisers with metacognition AND dual coding?”

1.0 Introduction

At our school, Business Management in the IB Diploma Programme is a new subject for students when they enter the sixth form years. This means they need to learn new concepts, content and exam techniques. Within a non-selective school setting and a departmental philosophy of inclusivity, the classes consist of students with varying levels of academic performance from those aiming for top universities to those on the certificate programme in combination with our school’s High School Diploma. As such, careful scaffolding of responses to exam questions, particularly the longer essay style questions has been a key element of day-to-day teaching. It was decided after completing a CPD programme into dual coding last academic year that there might be a need to create a visual aid to assist students in the classroom with those tasks.

2.0 Literature Review

Oliver Caviglioli is one of the main researchers into Dual Coding, the idea that our brains process information differently depending on how it is presented and processed (Khabarova, n.d.). In classrooms, teachers overcomplicate ideas and concepts for students through the use of language (Norfolk Research School, 2017). This includes both the language and subject knowledge itself, but also the language environment in which it is used. His conclusion is therefore to simplify complex ideas in a visual way that allows students to process the

information in a dually coded way.

Metacognition on the other hand is the idea of thinking about thinking or more specifically “metacognition is the learner’s ability to be aware of, reflect on, and direct their thinking” (EEF, n.d.). Metacognitive knowledge is knowing yourself and strategies that are effective alongside metacognitive regulation which is the planning, monitoring and evaluating thoughts in real time to allow you to complete any task.

A recent systematic review of empirical research (2023–2025) explicitly connects these concepts. It identifies graphic organizers (GOs) as visual aids that facilitate learning by helping students arrange information and demonstrate relationships between ideas, which directly encourages metacognition (Campoverde López & López López, 2022). The study concludes that the advantages of using GOs are fundamentally consistent with Dual Coding Theory, as they utilize both visual and verbal processing channels to improve long-term memory and conceptual understanding (Campoverde López & López López, 2022).¹

3.0 Method

For this action research, two Year 12 IB Diploma Business Management classes taught by two experienced teachers were selected. Both groups contained a combination of SL and HL students, and were approximately of the same size. They included students that were new to the school and students who have been here for many years. Students ranged in academic ability

as shown by IGCSE and CAT4 scores, as well as in SEN and EAL needs. On recent exams, they scored very similarly, too.

Two versions of a Graphic Organiser for 10-mark evaluate essays were created, as there is not a prescribed format of the essay students have to follow and there is choice in the amount of body paragraphs. These two versions are shown below:

10 marker

2 PEEL structure!

Question:

Point

Evidence

Theory:

Link to question

1 of: Limitation?

Drawback?

Missing info?

Point

Evidence

Theory:

Link to question

1 of: Limitation?

Drawback?

Missing info?

Answer, justify, missing info!

Finance?

steeple?

HR?

10 marker

3 PEEL structure!

Question:

Point

Evidence

Theory:

Link to question

Point

Evidence

Theory:

Link to question

Point

Evidence

Theory:

Link to question

1: Limitation?

Drawback?

Missing info?

1: Limitation?

Drawback?

Missing info?

1: Limitation?

Drawback?

Missing info?

Answer, justify, missing info!

Finance?

steeple?

HR?

In group A, the graphic organiser was used, while in the control group the graphic organiser was not used, instead relying on existing scaffolding strategies.

The students were surveyed twice using a Google Form to assess the level of self-reported confidence in their ability to write the essays.

Group A was also surveyed at the end of the action research project to gather information on the perceived usefulness of the created graphic organiser and potential improvements.

4.0 Results

Students in both groups - group A, with the graphic organiser, plus a control group were surveyed using google forms. Once after the first attempted 10 mark essay and again after their second essay attempt. They reported on their level of confidence. It is important to note that the group sizes are not statistically significant (being a group of 7 and 14 students respectively), thus any findings are to be treated with some caution, and used as guidelines rather than definitive results.

Fig 1: Reported Self-Confidence Group A

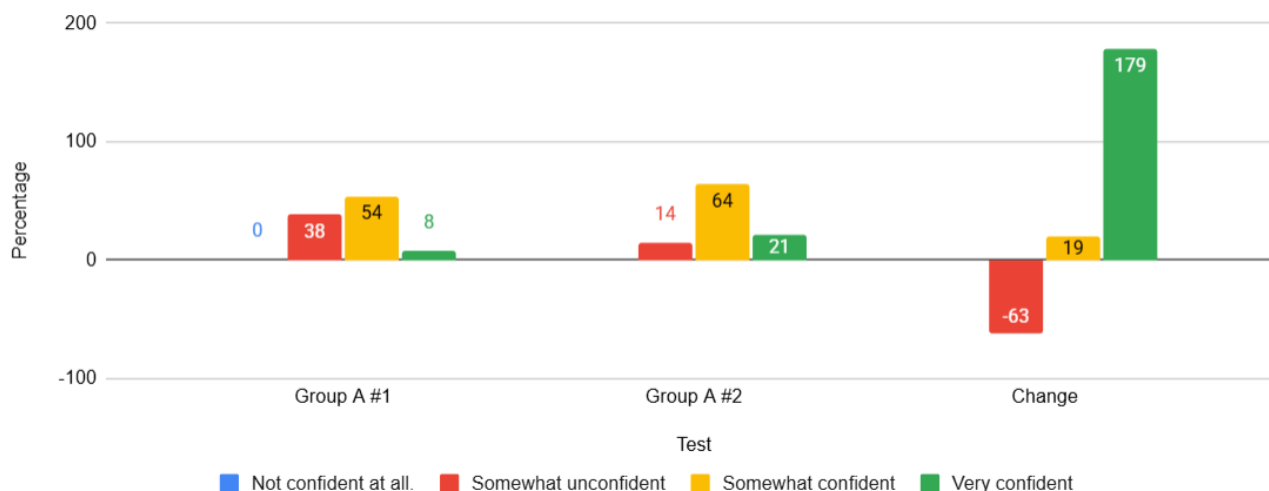
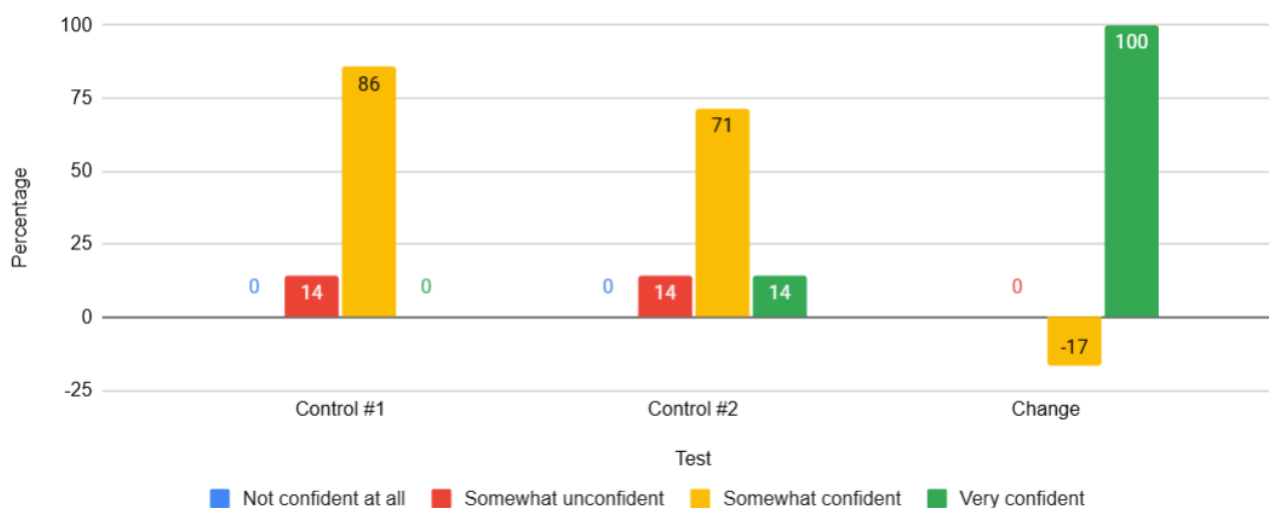


Fig 2: Reported Self-Confidence Control Group



Group A started at a lower level of confidence than the control group, with an almost 30% lower self assessment at the 'somewhat confident' category. In Group A, where the graphic organiser was used, there was a 24 percentage points decrease in those who were 'somewhat unconfident' and an increase in both of the

higher categories by between 10 and 21 percentage points. In the control group, they started with more of a 'somewhat confident' rating, and thus the gains were less pronounced, but 14 percentage points of students moved to the 'very confident' category, without the use of a graphic organiser.

Group A's responses to an additional survey regarding the perceived usefulness of the created graphic organiser and potential improvements are shown on the next page.

Figure 3 illustrates that the use of the graphic organiser helped with the essay structure and enabled students to organise their

essays more clearly, but that they didn't really help them to better understand the essay question itself. This is expected, as it is a

scaffold for 'all' essays in Business Management, rather than tailored to one type of essay question.

Figure 3: Reported Usefulness of Graphic Organiser

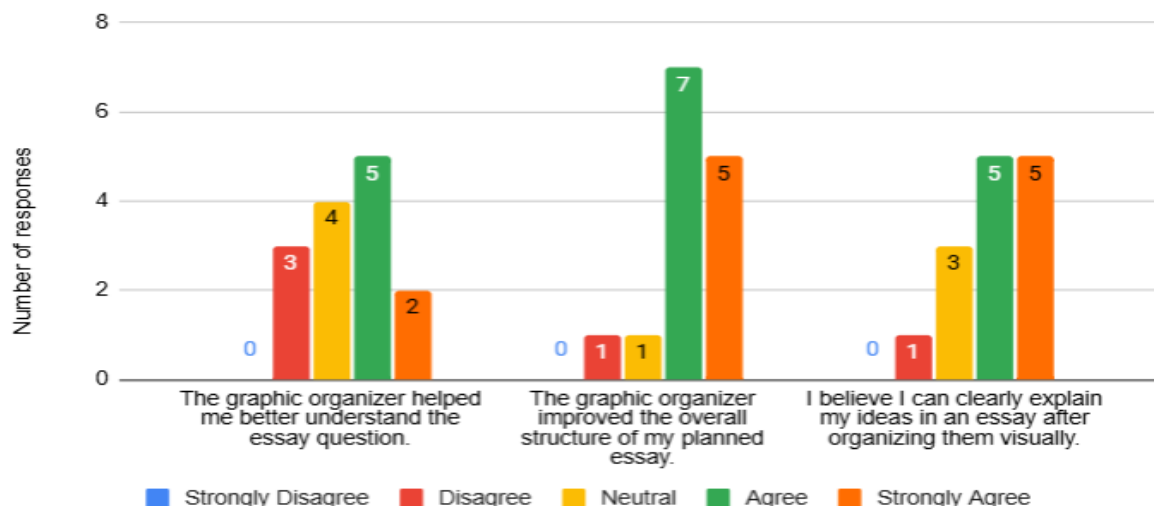


Figure 4: Reported Overall Experience

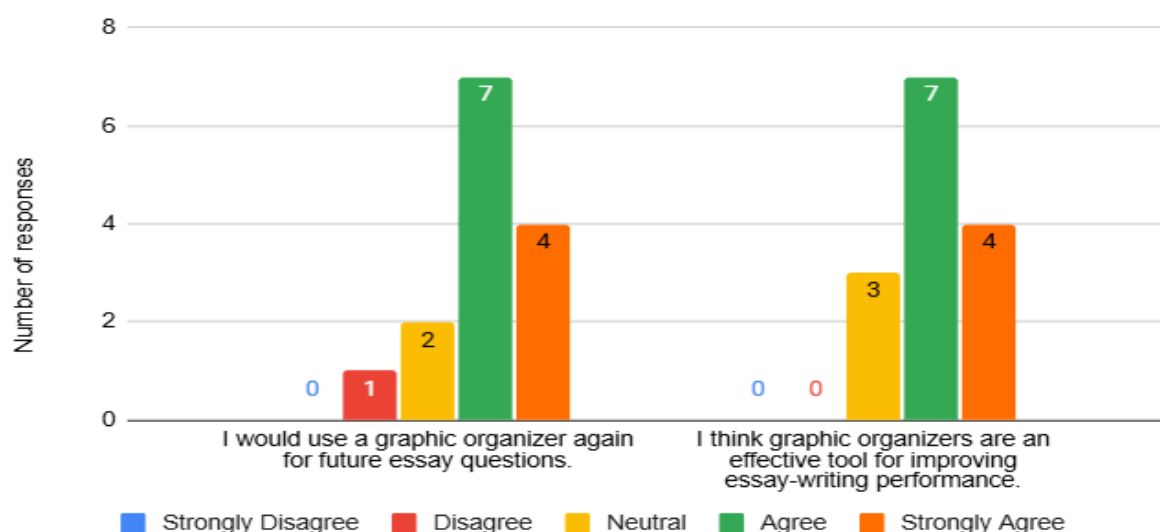


Figure 4 illustrates how students will use the graphic organisers in the future and that most agreed that it is an effective tool for improving essay-writing performance.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The overall conclusion is that both teachers, with and without the graphic organiser did facilitate an increase in confidence that students

felt when approaching this 10 mark essay. Despite the small sample size, the graphic organiser did aid those feeling less confident in improving, in comparison to the one student in the control group, who remained 'somewhat unconfident' without it. (Although this student had missed a significant amount of school, during this period, thus other reasons for their lack of confidence may skew their perception.) It is also the case that students access other sources of

information, online and through tutors that can influence their levels of confidence.

Most students state that they 'agree', or 'strongly agree' to continue to use the structure in future essays, which leads to the recommendation that the use of graphic organisers are helpful and thus will be used in the future by the Business Management Department.

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ACTION RESEARCH

The Feedback Frontier: How Year 11 Navigated the “8-Mark” Wilderness

Veryan Blake | Associate Head of Year (KS4), Head of Geography



“Moving away from simple ‘correct/incorrect’ markers toward self-regulation and strategy.”

Recognising that while feedback is a powerful lever for attainment, its effects are often inconsistent, this study implemented structured, exam-technique-specific homework booklets featuring integrated “feed-forward” cycles. Through a mixed-methods approach—including quantitative exam analysis and qualitative student interviews—the project explored whether a process-oriented, dialogic feedback model could demystify examiner expectations and bridge the “perceptual gap” between student effort and standardised performance. Preliminary results suggest significant gains in student confidence regarding high-tariff questions, though they also highlight a temporal lag in attainment outcomes.

The Feedback Paradox

We have all been there: a Sunday evening spent meticulously penning thoughtful, detailed comments on a stack of 30 essays, only to watch a student glance at the grade, tuck the paper into the deep, dark abyss of their bag, and never look at the

comments again. It is the educator’s heartbreak.

The literature tells us that feedback is a “potentially powerful lever” to improve learning. However, as the UCL/EEF systematic review notes, its effects are neither uniform nor unconditionally positive. In fact, if poorly constructed or focused solely on “what went wrong” rather than “how to fix it,” feedback can actually backfire, harming motivation or causing “feedback overload.”

In our international school context, I noticed a trend: our Year 11s were working hard, but their approach to feedback was passive. They knew that they were getting things wrong, but they weren’t always sure why or how to pivot their strategy for the next assessment. Drawing on Mandouit and Hattie’s (2023) perspective that effective feedback must answer “What is done well?”, “Where to improve?”, and “What to do next?”, I decided to overhaul our approach.

The Intervention: The “Homework Booklet” Revolution

Instead of the standard post-topic feedback sheet, I introduced a series of exam-technique-specific homework booklets. These weren’t just extra work—they were designed as a “feed-forward” mechanism. The booklets featured:

- **Granular Breakdowns:** A “Help and Hints” section that decoded “command terms” like Analyse or Evaluate.
- **Process-Oriented Feedback:** Moving away from simple “correct/incorrect” markers toward self-regulation and strategy.
- **The 8-Mark Breakthrough:** A specific focus on high-tariff, essay-style questions—the notorious “wilderness” where many marks are lost.

The “Hard Copy” Revolution: Strategy and Design

To ensure the intervention was robust, all three mixed-ability Year 11 classes participated in the project. We adopted a practitioner-led, quasi-experimental design, using mixed methods to compare current progress against previous cohorts and the students’ own Year 10 baseline data.

While we live in a digital age, we opted for a tactile approach. Each homework booklet was issued as a physical hard copy, with a digital “safety net” version available on Google Classroom only for those inevitable “the dog ate my homework” (or “I lost it”) moments. The goal was twofold: to intentionally reduce screen time and to increase “pen-to-paper” stamina, mirroring the physical demands of the final IGCSE exams.

Anatomy of the Booklet
Each booklet was structured into 6–8 cycles, each designed to simulate the anatomy of a real exam paper:

- The Warm-up: Multiple-choice and 1-mark identification questions.
- The Mid-tier: Short-answer questions (4–6 marks) focusing on structure and time-saving.
- The Summit: The “8-mark breakthrough,” requiring evaluated, evidence-based responses.

Incentivising Excellence

To ensure high engagement, the homework was “open book,” allowing students to use resources to build their Geographical knowledge. Crucially, the booklets accounted for 25% of the students’ attainment grade average. This high-stakes design aimed to foster two specific behaviours: a 100% completion rate and a “mastery mindset” where students strived for the highest possible mark in every cycle. This aligns with findings that feedback is most effective when students are given clear opportunities and incentives to act on it.

What the Students Said (The Good, The Bad, and The “Command Terms”)

The feedback from our student voice survey (n=29) was eye-opening. Students were surprisingly engaged, rating the frequency of booklet completion at a 4.26 out of 5.

The “Aha!” Moment

The qualitative data revealed that the booklet’s greatest impact was felt in the navigation of those scary 8 mark questions. Students noted

that their technique for essay-style responses improved significantly because the booklet helped them remember to state a cause, explain it, and—crucially—link it back to the question. One student highlighted that the booklet finally helped her pay attention to mark allocations and “what each command term is asking.”

The “Perceptual Gap”

However, the data also revealed a classic student dilemma. While they felt the booklet helped them change their approach (rated 3.59/5), their confidence that this would immediately reflect in their mock exam results was lower (rated 3.00/5).

As a researcher-practitioner, this identifies a “temporal lag.” It’s the academic equivalent of going to the gym for two weeks: you know your technique is better, but you’re frustrated that the six-pack hasn’t appeared yet. This “gap” shows we need to help students bridge the distance between understanding a technique and executing it under the high-pressure, timed conditions of an exam hall.

Scaling the Peak: Technology and Literacy

Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie’s meta-analysis suggests that feedback is more powerful when it targets self-regulation and process-level elements. In my study, the “Help and Hints” section served as a scaffold for this. However, as classes grow, how do we scale this “rich” feedback?

The literature points toward “Highly Informative Feedback” (HIF) models and learning analytics. While we aren’t using robots yet, the lesson is clear: we must cultivate feedback literacy. Even the best-designed feedback fails if a student doesn’t know how to interpret or act on it. Our booklets forced students to

activate the feedback by requiring them to revise their responses based on the “feed-forward” focus.

Reflective Synthesis: Was it Worth It?

The findings of this first cycle strongly support a shift toward dialogic and process-oriented feedback. By answering the learner’s questions of “Where am I going?” and “How do I get there?”, we moved the needle on student engagement.

Students reported significant improvements in their ability to structure complex responses, and many participants rated the impact on their exam approach at a 4 or 5 out of 5.

But there is always room for a “Cycle 2.” Students have already requested more “past paper volume” and—in a classic move of wanting to see the teacher’s secret handbook—the inclusion of integrated official mark schemes.

Lessons for the Staffroom

So, what can we take away for our own classrooms? If this project has taught me anything, it’s that feedback shouldn’t be a one-way street or a post-mortem of past failures. It should be a map for future success.

Instead of asking “What did you get wrong?”, let’s ask “How will you do it differently next time?” And maybe, just maybe, fewer of our comments will end up in the bottom of that school bag abyss.

Take-Away Points

- **Prioritise Process over Correctness:** Feedback that targets “how to do it” (strategies and self-regulation) is far more potent than simply pointing out errors.
- **Demystify the “Command Terms”:** Students often struggle not with the content, but with the language of assessment. Granular breakdowns of terms like “Analyse” or “Evaluate” are essential.
- **Build Action into the Feedback:** Feedback is most powerful when it is “activated”—meaning students must have an immediate opportunity to revise or apply the guidance.
- **Mind the “Perceptual Gap”:** Acknowledge to students that there is often a lag between improving technique and seeing it reflected in grades. Persistence is key.
- **Cultivate Feedback Literacy:** We must teach students how to use feedback. It is a skill that requires scaffolding and practice just like any other part of the curriculum.
- **Consider Multimodality:** Where possible, students value “dialogic” and multimodal feedback (audio, video, face-to-face) as it reduces ambiguity and conveys nuance better than text alone.

From Student Voice to School Change: Creating Belonging Through DEIBJ

Alessia Boromei | Teacher of Art & Design Technology



“Effective leadership begins by listening, understanding the needs of a community and working collaboratively to improve experiences for others.”

One of the most valuable lessons I learned through the COBIS Programme for Middle Leaders (CPML) was that leadership is not simply about holding a position of responsibility; it is about creating opportunities for positive change. Effective leadership begins by listening, understanding the needs of a community and working collaboratively to improve experiences for others.

My CPML Leadership Project focused on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging and Justice (DEIBJ), with a particular emphasis on belonging and representation within school life. The project emerged from a growing awareness, both within our school and across international education, that belonging is not a “nice to have” but a fundamental condition for learning, wellbeing and student success.

Research consistently demonstrates the importance of belonging within schools. Students who feel valued, respected and connected to their community are more likely to engage positively with learning, develop stronger relationships and achieve better academic outcomes (Walton and Cohen, 2011). Kelleher (2024) argues that belonging is the belief that one is academically and socially connected, supported and respected. Similarly, Healey and Stroman (2021) identify belonging as a universal human need that is closely linked to learning and wellbeing.

At the same time, educational research highlights the importance of representation. Pearson’s recent research found that many students continue to feel underrepresented

in what they study, despite increasing efforts to diversify curricula (Pearson, 2025). Panorama Education (2021) also emphasises the value of student and staff voice in understanding how inclusion and belonging are experienced within schools.

These ideas resonated strongly with discussions already taking place at St George’s through the DEIBJ Working Party. The group brought together colleagues from different departments to explore how our school could further strengthen diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and justice across both curriculum and culture. Early discussions highlighted that while St George’s already celebrates diversity through initiatives such as International Evening, Pride Month and International Women’s Day, there was an opportunity to make inclusion and belonging more visible and more explicitly embedded within everyday school life.

As part of my CPML project, I began by gathering student voice through surveys. Students were asked about representation, belonging and where they saw diversity reflected in their learning. The findings were encouraging but also thought-provoking. While many students identified examples of diversity within subjects such as English, History, Languages and Citizenship, a significant number felt that representation could be strengthened further. In particular, some students reported that they did not always see their culture, language or background reflected in what they learned at school. In response to this feedback, the

DEIBJ Club was launched in January 2026. The aim of the club was to promote inclusion, celebrate diversity and make different cultures, identities and perspectives more visible across school life. Importantly, the club was designed as a student-led space where students could actively contribute ideas and help shape initiatives. One of our first projects involved students learning graphic design skills using Photopea and creating a series of multicultural collages inspired by the work of artist Lucy Naland. Students also contributed to displays celebrating inspirational figures from around the world and helped redesign subject boards to better reflect the diversity of our global community.

Alongside visual projects, students developed resources for World Book Day, contributed to tutor activities such as “News Around the World,” and began planning activities for International Week. Current projects include student presentations exploring diversity in the curriculum and the development of a “Country of the Week” podcast, where students will share stories, traditions and interesting facts from countries represented within our school community.

Some members of the DEIBJ Club also took a leading role in the International Week assembly. Students shared personal reflections on their identities, cultural backgrounds and experiences within our international school community. They spoke about where they had encountered diversity, representation and freedom of expression in their lessons throughout the year, highlighting subjects and activities that had helped them feel seen, valued and included.

At the same time, my involvement in the DEIBJ Working Party provided an opportunity to contribute to wider school improvement discussions. During several face-to-face sessions, we explored curriculum representation across departments and considered how diversity and belonging could be embedded more explicitly within teaching and learning.

These discussions highlighted an important insight. While some colleagues initially questioned whether student survey findings reflected the reality of our curriculum, many agreed that diversity was already present within subjects but was not always visible to students. This shifted the conversation from asking whether diversity existed to considering how we could make it more explicit and meaningful.

As a result, the Working Party began exploring opportunities for greater cross-curricular collaboration and shared themes that could connect different subject areas. Although departments naturally approach content in different ways, we identified opportunities to strengthen links around identity, representation, belonging and global citizenship.

One proposal emerging from these discussions was the development of an International Week display, bringing together contributions from different subject areas to highlight global perspectives and examples of representation already embedded within the curriculum. The display aims to celebrate the diversity of our school community while making these connections more visible to students.

Through the COBIS CPML programme, I learned that leadership is most effective when it is values-driven, evidence-informed and collaborative. The DEIBJ Club and Working Party have provided opportunities to put those principles into practice while contributing to a school culture where students feel seen, valued and represented.

Although this work is still evolving, it has reinforced my belief that belonging should sit at the heart of school improvement. When students feel connected, respected and able to see themselves reflected in their learning environment, they are more likely to thrive. As educators and leaders, creating those conditions is one of our most important responsibilities.

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Implementing a Consistent Spelling Framework across Key Stage 2 CCJS

Kirsty Michel | Class Teacher



“I knew we needed a model where every child received the same high-quality provision, regardless of whose classroom they were in.”

While early phonics instruction often benefits from a highly structured, heavily resourced, and universally implemented approach, the pedagogical landscape frequently shifts once pupils outgrow early reading schemes. At St George's City Centre Junior School (CCJS), the transition from Key Stage 1 (KS1) into Key Stage 2 (KS2) brought an unintended shift from systematic instruction to fragmented spelling routines.

Within the Key Stage 2 curriculum, spelling can no longer be treated as a passive exercise in memorising isolated word lists; it must be taught as an active exploration of the rules that govern our language (Bowen, 2021). Research indicates that explicit, structured instruction in phonology, orthography, and morphology is essential for primary pupils to internalize how prefixes, suffixes, and root words connect (Nunes & Bryant, 2009). Without this systematic breakdown, students are forced to rely on visual guesswork, meaning that an insecure grasp of spelling rules quickly becomes a major bottleneck that stifles their writing fluency and overall literacy development (Graham et al., 2012).

The challenge facing modern educators is rarely a lack of commitment to literacy, but rather what research identifies as within-school variation. Studies by the OECD and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) highlight a stark educational reality: variation in pupil performance within schools is significantly greater than variation between schools. At Key Stage 2, this within-school variation is five times greater than between-school variance. This is a discrepancy that

widens cumulatively to 11 times by Key Stage 3.

To bridge this gap at CCS, I launched a targeted middle-leadership initiative during the 2025–2026 academic year. My goal was to move away from a “lottery” of provision and establish a robust, explicit, and consistent spelling framework across Years 3 to 5.

Step 1: Diagnosing the Provision Gap Through Data

To understand the true scope of the challenge, I began the project by conducting a diagnostic audit of our assessment data. I triangulated baseline metrics from the New Group Spelling Test (NGST), Quest Spelling assessments, and Spelling Shed Sounds and Patterns data from Years 3 to 6, which exposed wide disparities in attainment both between and within year groups.

This uneven landscape confirmed a real structural risk for me: the absence of a unified, progressive spelling curriculum beyond early phonics created inconsistent outcomes across parallel classes. The data and focus group discussion clearly demonstrated to me that without a centralised strategy, student outcomes were dependent on individual teacher approaches rather than a coherent whole-school progression. I knew we needed a model where every child received the same high-quality provision, regardless of whose classroom they were in.

Step 2: Creating Urgency and Building a Guiding Coalition

To transition this data from an abstract problem into a shared collective mission, I adopted John Kotter's (1996) Eight-Step Process for Leading Change. Kotter argues that change initiatives fail primarily due to a lack of situational urgency. I held an initial staff consultation and focus group to reduce institutional "blind spots" using Johari's Window framework, looking honestly at teacher self-efficacy and systemic barriers.

The qualitative feedback from the focus group revealed to me that staff were already operating in a state of high urgency. Teachers candidly expressed to me that they struggled to teach spelling effectively within crowded timetables and felt overwhelmed by compiling tracking data without a clear pathway to inform their daily practice. This professional honesty was incredibly encouraging; it signaled to me that there was a clear appetite for a structural solution.

To distribute leadership effectively, I formed a Guiding Coalition of phase and year group leaders. This distributed leadership model (Fullan, 2007) ensured that the initiative maintained grassroots credibility. I worked closely with these "spelling champions" from Years 3, 4, and 5, who helped me adapt the emerging framework to the unique demands of their respective cohorts.

Step 3: Designing the Vision and Action Plan

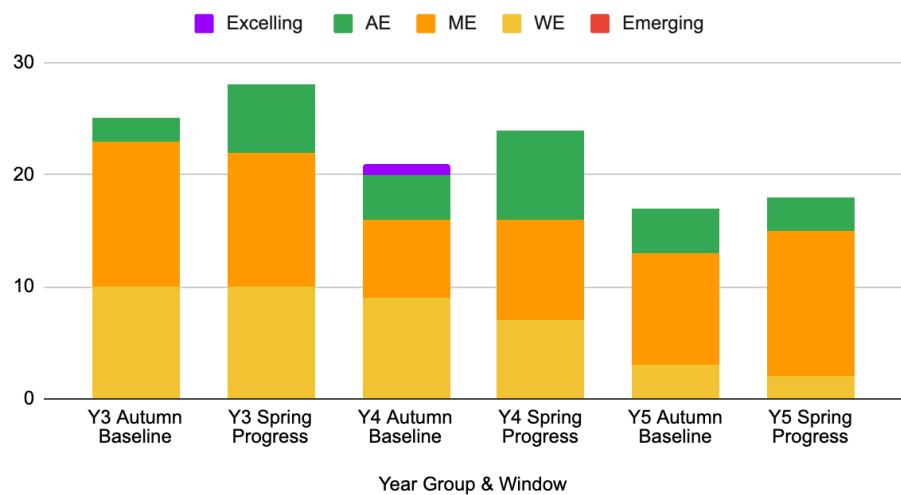
I formulated a strategic action plan designed to transition the staff from "will" to "skill" through targeted implementation windows

- Scheme Evaluation (October 2025): Evaluated diverse spelling methodologies. Selected a unified digital scheme due to its structured overviews, English National Curriculum (ENC) alignment, and automated retrieval paths.
 - Decision-Making Stage (November 2025): Navigated the choice of delivery models, opting for a centralised, explicit structure over an incidental one to minimise classroom variation.
 - Guiding Coalition Activation (November 2025): Initiated an exploratory trial phase in Years 3, 4, and 5 to test platform mechanics and establish baseline data.
 - Cross-Campus Inquiry (December 2025): Conducted invaluable learning walks at La Storta to observe existing morphology integration and streaming models within their timetables.
 - Whole-Phase Rollout (January 2026): Launched a coordinated Years 3–5 integration, establishing structured medium-term overviews to eliminate localised variation
- Pedagogical 'Top Tips' (Jan–May 2026): Introduced brief, teacher-led morphology strategies during routine staff meetings to build collective teacher efficacy.
 - Parental Engagement (March 2026): Delivered a parent workshop outlining the cognitive shift away from rote memorisation and toward orthographic pattern recognition.
 - Structural Review & Design Window (April–May 2026): Evaluate mid-year implementation data and gather staff feedback regarding workload and engagement to design a sustainable, long-term weekly delivery structure.
 - Co-Planning Staff Session (June 2026): Collaboratively review incoming student data to map out target phonetic/morphological focuses and pre-plan specific activity matrices for the first two half terms.

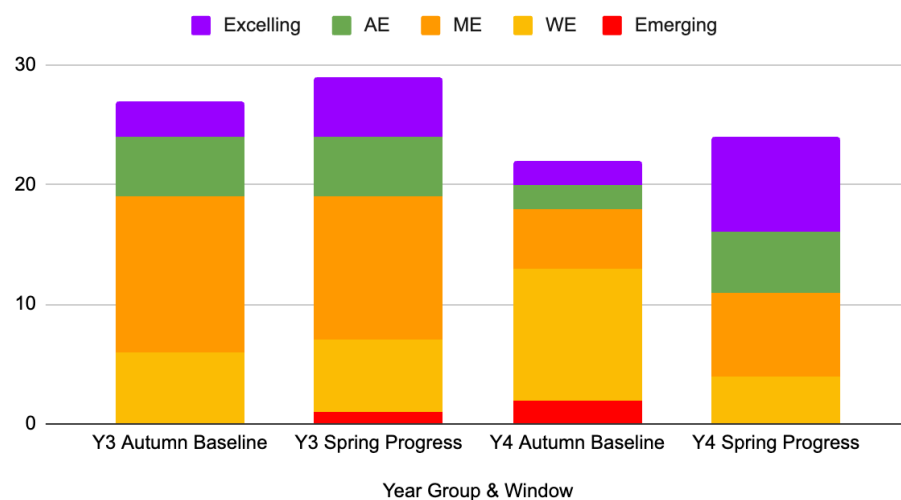
Step 4: Measuring Impact and Navigating Reality

When I reviewed our mid-year quantitative indicators, I was pleased to see a steady upward trajectory toward national benchmarks across all participating cohorts. For me, this confirmed that the presence of a structured spelling scheme was having a tangible, positive impact on student progress.

NGST Progress



Quest Progress



"In Year 3 we have been trailing Spelling Shed, the children enjoy the style of the worksheet, being able to work together in table groups to complete them and also exposure to new words such as 'anvil'. They find the online games fun and engaging, especially Bee Sighed. When asked if the worksheet were too repetitive, the children said they liked the fast pace and the format and that they enjoyed them. I have been sending some for homework and they have been well received."

Step 5: Instituting the Change and Securing the Legacy

To transition this project from a temporary initiative into a permanent fixture of our academic culture, I am focusing the final phase entirely on institutional legacy. The primary vehicle for this sustainability is a collaborative co-planning staff meeting I have scheduled for the end of the academic year. During this session, I will have teachers interact directly

with the tracking data of their incoming cohorts to prioritise the specific sounds and patterns they need to focus on in the initial weeks of the academic year, before baseline assessments are undertaken in September. I will also guide them to plan out the exact matrix of activities that will form their spelling routines for the first two half terms, ensuring continuity from day one.

The 4x Weekly Micro-Slot Model: Structure and Research Rationales

The central structural legacy of this project is the mandatory implementation of 10-to-15-minute spelling slots, delivered 4 times a week at the beginning of either an English reading or writing lesson. This model operates on an unchanging, predictable weekly rhythm: the exact same sequence of activity types is replicated every week for the duration of a half term.

Additionally, this consistent approach led to a noticeable lift in classroom energy, with student engagement increasing significantly across the daily sessions.

To navigate complex challenges like timetable limitations and the dilemma of whether to stream students by ability or stick to whole-class instruction with targeted interventions, I turned to evidence-based leadership (Robinson, 2011). By grounding my decisions in the data rather than assumptions, I was able to establish a clear, non-negotiable baseline of expectations for how spelling should look across the phase.

Ultimately, to sustain long-term momentum (Kotter's Steps 7 & 8), I determined that we must guard against the "streaming trap" (Hattie, 2009) and instead prioritise high-frequency, distributed practice (EEF, 2020) over rigid, top-down compliance.

2026-2027 Spelling Planning

Although the sound and spelling pattern will vary each week, this document outlines the half-term plan. Keeping the activities consistent will reduce planning time and help pupils build confidence and achieve success.

These lessons should be short 10-15 minute bursts at the start of your reading or writing lessons.

[Bank of resources](#)

September - October

Introduce Sound/Pattern				
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Homework
Spelling Shed Powerpoint	Word of the day	Spelling Shed fill in the blanks	Root word challenge	Spelling Shed homework Worksheet

November - December

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Homework
Spelling Shed Powerpoint	Frayer model Word Tree Morphology	Spelling Shed Worksheet	Spelling Pyramid	Spelling Shed homework Worksheet

This highly structured approach is deliberately grounded in cognitive psychology and vocabulary acquisition research to achieve three goals:

- **Predictability and Reduced Cognitive Load:** Sweller's (1988) *Cognitive Load Theory* demonstrates that when instructional routines are highly predictable, students do not expend limited working memory trying to understand how to do an activity. Instead, their cognitive architecture is freed to focus entirely on the spelling pattern or morphological structure.
- **High Success Rates and Automation:** Spacing spelling practice across four short, consecutive daily intervals leverages the Spacing Effect and Distributed Practice (Bjork & Bjork, 2011; EEF, 2020). Short, high-frequency retrieval blocks ensure information is repeatedly transferred to long-term memory far more effectively than a single weekly block. Words must be intentionally and explicitly taught rather than incidentally encountered if they are to successfully embed into long-term academic literacy (Harris et al., 2011).

- **Low Planning and Sustainable Workload:** For teachers, an unchanging half-termly matrix radically minimises planning friction. Because the structural format remains identical week-to-week, teachers only need to change the target word lists or focus rules within pre-existing templates, drastically cutting preparation time while keeping the pedagogical impact high.

Step 6: The Collaborative "Spelling Bank of Resources"

To support staff in executing these daily micro-slots efficiently without inflating workload, a centralised, dynamic digital folder was populated with a collaborative bank of resources. Rather than working in isolation, teachers can draw from three explicit pedagogical domains designed to embed these routines seamlessly into the weekly matrix:

1. **Morphology, Etymology, and Vocabulary Building:** High-impact visual frameworks—such as Word Tree Morphology, Root Word Challenges, and Word Connection Hexagons—that empower students to decipher unfamiliar words by manipulating prefixes, suffixes, and base roots.

2. **Gamified Retrieval and Cooperative Learning:** Interactive live classroom games (such as Spelling Shed Hives and Spelling Siege) alongside collaborative structure challenges like Headband Spelling, which gamify retrieval practice to boost student engagement and recall.
3. **Multisensory and Multisyllabic Consolidation:** Structured segmenting routines (such as Sounds and Syllables), spelling pyramids, and kinesthetic tracking methods that force isolated, visual analysis of tricky orthographic sections.

By structuring the repository as a living, open-access drive, staff are encouraged to continuously contribute and adapt templates, ensuring the project remains an evolving, school-wide collaboration.

Conclusion: Reducing the Variance

By moving away from an incidental approach to spelling, our school has systematically begun narrowing the gap of within-school variation. The ultimate success of the project lies not in short-term data spikes,

but in the structural framework left behind.

By formalising our 4x weekly micro-slots, reducing planning barriers through a shared resource bank, and anchoring accountability within collaborative teacher routines, systematic orthographic development will remain permanently embedded within the fabric of our daily academic provision. This ensures every child receives high-quality, predictable, and highly successful literacy support across Key Stage 2.

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Vocabulary Routines for Inclusion in Key Stage 3

Niki Sweetnam | Acting Head of EAL, Teacher of English



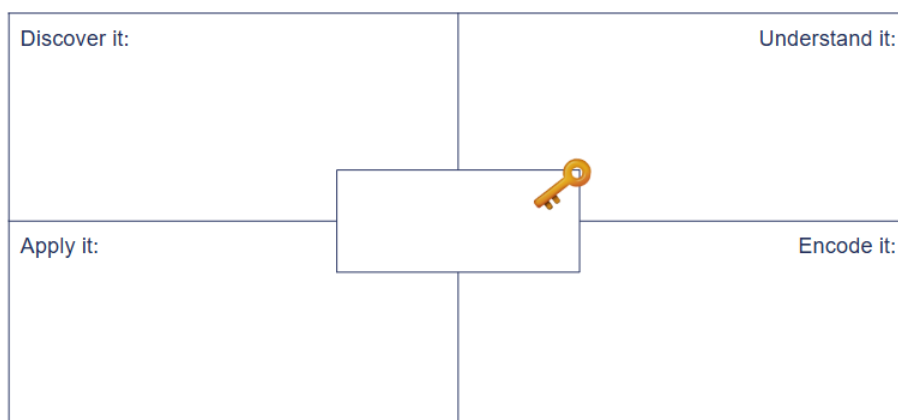
“Understanding the meaning of academic words becomes increasingly important as students transition from Key Stage 2 into Key Stage 3.”

Understanding the meaning of academic words becomes increasingly important as students transition from Key Stage 2 into Key Stage 3. During this phase their exposure to the language of academic literacy quadruples in what is coined ‘the language leap’ (Quigley, 2021).

Students who struggle with academic language will not be as successful at learning new content and new concepts through reading because their cognitive effort will be consumed with comprehension at a word and sentence level (Foorman et al., 2015). Vocabulary words used in texts continue to expand in number and complexity throughout schooling (Paris, 2005). This reflects the breadth of vocabulary across complex academic domains, and the depth of the content being covered of which students may have little or no prior knowledge.

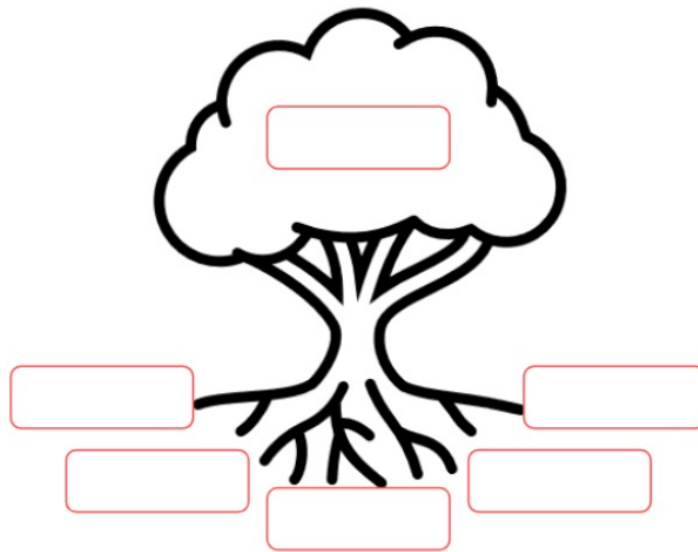
The Education Endowment Foundation’s guidance report on Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools (2019) recognises that literacy skills are both general and subject specific. It highlights how subject teachers often lack training in how to develop the language aspect of their discipline to equip students to write in line with the conventions of academic writing as ‘experts’ in that discipline. Nearly half of the words that students meet in academic reading are new or unfamiliar, so their ability to break down these words through analysis of their component parts (prefix, root word, suffix) and understand the contextual clues around them is crucial to learning (Harris et al., 2011). The two models below are particularly useful for representing word knowledge visually.

Fruyer model



Word family tree

Use prefixes and suffixes to build out from the root word
e.g. help - helpful - unhelpful
- helpless - helplessness



For multilingual learners, students with English as an Additional Language (EAL), and/or those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), the leap is even wider and can represent a significant barrier to curriculum access. There has been a 26% increase in Senior School enrolments in the last 5 years, bringing with it a proportionate rise in students with additional needs.

One zero-cost, high impact way to address this barrier is by embedding structured vocabulary routines in every lesson, so that the language needs of the lesson are anticipated, or recapped, and returned to at intervals throughout the lesson sequence to check understanding and retention and consolidate learning. Language, literacy and learning are inseparable and inter-dependent, as Professor Maggie Snowling so clearly explains in [this video](#).

My CPML leadership project focused on establishing these routines in Year 7 Group 1 History and Science lessons due to the volume of new words encountered in these subjects and the make-up of this particular group. Words need to be intentionally taught rather than incidentally acquired if they are to become part of academic literacy in the specific subject over time.

Mindful of reducing teacher workload, reducing barriers to learning, and reducing low-level disruption in the classroom, subject experts were empowered to embed vocabulary instruction into their existing classroom routines. Co-planning slots allowed us to look ahead at the vocabulary that would be encountered in the upcoming unit, and deliberately plan how to integrate it through low or no-prep activities such as the humble vocabulary slip. Variations on the slip were bulk printed on pastel

paper and pre-trimmed then placed in the staffroom pigeonholes as a 'grab and go' resource. A separate sheet of Top Ten Tips was also supplied, which summarised the previous three Teaching and Learning Bulletin posts from the EAL Department.

The vocabulary slip routines are simple, yet highly effective, and are flexible enough to be able to use for a range of purposes including

- Do It Now
- Elicit prior knowledge on a topic (in any language)
- Provide or match words and definitions
- Building topic glossaries
- Read, discuss, note and attend to new vocabulary
- Check retention of knowledge
- Translanguaging English - home language
- What word is missing in the sentence I've read out?
- Exit ticket/recap

I am going to read out some sentences. In each one, there will be a word missing. Write the word that best completes the sentence.		Write words you know to do with _____. You can write in your home language if you wish.		Use the glossary at the back of the book, or your wordbank, to write definitions for these words :		Read pages silently. Concentrate! Then read it out loud to your partner. Close your books to talk about what you've read. Write as many words as you can remember.	
Name :	Date :	Name :	Date :	Name :	Date :	Name :	Date :
1.	Clue - it begins with the letter	1.		1.		1.	
2.	Clue - it begins with the letter	2.		2.		2.	
3.	Clue - it's the subject-specific term for	3.		3.		3.	
4.	Clue - it's the opposite of	4.		4.		4.	
5.	Clue - it ends with	5.		5.		5.	
6.	Clue - the second part of this word is	6.		6.		6.	
7.	Clue - it's a synonym for	7.		7.		7.	
8.	Clue - it's used for	8.		8.		8.	
9.	Clue - it means	9.		9.		9.	
10.	2 points for this answer if you get it without any clues!	10.		10.		10.	

Dedicating the initial minutes of a lesson to explicit vocabulary focus anticipates needs on a whole-class level, sets a calm tone and instills learner confidence, creates a structured entry point, and helps students settle more quickly. Across the project, this ultimately increased student engagement, reduced low-level disruption and maximized active teaching time. At the time of writing I am still collating quantitative data beyond the 11% average increase in test scores in Science and the 66% of students who maintained or increased their attainment.

Qualitative feedback highlights a transformation in student autonomy as learners began independently utilizing their printed word banks, referring back to what they had read in the text book, talking to their peers about the language of the lesson, attending to subject-specific vocabulary, and organizing their notes more effectively.

Structured vocabulary routines transform the well known mantra 'Every teacher is a language teacher'

(DfE Literacy Strategy, 2023) into readily-implementable action with a tangible impact at no cost. I am very grateful to the many colleagues who collaborated to make this project successful, especially the heroic Jim Bullivant and Stephen Gilbert who so willingly brought their subject expertise to the table and thought aloud and honestly with me as we co-planned, planned ahead, tweaked plans and reflected on planning. I would also like to thank Mary-Clare for the opportunity to join the CPML, Matt, Jess and Fran as facilitators, my CPML peers, and Lilli with whom I co-led the Working Party on vocabulary routines.

Resource templates and ideas for use are linked [here](#) - please make a copy.

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CPML

Enhancing Student Organisation and Belonging in Year 7

Richard Lancaster | Joint Acting Head of Year 7, Teacher of Art and Lead Teacher for Wellbeing



“The aim was simple: to provide students with a practical, structured and reassuring resource.”

The transition from primary to secondary school is one of the most significant stages in a child’s educational journey. For many students, Year 7 represents excitement, independence and opportunity; however, research consistently shows that it can also be accompanied by anxiety, uncertainty and concerns around organisation, workload and belonging.

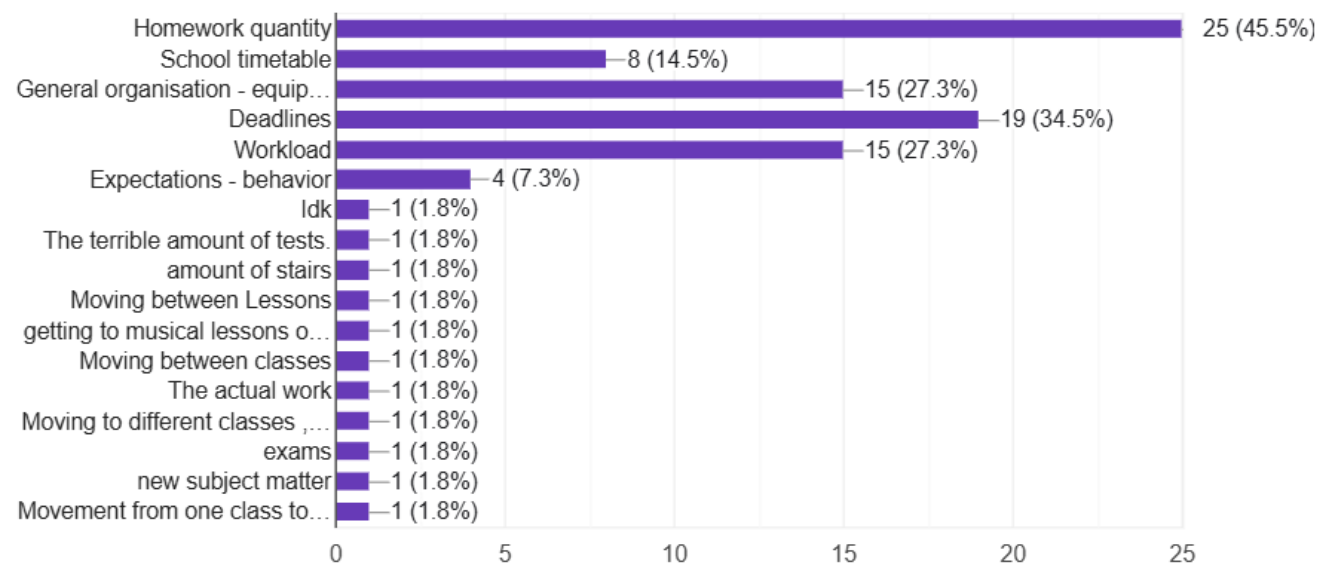
As acting Head of Year 7, I wanted to research and find solutions to these findings within our own school setting. It ultimately led to the idea to develop a physical welcome activity booklet and homework organiser for our incoming Year 7 cohort. The aim was simple: to provide students with a practical, structured and reassuring resource that supports organisation, clarifies expectations and promotes confidence during the transition process.

Research into secondary transition repeatedly highlights the emotional and academic challenges students face when moving from primary school. Recent work from the UCL Institute of Education argues that pupils often feel anxious about navigating a larger school environment, managing increased academic demands and establishing friendships. While students may look forward to specialist subjects and increased independence, concerns about routines, expectations and workload remain significant. Importantly, the report emphasises that schools which prioritise relationships, wellbeing and structured pastoral support achieve more positive outcomes for students.

Our own Year 7 students were surveyed throughout the year as part of my CPML project, as part of Head of Year tutorial exercises and through Bounce surveys. Indeed, the same issues were raised within these results.

What aspects of the transition did you find most challenging (e.g., homework, timetable, organisation, workload, routines)?

55 responses



The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these concerns. Researchers Jane Perryman and Sandra Leaton Gray note that many students experienced fragmented educational experiences and reduced opportunities to develop organisational independence during Key Stage 2. As a result, schools have increasingly recognised the importance of explicit support structures during Year 7 transition. The emphasis on flexibility, wellbeing and carefully scaffolded routines has become embedded within effective transition practice. A physical welcome booklet and organiser directly responds to this need by offering students clarity, routine and consistency at a time when uncertainty can feel overwhelming.

Research from the Chartered College of Teaching further supports this approach. Their review describes transition as one of the most challenging periods in a student's educational career and highlights how the move to secondary school can negatively

affect both attainment and wellbeing. The review identifies several factors that can ease transition, including resilience-building, clear communication of expectations and helping students understand the realities of secondary school life before arrival. This is particularly relevant when considering homework and independent learning. Many Year 6 pupils are unfamiliar with managing multiple subjects, different teachers and varied deadlines. A dedicated organiser therefore acts as a bridge between primary and secondary systems.

One particularly important finding from the Chartered College review concerns the "language" of secondary school. Researchers found that pupils can struggle with unfamiliar terminology, subject-specific vocabulary and changing expectations across different lessons. Students are suddenly expected to interpret timetables, homework systems, behaviour policies and subject-specific instructions independently. For some pupils, especially those with additional needs

or lower confidence, this can contribute to feelings of stress and disengagement. A physical welcome booklet helps reduce this cognitive overload by clearly presenting routines, expectations and key information in one accessible place. It allows students and families to revisit guidance repeatedly rather than relying solely on verbal instructions or digital platforms. The importance of structure and familiarity is also echoed in research exploring Year 7 "bubbles" during the pandemic. Studies found that students benefited from environments that retained some of the supportive characteristics of primary school, particularly around peer relationships, teacher guidance and organisational routines. Researchers concluded that transition should be gradual and developmentally appropriate, allowing students time to adapt to the social, emotional and practical demands of secondary school. A physical organiser contributes to this by creating continuity and predictability. It gives students a tangible tool that supports independence while still offering reassurance and guidance.

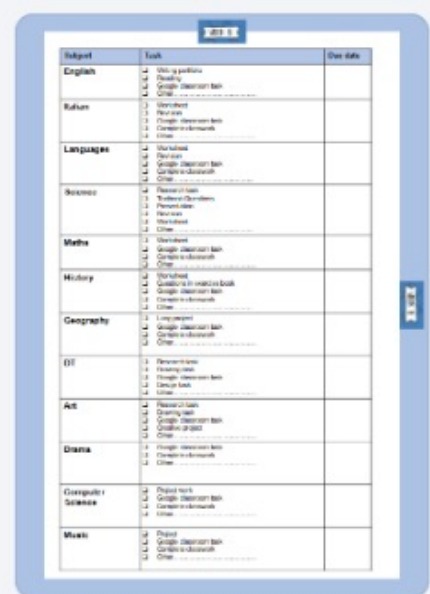


mirror the concerns identified in wider educational research and demonstrate that organisational anxiety begins long before students arrive in September. By introducing a welcome activity booklet and organiser before transition, we can proactively address these fears rather than waiting for problems to emerge.

The physical nature of the organiser is especially important. While digital platforms undoubtedly play a role in modern education, research following the pandemic highlights continuing inequalities in digital access and varying levels of digital literacy among students. A physical organiser provides consistency and accessibility for all pupils regardless of technology access at home. It also promotes routine-building in a visible and practical way. Students can physically record homework, check expectations and refer to guidance throughout the school day. For many pupils, especially those still developing executive functioning and organisational skills, this tangible process is more effective than relying exclusively on online systems.

Alongside wider educational research, primary research conducted within our own school community strongly reinforced the need for this resource. Surveys conducted with current Year 7 students identified homework organisation and managing workload as the most significant challenges during transition. Students frequently described difficulties remembering equipment, tracking homework deadlines and balancing multiple

subjects simultaneously. These findings are particularly important because they reflect the lived experiences of our own pupils rather than abstract national trends. Similarly, surveys completed by our current Year 6 pupils revealed that homework was their greatest concern about joining secondary school. Many pupils expressed anxiety about “forgetting homework,” “having too much work” or “not knowing what to do.” These responses closely



Furthermore, a welcome booklet can strengthen relationships between school and home. Transition research repeatedly highlights the importance of parental involvement and clear communication throughout Year

7. Parents often feel anxious about how best to support their child during the move to secondary school, particularly regarding homework and independence. A structured booklet allows families to understand school expectations,

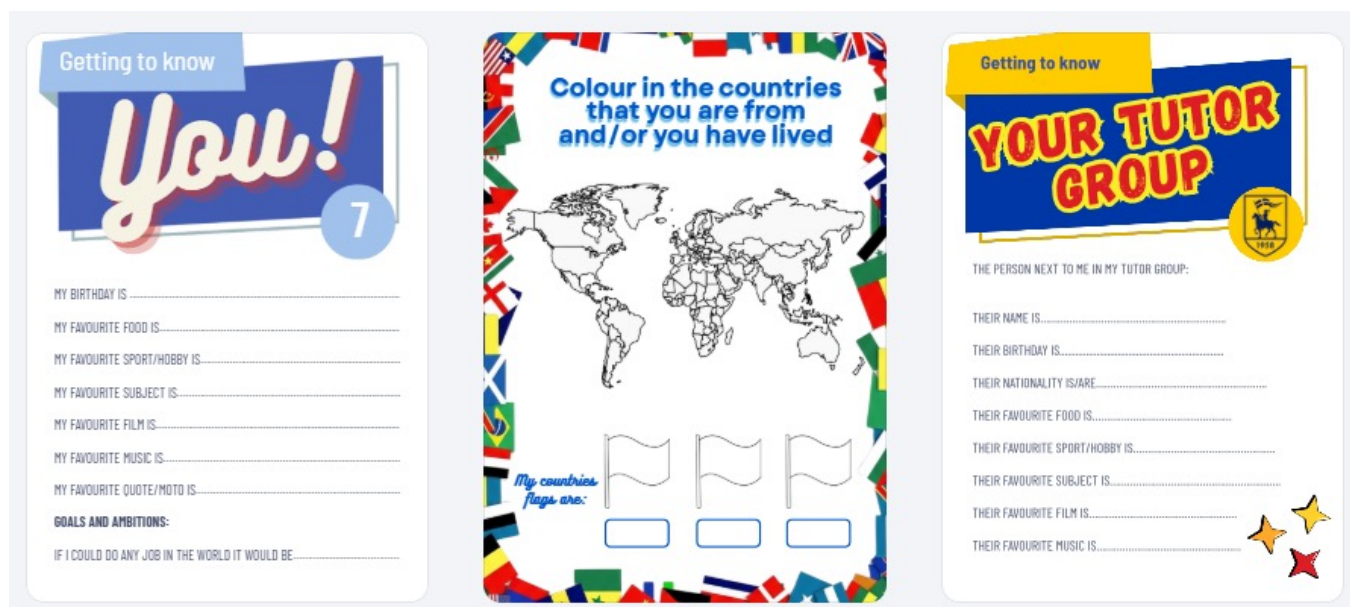
establish routines at home and engage in conversations about organisation and wellbeing. In this sense, the booklet becomes more than a student planner; it becomes a shared transition tool supporting collaboration between students, parents and school staff.



Ultimately, the development of a Year 7 welcome activity booklet and homework organiser reflects both educational research and the voices of our students. Transition to secondary school is not simply an academic change but a social, emotional and organisational shift that requires thoughtful support.

Research consistently demonstrates that students thrive when schools prioritise wellbeing, relationships, clarity and structure. Our own student surveys further emphasise that homework organisation and workload management remain central concerns for both current and incoming pupils. The booklet

includes activity pages that celebrate Internationalism and Belonging, further strengthening the students wellbeing. Indeed, there are even activity pages devoted to promoting positive mental health.



By providing a physical organiser and welcome pack, we are not merely distributing information; we are equipping students with practical tools that encourage independence, reduce anxiety and

foster confidence. In doing so, we aim to create a smoother, more supportive transition experience that allows every child to begin Year 7 feeling prepared, organised and ready to succeed.

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CPML

Consistency Beats Complexity: Why Technology Only Works When Students Know What to Expect

Fernando Gonzalez Navarro | Teacher of Design & Technology



“These are the years in which pupils develop routines, independence, organisational habits.”

In schools, discussions about educational technology often focus on the next platform, the newest feature, or the latest innovation promising to transform learning. Yet in many classrooms, the challenge is not the absence of technology but the inconsistency of how existing tools are used.

At St George's British International School, Google Classroom is well established as part of daily teaching and learning. It is familiar to staff, embedded within systems, and widely accessed by students. However, through my experience teaching across Key Stage 3, tutoring Years 7 and 8, and working closely with students in my pastoral role, I began to notice a recurring pattern: students were generally confident using Google Classroom, but their experience of it varied significantly depending on the subject or teacher.

This observation became the starting point for my CPML Leadership Challenge Project, which explored a simple but important question: does technology support learning most

effectively when students encounter it consistently across the school?

Why Key Stage 3 Matters

Key Stage 3 is a crucial phase in a student's school journey. These are the years in which pupils develop routines, independence, organisational habits and confidence as learners. They are also years in which students move between multiple teachers and subjects, often navigating increasingly complex expectations.

For Year 7 students in particular, transition into secondary school brings excitement but also challenge. They move from one classroom teacher to a timetable involving many departments, each with different systems, routines and expectations. If digital tools are used differently in every subject, what should be a source of clarity can quickly become another source of confusion.

Google Classroom has the potential to support organisation, feedback and independent learning. However, like any system, it only works well when users understand what to expect. 65

Listening Before Leading

Rather than relying solely on anecdotal evidence, the project gathered perspectives from both staff and students. Two surveys were conducted during the Autumn term: one with KS3 students and one with teachers. In addition, conversations took place with key colleagues including the Director of Digital Learning and middle leaders already using Google Classroom effectively in their departments.

This triangulated approach was important. If the goal was to improve student experience, student voice needed to be central. Equally, any proposed change had to be realistic, supportive of staff workload, and respectful of teacher autonomy.

What Students Told Us

A total of 110 KS3 students responded to the survey. The results were revealing.

Students were highly confident in using Google Classroom, with 94.5% agreeing that they knew how to use the platform. They also recognised its organisational benefits:

- 82.9% agreed that Google Classroom helps them stay organised

- 80.7% agreed they can find homework easily

This suggests that the technical barrier has largely disappeared. Students do not need to be convinced to use the platform; they are already comfortable with it.

However, the most significant findings related not to access, but to consistency.

- Only 64% agreed that teachers usually give feedback or mark work through Google Classroom
- 90% agreed that they would like all teachers to use Google Classroom in a similar way

Open-ended responses added further depth. Students valued being able to work from home, check deadlines and access resources. At the same time, they reported frustration when homework titles were unclear, due dates varied, files were difficult to locate, or feedback was inconsistent.

In short, students were not asking for more technology. They were asking for clearer systems.

What Teachers Told Us

35 staff responses were collected, including 31 colleagues teaching KS3.

Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about Google Classroom as a tool:

- 82% felt it makes their job easier
- Confidence in using core functions was high (average 4.4/5)
- Most regularly used it for homework, resources, announcements and communication

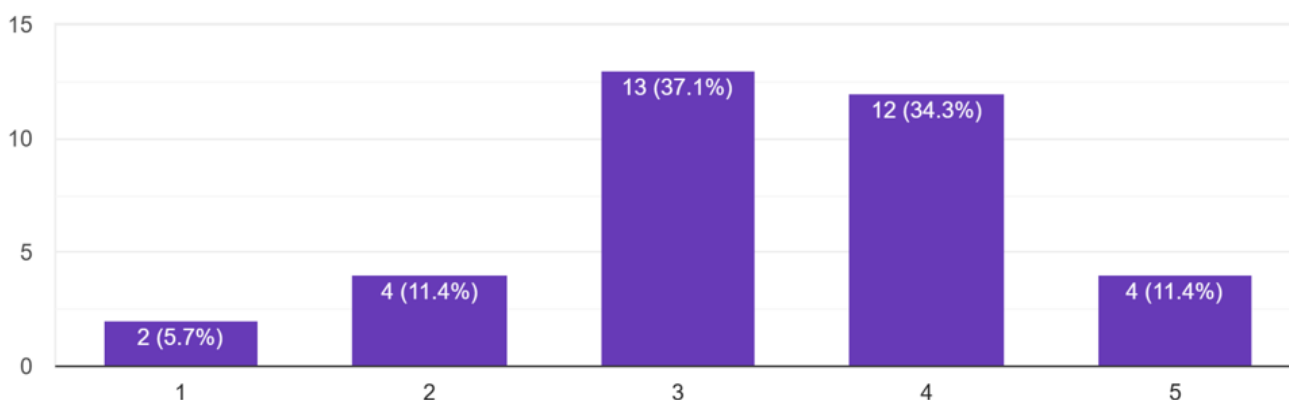
There was also strong agreement that greater consistency would benefit students:

- 86.9% supported a more standardised school-wide approach

Interestingly, while consistency within departments was rated moderately positively (66.9%), perceived consistency across departments was significantly lower (50.9%).

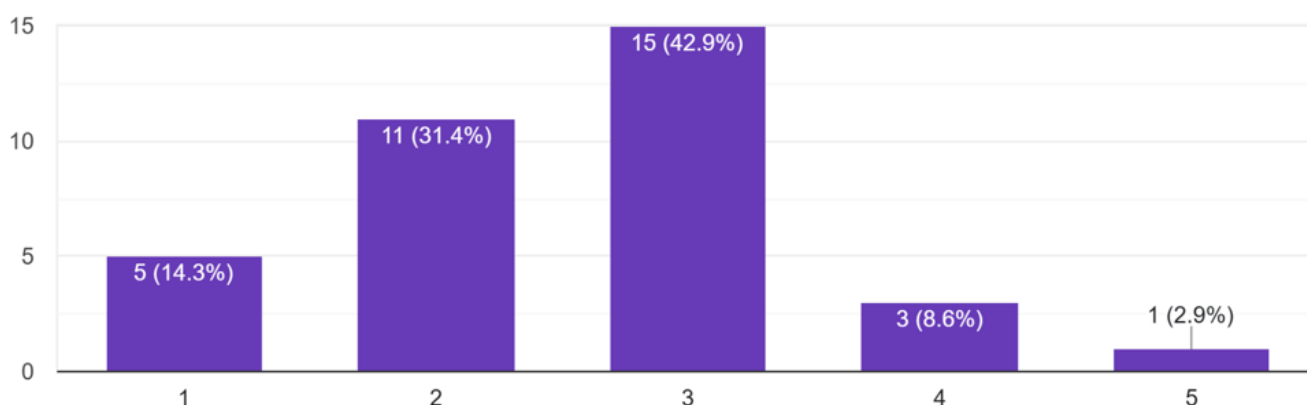
Teachers in my department use Google Classroom in a consistent way.

35 responses



Teachers across different departments use Google Classroom in a consistent way.

35 responses



This reflects a reality familiar to many schools: departments often develop effective internal habits, but students experience school horizontally rather than vertically. They do not move only within one department; they move across six or seven subjects each week. What feels coherent to adults within teams can feel fragmented to students navigating the whole system.

The Hidden Cost of Inconsistency

When systems differ widely between classrooms, students expend energy interpreting processes rather than focusing on learning. They ask:

- Where is the homework posted?
- Is the deadline on Classroom or verbal?
- Will feedback appear privately, in class, or not at all?
- Are marks visible?
- Where are the lesson resources stored?

These may seem minor questions, yet repeated daily they create unnecessary cognitive load. For organised, confident students this may be manageable. For younger pupils, less confident learners, or

those still adjusting to secondary school routines, it can become a barrier.

Consistency, therefore, is not about control for its own sake. It is about reducing friction so students can direct attention towards learning rather than logistics.

Consistency Without Uniformity

One of the most valuable insights from discussions with colleagues was the need to find a “sweet spot” between standardisation and autonomy. Too much rigidity risks reducing professional judgement. Too little consistency creates confusion for students.

The aim should not be for every Google Classroom to look identical. Different subjects have different needs. A Drama classroom may not mirror Mathematics; Art may require a different structure from Geography.

However, some shared expectations could improve the student experience significantly. For example:

- Clear and consistent naming of assignments
- Visible deadlines and due dates

- Resources organised logically
- Regular use of feedback functions
- Common terminology where possible
- Transparent use of marks or rubrics where appropriate

These are not restrictive measures. They are simple habits that create predictability.

Leading Change from the Middle

As with many CPML projects, this work has also been a lesson in leadership. Sustainable change rarely comes through mandates alone. It often grows through collaboration, modelling and practical examples.

Several colleagues across different departments are already using Google Classroom in highly effective ways. The next step is not to reinvent practice, but to identify, celebrate and share what is already working well.

This might include:

- Staff CPD sessions showcasing effective classroom models
- Shared school guidance for minimum expectations

- Department discussions on common routines
- Opportunities for peer support and coaching
- Ongoing review of student voice and impact

In this sense, middle leadership is not simply about implementing policy. It is about connecting strong existing practice and helping it spread.

Looking Ahead

My CPML project remains ongoing, but the findings so far are clear. Students value Google Classroom. Teachers value Google Classroom. The issue is not whether we should use digital tools, but how coherently we use them together.

Schools can sometimes assume that once a platform has been introduced, the digital work is done. In reality, implementation is where the real work begins. Systems only become powerful when they are reliable, understood and consistently experienced.

Technology should simplify school life, not complicate it.

Final Reflection

Educational technology often promises transformation through complexity. Yet one of the strongest lessons from this project is more modest: progress may come not from adding more tools, but from using familiar ones better.

Students do not need every classroom to be the same. But they do need enough consistency to feel confident, organised and supported wherever they learn.

TTE

More Than “Congratulations”

Lauren Bell-Brown | TTE Trainee Teacher (Art & DT)



“From the very beginning, they welcomed us with open arms.”

Once upon a time, a trainee teacher decided to apply to teach at an international school as part of the TTE (Teaching Together in Europe) programme. The story goes something like this...

It must begin with the selection process; the week we knew decisions were coming. I was checking my emails every five minutes. By Friday evening, with still no news, I had convinced myself it wasn't me. But then came one final check on Saturday morning, and there it was: “*Congratulations.*” I'm not afraid to admit that I cried when I read it. A mix of disbelief, shock and pure excitement. As it turns out, “congratulations” was something of an understatement compared to the perspective-shifting and eye-opening experience I have had here at St George's.

From the moment I arrived at St George's and met the teachers, students and wider staff, I knew this was no ordinary school. There is an incredible sense of ease the moment you walk through the doors, and that is a testament not only to how the school is run, but to the wonderful community that lives within its walls. The staff are some of the most inspiring and welcoming people I have had the pleasure of working with. From the very beginning, they welcomed us with open arms. Everyone is eager to help, and what is especially moving is that these staff are not just colleagues, they are friends. It didn't matter that we were only passing through here for just five weeks, from the moment we walked through the doors, we were treated as part of that community.

In addition to the staff's welcoming energy and palpable sense of community, their commitment to both the school and its students is truly inspiring. We were fortunate enough to take part in focus sessions with several members of the team, who went above and beyond to share their depth and breadth of knowledge with us. What stood out most was their curiosity. They were just as eager to hear about the latest research and developments we had encountered in our training, asking thoughtful questions and engaging in genuine professional dialogue.

They made the most of every moment, constantly seeking ways to refine their practice for the benefit of their students. There was a real sense of purpose in how they approached their work. Never standing still, always looking forward. In those sessions, I never felt like a trainee teacher. I felt like part of a team, collaborating, brainstorming and, more often than not, running out of time, but never running out of things to say! The students deserve a story of their own - one far longer than I can do justice to here.

One particularly memorable first lesson came during my first week, when I was asked to deliver a short presentation on my jewellery designs and their original inspiration: Cabinets of Curiosities, the very project the students were

exploring at the time. At the end of the presentation, I asked if there were any questions. I expected a few polite smiles, perhaps a shake of the head and a quiet "thank you." What I was met with instead completely took me by surprise.

The questions that followed were detailed, thoughtful and deeply considered, of a quality you might expect in an interview. I found it impossible to contain my excitement as they continued, one after another. In that moment, it became clear that the curiosity in the room was not passive; it was alive, engaged and students were genuinely invested.

I believe that this energy, the students' curiosity and enthusiasm, became one of the driving forces behind my own journey here. With each lesson, I felt more at ease showing my true self: my passions, my excitement and my genuine interest in the work. I knew that what I was bringing into the room was being reflected back at me.

Research tells us that teacher enthusiasm plays a powerful role in boosting student motivation, particularly by increasing intrinsic motivation. What struck me most during my time here was how naturally this unfolded. The buzz of energy created through curiosity, passion and openness wasn't something forced, it was something shared.

The story doesn't end here, nor does it exist only within lessons, teaching, and work. My five weeks were filled to the brim with activities and a real sense of extra-curricular vibrancy. There was the School Concert, the Year 11 trip, International Women's Day, Sports Day, and finally, the end-of-term charity fair and talent show.

The school should be and is incredibly proud of the breadth of opportunities it provides for its students. Each of these events, both in and beyond the classroom, plays a role in broadening students' perspectives: locally, nationally, and globally. One thing I noticed very quickly was the way students spoke about the opportunities they have experienced so far. There is a confidence and awareness in how they reflect on these moments, and you can truly see how each one has contributed to shaping who they are, and who they are becoming.

And so, as this chapter comes to an end, I find myself returning to the UK not just with memories, but with a renewed sense of purpose. Inspired by the people, the passion and the shared curiosity that fills this school. I leave with more than I arrived with, not just as a trainee teacher, but as someone more certain of the kind of educator I hope to become.

This story doesn't end here...it's only just beginning.

When in Rome

Jack Nicholls | TTE Trainee Teacher (English)



“Almost every interaction I had with a student I could feel that they wanted to be here; that they enjoyed their lessons, their community, their experience of being at school.”

Almost right up until I taught my first lesson at St George's, I had a hard time believing the whole thing was really happening. When I was waiting in the airport before my flight to Rome, I kept thinking how uncharacteristic of me this seemed. I have a habit of avoiding big things, exciting things, telling myself the cost is too much, the distance is too far. So it seemed totally unbelievable that the first time I was getting on a plane as an adult was to go to Rome for five weeks to teach at an international school. I half expected an email telling me there had been some kind of mistake. I am very very glad there wasn't one. It's hard to know where to start when so many things came together to make the experience what it was. I think the thing that struck me the most about St George's was that it exudes a real sense of joy, corny as it sounds. It feels bright and warm and not just from the weather (though I heard from several people that this was the worst March in years, which is surely impossible). Almost every interaction I had with a student I could feel that they wanted to be here; that they enjoyed their lessons, their community, their experience of being at school. The difference that made to my experience of teaching was astounding.

One of the most wonderful parts of my time at St George's was in fact getting to see the students outside of the context of the classroom. The talent showcased at the Spring Concert, Sports Challenge Day, the IB Art exhibition, the Talent Show on our final day – it was just incredible; but more than that was the sense of pride, the achievement, and most importantly the celebration of that achievement. It has never been so clear to me the importance of giving students the opportunity to excel at

something, whether that be music, sports, art, or something entirely different. St George's feels proud of its students, and it made it such a joy to teach there.

When I began teaching at St George's I felt for the first time that I was not a student getting up in front of a class, pretending to be a teacher and hoping nobody would notice. For the first time since I began my training I felt like a teacher. I started to become genuinely excited at the prospect of teaching my next lesson, of seeing my students improve and seeing their enthusiasm for the subject develop. The variety of nationalities, languages, and experiences represented by a class at St George's also made my English lessons with them so wonderfully rich. This was another thing St George's taught me: let your subject be theirs; let them be part of it, because they are. Lessons that felt like a dialogue between me and the students, and between the students and one other, were infinitely more rewarding and more productive than lessons where they did not have the opportunity to share and express themselves. And on top of that it was just fun. Teaching in an environment that lets students showcase their interests and personalities, their enthusiasm – it made my lessons so much more dynamic, and so full of life and character.

The other thing that made my time at St George's so enjoyable, and this cannot be overstated, was how welcome and supported all the staff made me feel. Never at any point did I feel that I was unable to ask for help or that as a trainee I was separate from the rest of the staff body. Every person I spoke to at St George's made me feel

like I was part of the community. On top of that, the opportunity to discuss different pedagogical approaches with other teachers was invaluable; supporting SEND, the value of quality first teaching, EAL, approaches to teaching different subjects, different year groups, different classes, even different strategies you might use teaching at different times of the day – these conversations introduced me to ways of teaching I hadn't even considered could be a part of my own classroom. Being able to plan my own lessons from scratch meant I was able to experiment with these strategies; try something new, make mistakes, come back, reevaluate, and try something different. I got to watch myself improve week on

week in a way I didn't realise I was capable of.

Before I got to St George's good teaching could often seem like this big nebulous amalgamation of a thousand different things you have to do and each one only works if you're doing the nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine other things in the background as well. I suppose it is still a bit like that (or a lot, some might argue), but teaching at St George's I found myself for the first time thinking, hey maybe I'm getting the hang of this. St George's showed me just how much joy can exist in this profession, and I will take this experience with me throughout my career.

Finally, it seems silly not to mention how much I loved living in Rome. In five weeks, I saw so much history, so much beauty, so much character. Ate so much delicious food. I am certain I will return some day. I've made it my mission now to travel further, have more exciting adventures, spend more money on things that will make you happy because you can't take it with you. When in Rome. I loved my time at St George's. I am so glad I got to experience it and so grateful I had the chance.

TTE

A Journey of Connection, Creativity and Joy at St George's

Morgan Godden | TTE trainee teacher - Geography



“It was definitely because of how comfortable and welcomed I feel here.”

One of my most treasured moments at St George's was walking down the B Floor corridor on my third day at the school, a student enthusiastically called out 'morning Miss Godden' with a beaming smile, and this interaction set the tone for what the rest of my 5 wonderful weeks at St George's were like. Teaching is something that has allowed me to be the most authentic, passionate and fulfilled version of myself so far, and my experience at St George's was so affirming and enjoyable because of the attitude and personalities of the students, and the diverse and passionate staff body.

As a Geography trainee and previous boarder at an independent school for Sixth form, walking through the school was so exciting,

seeing students from many nationalities talking in multiple languages with each other, and teaching lessons where students wanted to share their personal experiences of the countries mentioned in lesson was such a unique experience. The students were so excited to talk about their own opinions and knowledge in lessons. I loved how students would eagerly call me over to read their work or ask me what was next when they had completed the task. Teaching SGBIS students allowed me to delve deeper into the topics that I taught in lessons, making sure I always had something to challenge everybody, and often discussing geographical concepts from multiple perspectives and spatial scales, learning with and from the students.

At St George's I was able to bring my whole self to the classroom and the school, the school had such an air of happiness and comfort in the way that staff and students interacted with each other. The interpersonal relationships and real recognition and support of every person in the school is something that will stick with me. My favourite lessons were ones in which students presented their projects they worked on over the half term. Feeling how supportive students were of each other made me so proud to be working in a school where that is so prevalent and important. I also saw this when I attended St George's Model United Nations conference at FAO, where students from multiple European schools were working together, and their confidence to speak in front of hundreds of students just struck me with awe. Or attending the Spring Music showcase and IB art showcase, seeing KS3-5 students turn up to support the artists and performers, resonated so strongly with me.

Working at St George's also made me realise I am a lot more creative and confident than I thought I was. Through working with my mentor, Jeremy, I often integrated technology into my lessons and came up with activities where students could work in pairs or groups to synthesise the new knowledge in different ways. Having the confidence to try something completely new, and plan so many lessons from scratch with

the support I received, allowed me to push myself and grow in my practice. Confidence-wise, never would I have imagined I would be dressed as Beyonce, as a judge for the Talent Show; I'm still not entirely sure where the confidence came from for this one, it was definitely because of how comfortable and welcomed I feel here.

Something I saw often in the lessons which I observed was how much autonomy students were given over their own learning, and how many thrived with this. I enjoyed watching students take the work into their own hands and I worked on integrating this into my lessons. I really loved guiding them through the learning process. This autonomy was also visible in the range of leadership opportunities the students take part in throughout their schooling life. Whether it is organising the Charity Fair, Sports Day or the Talent Show, watching students navigate through these experiences showed me how important they are for their growth as young people, and also made me want to focus on this when I return back to the UK: I am hoping to start an MUN club at my new school in September.

Observing lessons, I also saw the range of personalities from the amazing teaching and support staff and how important this diversity is to support such a diverse range of students. I integrated multiple

teaching strategies from watching other staff in their classrooms, from small tweaks in behaviour management techniques (for example starting a countdown from 5 instead of 3, to give that extra space for a class to settle/regulate; seemingly minor, but effective), or turning a question from a student into a learning opportunity for the whole class by asking every student to explain the correct answer on their mini whiteboards. On speaking with the SEND and EAL teams, I also built my skillset to best support all students in my classroom. These learning opportunities were essential to how I developed my teaching in my time at the school. Also, through receiving feedback from staff, I had the chance to unpick my practice and work through potential solutions with more experienced colleagues, which at times can seem daunting, but I always felt supported and trusted with the freedom to make my own decisions in the classroom.

I am leaving St George's with a stronger sense of self, increased confidence to bring my whole personality to the classroom and an increased love for what I am doing. I am so grateful to Fran and Marco, Jeremy and the Geography team, Charlotte my form group teacher, and all the staff who supported me throughout my time at the school. It has been a pleasure to work with everyone, the students are fantastic, and I hope to visit sometime in the future!

Autism - The Importance of Being Experts in the Individual

James Blackburn | SEN (Second in Charge)



“The difference is that people with autism experience these at a level that impairs their ability to manage neurotypical expectations.”

Autism is fascinating, especially in its complexity. Even the way we refer to people with autism is constantly under scrutiny. For the purposes of this article I will use the term ‘children and young people with autism’ though I would like to acknowledge that there may be people reading this who disagree with this. I can only apologise in advance and reassure you that I am constantly open to discussion. Nevertheless, having worked in a range of environments, including a special needs secondary school for young people with autism, what is most joyous about this work, at least for me, is how very human it feels. What matters is understanding who the person is and what the person needs. You teach the person first, then the curriculum.

All of us have learnt to communicate in a way that makes sense to us. All of us have our patterns, routines and habits that support us in negotiating and managing our daily lives. All of us manage and regulate our emotions and our sensory needs constantly. Autism on its own is not a learning need. It is a communication disability. People with autism find expressing themselves difficult, understanding the world around them difficult and have a need for sameness that can manifest itself in rigid routines, rigid thinking and sensory needs. The difference is that people with autism experience these at a level that impairs their ability to manage neurotypical expectations.

There are three significant psychological theories that are fundamental in understanding what autism is. **Theory of Mind**

(Premack and Woodruff, 1978) posits that we are able to imagine the mental states of others and a weak theory of mind (i.e. the inability to imagine or read non-verbally what others are thinking) has been used to explain difficulties in social communication and literal thinking (Hadwin, Howlin and Baron-Cohen, 2017). **Central Coherence theory** (a difficulty in seeing the bigger picture) has been used to explain the difficulties people with autism have in seeing and understanding things at a global level (Harris, 2018). It is common for people with autism to excel in detail orientated environments. However, it is also often the case that people with autism do not understand how details fit into a bigger picture, so it is very difficult to identify which detail matters. Finally, a weakness in **executive functioning** (the part of the brain responsible for planning, organisation and purposeful behaviour) is useful for understanding difficulties in organising, planning and initiating tasks people with autism often struggle with (Burroughs, Muscatello and Corbett, 2024), especially those that do not directly relate to individual areas of interest.

This individuality has been explained by defining autism as a spectrum condition. What this means is that although all people with autism have communication needs, this manifests itself differently for each individual. Some people with autism may have incredibly complex needs that require lifelong support and care, whereas others may lead very successful lives but seem slightly odd in social situations. Where all people with autism have habits

and routines they need, they will have different routines and habits particular to them. Where one person may find the lighting in a classroom mildly irritating, another may find them physically painful. Autism is different for everyone. So, we must use our knowledge of autism to become experts in the individual. We must know the child well enough to use the features of their autism as a strength. In the end, it is the person, not the need, that we must be experts in.

This leads us to one of the biggest debates around our current understanding of the concept of autism. Officially, autism is a medical need that is categorised as a deficit. This would imply that the symptoms of autism can be cured with the correct intervention. This contradicts the fact that autism is a lifelong condition. It appears that weaknesses can be improved through early and regular intervention, but not cured. A key criticism of the medical viewpoint of autism is how little relevance the research has to the autism community (Pellicano and Stears, 2011). This has led to the term **neurodiversity** becoming commonplace in the language we use. Neurodiversity implies that autism is a part of the variety of human brain development and places it in the social model of disability (Pellicano and Houting 2021). In this case, autism is not a deficit or a disorder, but a natural difference in the way human brains are constructed. This means that how disabling a condition is is dependent on the expectations of modern society. It can therefore be hypothesised that the increase in numbers of autism diagnoses can be attributed to greater knowledge of autism in society, but also modern societies focus on collaboration, communication and discussion which highlights autistic tendencies. From a school perspective, in a world where we understand that learning is a

fundamentally social activity, the concept of autism as neurodiversity means we must consider how our environment, expectations, processes and knowledge of autism affects children on the autistic spectrum.

How can we then meet the needs of students with autism when the picture is this complex and contradictory? What can we do?

Fortunately, there are answers that are simpler than the contradictions and the paradoxes inherent in autism itself. At a whole school level, an answer might lie in the appointment of a member of staff who is responsible for developing a culture that supports autism as well as other neurodiversities. If there is the opportunity to increase teacher awareness and knowledge of autism: what it is, what it can look like and what works in the classrooms, corridors and social spaces, then greater professional knowledge has been shown to be the most effective tool in supporting and educating young people with autism (Morewood et al., 2011). A focus on explicitly teaching social skills through intervention and supported clubs as for the majority of students with autism in a mainstream setting, it is the social element of our spaces that present the most significant challenge to learning. Similarly, if space can be made to teach and prioritise life skills and managing everyday bureaucracy, then children and young people who have the skills to flourish in their areas of interest are not hampered by their difficulties in understanding which everyday details need to be prioritised.

Vitality, the creation of a space where the autistic voice can be heard matters. For students with social communication needs, their opinions, their thoughts and their needs are often overlooked because mainstream systems for gathering student opinions are difficult to

access. Studies have shown that the creation of a youth panel, facilitated by a member of staff, supports students with autism to recommend changes they feel could help, create belonging, community and opportunities for socialisation and friendship. The use of technology has also been shown to be an effective way of engaging students with autism, though it is important to acknowledge some students with autism will need support to remember to fill in the form (Autism Education Trust, 2016).

Finally, but fundamentally, our environment must be adapted to consider the needs of young people with autism. Best practice would require building a brand new school from the ground up, and while this is an unreasonable suggestion, there are things that can be done: the identification and creation of a space where students can go to relax, recharge and study that is designed to be neurodiverse; where possible use natural light in your classrooms to reduce sensory stimulation; use visuals to support the transitory nature of language; create routines that structure transitions between activities and lessons; communicate the rules of your classroom clearly and enforce them consistently, communicate in way that supports students with autism to understand and respond. Personally, I have found that the following three step process works effectively: think about what you want to say, say what you mean and then wait for a response (Morewood et al., 2011).

In the end, what is most vital for making a school a welcoming place for children and young people with autism is a commitment at a whole school level to create a culture that supports all neurodiversity. By considering the environment, prioritising staff development and knowledge, being flexible in our approach, and developing interventions aimed at social skills

we can support academic and social engagement. Finally, by creating neurodiverse spaces where the autistic voice can be expressed and heard, we can create a greater sense of belonging and agency. As with all learning needs, but perhaps more so with autism, becoming an expert in the individual and attempting to meet the specifics of their needs, can lead to great success.

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Reframing Misogyny: Engaging Boys and Men as Part of the Solution

Vicky Walsh | Relationships and Sex Education Specialist



“The silence of good men perpetuates harm.”

I felt very honoured to host Dr Jackson Katz at our school last November. For those of you that may have missed the visit, Katz is an American educator, author, and scholar-activist who has long been a major figure in the growing global movement of men working to promote gender equity and prevent gender-based violence.

In 1993, he co-founded Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP), the first large-scale prevention initiative in university and professional athletics in North America, and later the first system-wide programme across all branches of the U.S. military. MVP introduced the bystander approach to the fields of sexual assault and relationship abuse prevention. Katz has produced many influential educational films and authored

three books exploring masculinity, media, and power. His TEDx talk on gender-based violence has been translated into 27 languages and has been viewed more than 5.7 million times.

Why Dr Katz’s Message Matters Now

With a rise in discriminatory and misogynistic language playing out on the global stage — and therefore echoing in our school corridors and playgrounds — I felt there was no one more qualified to speak with our teachers, parents, and students about this critical topic.

I purposefully invited a man to deliver this message. Representation matters, and having a respected male voice publicly

model empathy, allyship and accountability can be profoundly powerful. And I was right — the ripple effects of his visit continue to move through our community. 6 Key Takeaways — and How They Translate Into Practice

1. Gender-based violence is a men's issue

Katz's most repeated refrain is that gender-based violence is not a "women's issue" — it's a men's issue. It's about how some men use power and control over others, and how the silence of good men perpetuates harm.

He reminded us that men's violence affects everyone — women, girls, boys, and men alike. When we normalise aggression or dismiss harmful behaviour as "banter," we teach boys that dominance equals strength. Katz reframes this by urging men to be active allies — to use their privilege and influence for change.

In educational contexts, this means shifting from "protecting girls" to engaging boys as part of the solution — inviting them to see fairness, respect, and equality as strengths, not threats.

2. Passive language and victim-blaming

Katz challenged us to notice how language shapes culture. All too often, headlines and conversations remove the perpetrator: "John beat Mary" becomes "Mary was beaten." Suddenly, John disappears — and attention shifts to the victim: *What was she wearing? Why was she alone?*

This subtle linguistic shift reinforces a culture where victims are scrutinised and perpetrators fade from view. Katz urges educators to help young people recognise how

everyday language choices reflect — and reinforce — social attitudes about responsibility and blame. In RSHE and English classrooms alike, teachers can analyse headlines or film scripts, exploring how framing affects perception. Changing how we talk about violence is a vital step toward changing how we think about it.

3. Guilt versus responsibility

One of Katz's most powerful lines was:

"I don't feel guilty for being a man, white, or straight. I feel privileged — and with that comes responsibility. Because what's the alternative? To be a hypocrite? To be a coward?" He explained that boys and men are sold a lie — that standing with women somehow diminishes their masculinity. Yet, Katz reframes allyship as a marker of strength, courage, and integrity. For educators, this is an invitation to create spaces where boys can reflect on masculinity without shame. Conversations about privilege shouldn't lead to guilt, but to awareness and action — recognising that using one's influence for good benefits everyone.

4. The Rape Pyramid

Katz revisited the familiar educational tool, the Rape Pyramid, to illustrate how "minor" expressions of sexism — jokes, slurs, "locker-room talk", or dismissive comments — help normalise a culture that tolerates violence. He reminded us that acts of violence rarely happen in isolation; they sit at the top of a continuum of harmful behaviours, supported by everyday attitudes and language that devalue women and girls.

Discussing this continuum in classrooms helps students see the

link between words and actions and understand that stopping harm begins at the base — by challenging sexism and disrespect early.

5. The Bystander Approach

Katz's pioneering bystander model reframes prevention by asking not, "What should victims do?" but "What can we all do when we witness harm?"

He reminded our community that silence is a form of consent — and that everyone, regardless of gender, can play a role in interrupting harm and supporting others. In schools, this means helping students build confidence to intervene safely, to check in with peers, or to challenge inappropriate language or behaviour.

Developing these skills not only prevents incidents but also builds empathy, responsibility, and collective care — cornerstones of healthy school culture.

6. Raising leaders — invite rather than indict young men

Finally, Katz left us with a challenge — and a hope. He urged educators to invite rather than indict boys and young men into the conversation about gender and respect.

When boys feel accused or blamed, they withdraw. But when they are invited to be leaders, allies, and protectors of fairness, they rise to that expectation. Katz models how the language of invitation fosters collaboration and shared purpose, rather than division.

By positioning boys as part of the solution, we nurture empathy and responsibility — and begin to reshape what it means to "be a man" in today's world.

A Lasting Impact

Dr Katz reminded us that culture change begins in conversation — and that education is one of the

most powerful places to start. His teachings ignite a commitment to model respect, challenge harmful

norms, and equip our students to become active, compassionate citizens.

From Idea to Impact: Creating a Culture Where People Thrive

Nicola Wilson | Class Teacher, KS2 Phase Coordinator



“A clear strength emerged in relationships. Students consistently reported feeling known, valued, and supported by adults.”

Is wellbeing in education just the latest buzzword we say we prioritise or is it the long-overdue shift that puts human experience at the heart of learning? We would hope wellbeing matters in every office, school and household universally. Yet too often, it remains trapped in the abstract - framed by broad statements, isolated initiatives, or timetabled lessons that sit alongside, rather than within the fabric of daily classroom life. The challenge is not a lack of intent, but a lack of precision. If wellbeing is to have genuine impact, we must move beyond talking about it and define clearly what it looks like in practice.

This has been a focus at La Storta Junior School (LSJS): shifting wellbeing from a conceptual priority to a lived, observable culture. The work has not been about adding more, but about aligning what we already do, making it consistent and ensuring it is experienced by every student, in every classroom, every day.

Step 1: Defining Wellbeing. What Does It Actually Look Like?

Before we could begin, we needed a shared understanding. As a staff, we worked to define wellbeing not as a

concept, but as a set of observable practices that could be seen, heard, and experienced consistently. We created a document that defined wellbeing in the following sections: Academic, Emotional, Social, Physical and Mental wellbeing. This shared set of definitions allowed everyone to have a consistent understanding. These areas framed all the audit questions.

Step 2: Community Audit. Listening Before Acting

To ensure our understanding reflected reality, we conducted a comprehensive wellbeing audit across our community of staff, students, and parents. The intention was clear: before making changes, we needed to listen. Staff reflected on their own practice, focusing on both confidence and consistency. Students were asked direct, accessible questions about their daily experience - whether they felt listened to, supported, and treated consistently. The audit was edited with the help of our AEN and EAL specialists to ensure all students could access the language. Students from Year 1 to Year 6 were interviewed. Parents provided valuable insight into how wellbeing translated beyond school, particularly through their child's behaviour and communication at home.

This triangulated approach ensured that the data captured a full picture of the school experience.

Wellbeing Audit



Step 3: Analysing the Results: Identifying Patterns and Gaps

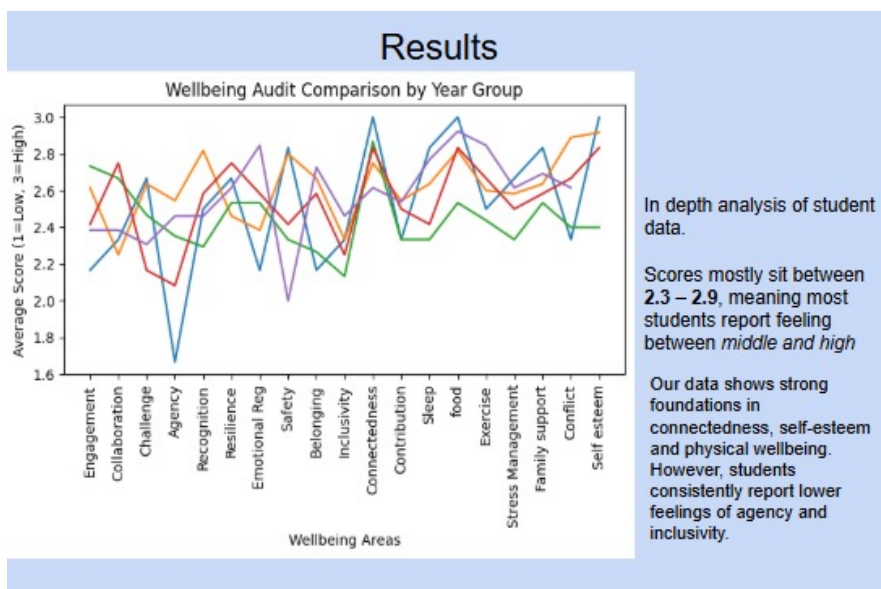
The most important part of the audit was analysing patterns across all groups. Rather than focusing on individual responses (unless we felt there was a concern), we looked for trends, alignment, and discrepancies.

We asked three key questions: What are we doing well? What do we need to improve? Where do perceptions differ?

It was evident that wellbeing was a strength of our school. The question was, how do we move from good to great?

A clear strength emerged in relationships. Students consistently reported feeling known, valued, and supported by adults. This provided a strong foundation for further development.

Students highlighted that their experience of wellbeing varied depending on the class they were in. This variability was also reflected in staff responses. Below is a graph comparing the results of Year 2 to Year 6.



In some areas, staff perception differed from student experience - particularly in relation to student voice. While staff believed opportunities were present, students did not always feel genuinely heard. These gaps were critical, as they highlighted where intention was not yet translating into impact. The table below shows the three areas of strength in pink and the areas for development in green. We have highlighted in yellow where there is a trend. While the audit identified a broad

Results		
3 areas of strength, 3 to develop further		
Staff	Safety Collaboration Engagement	Recognition - how do we celebrate success? Resilience Engagement Risk taking
Parents	Safety Collaboration Contribution	Nutrition Challenge in learning Stress management Recognition
Students	Connectedness Self-esteem Nutrition and exercise	Agency (choice) Challenge in learning Inclusivity - people being treated fairly.

range of areas for potential development, it was neither practical nor purposeful to attempt to address all of them simultaneously. A conscious decision was therefore made to prioritise a small number of focus areas to ensure the work remained both achievable and meaningful. This narrowing of focus was critical in moving from aspiration to sustained impact.

Three key priorities were identified for the 2026–2027 academic year: **recognition, challenge in learning, and resilience**. These areas emerged not only from the audit data but also from ongoing professional dialogue, where patterns began to surface around student motivation, engagement, and responses to difficulty. Recognition was linked to students’ sense of being seen and valued, not only for outcomes but for effort and progress. Challenge in learning reflected the need to ensure all students are appropriately stretched, with a particular focus on maintaining high expectations alongside strong support. This was an area for development also highlighted from learning walks throughout the school. Resilience was identified as an area requiring further development, particularly

in supporting students to navigate setbacks, persist with difficulty, and build confidence in their ability to improve.

By selecting these three areas, the intention is to create depth rather than breadth—allowing time for practices to embed, for staff to reflect and for impact to be monitored over time.

To support this process, a collaborative approach has been prioritised. A shared Padlet has been created as a working space for staff to contribute practical ideas, strategies, and examples of effective practice. This includes both new approaches and existing strengths, ensuring that the project builds on what is already working well within the school. The Padlet functions as a dynamic repository of practice, encouraging ongoing professional dialogue and reducing reliance on top-down direction.

This approach reinforces the principle that cultural change is collective. By focusing on a small number of clearly defined priorities and creating structures for shared contribution, the work is more likely to lead to consistent, sustainable improvement across classrooms.

Step 4: Action Plan for the Year Ahead: From Strategy to Practice, From Good to Great

The next phase is implementation. The emphasis is on embedding rather than adding.

In our classrooms, this looks like deliberate, consistent routines. The goal is for every child to be consistently greeted by name at the door and have a check-in morning routine. This moment is purposeful - it allows the teacher to quickly assess emotional readiness and adjust their approach if needed. Emotional check-ins are brief and embedded into learning rather than bolted on, using simple strategies such as check in charts makes this easy to achieve.

Students will each continue to have access to a journal, to write, draw and express their emotions. These are separate from the typical school book and won’t be marked, they will be kept personal to the students.

Professional learning is ongoing and practical. Staff will engage in collaborative discussions using real classroom scenarios, observe one another with a focus on wellbeing practices, and reflect on the impact of small changes. This ensures that development is grounded in reality rather than theory.

Small, deliberate actions remain at the centre of the strategy. The consistency of these actions is what drives cultural change.

Language shift – how are we communicating with students? Staff are not focusing on labelling behaviour but interpreting it. Instead of “disruptive,” we ask, “What is this behaviour communicating?” This subtle change has a profound impact on how adults respond and how students feel understood. A simple

strategy for this has been the use of question prompts in staff lanyards to support challenging conversations and professional development focused on behaviour being a form of communication. Regulation strategies are to be normalised. Breathing techniques, movement breaks, and quiet spaces are part of the everyday classroom environment, not reserved for moments of crisis.

The impact of these strategies comes from being applied consistently across all classrooms.

Student Leadership: Wellbeing Ambassadors in Action

A significant strength of this work has been the role of student leadership, particularly through our Wellbeing Ambassadors. Their contribution has moved beyond representation to genuine influence. Students have been actively involved in shaping the direction of the work, offering honest insights into what wellbeing feels like from their perspective. Their feedback has challenged assumptions and ensured that adult decision-making remains grounded in student experience.

One of their most impactful contributions has been the design and delivery of student-led wellbeing initiatives. A recent example is the upcoming Year 6 Wellbeing Morning, where ambassadors have designed and will lead sessions for parents. These will include yoga and breathing, guidance on authentic conversations about wellbeing, and a creative workshop contributing to a shared installation.

What makes this powerful is not the activities themselves, but the authenticity. Students are not delivering a script - they are sharing what matters to them. This creates

a genuine connection between school and home and reinforces the idea that wellbeing is a shared responsibility.

The ambassadors have also played a role in modelling everyday practice. They demonstrate regulation strategies, support peers, and contribute to a culture where wellbeing is normalised rather than exceptional. This has been evident in lunchtime activities available to all students where they have taught yoga, held check-ins and promoted students to think about what they are passionate about.

Their involvement has shifted the narrative. Wellbeing is no longer something done to students, but something shaped with them.

Conclusion: Culture Over Curriculum

The impact of this work is not found in a single initiative, but in the cumulative effect of consistent practice. Classrooms are more predictable, relationships are strengthened and there is greater alignment between intention and experience.

Wellbeing is not an addition to the curriculum, it is embedded within the culture of the school.

If we are serious about preparing young people for an increasingly complex world, this shift is essential. The question is no longer whether wellbeing matters. It is whether we are prepared to define it clearly, implement it consistently, and sustain it collectively.

This work has been a collective effort from staff across LSJS and highlights the staff dedication and commitment to ensuring we continually strive to improve.



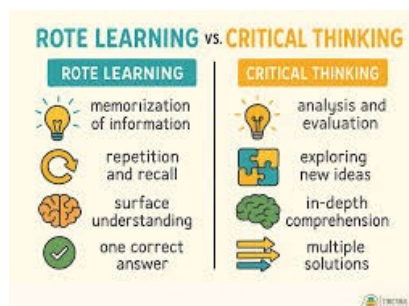
Wellbeing Ambassadors holding a yoga workshop.

Define the shift: Rote vs Enquiry-based Learning

Emma Navin | Head of La Storta Junior School



“This model helps students understand not just what something is, but why it matters and how it connects to the world around them.”



Structural Learning

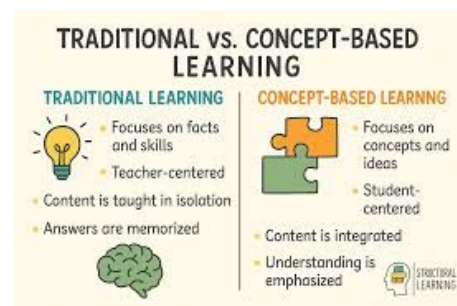
I had the privilege of attending the World Education Summit in Dubai in February 2026 and was asked to write a blog about rote vs experiential, inquiry based learning as well as join a panel to discuss this topic.

Here is my blog.

The advantages of an inquiry based approach to learning - why this matters now in education.

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” Benjamin Franklin.
For many years, education has relied heavily on rote learning memorising facts, formulas, and definitions to repeat them when tested. While this approach can help students recall information quickly, it often falls short in developing deeper understanding, creativity, and critical thinking. As the world becomes more complex, schools are increasingly shifting toward inquiry-based learning models that better prepare students for real-life challenges.

Inquiry-based learning moves beyond knowledge and memorisation and places students at the centre of the learning process



making it far more interesting. Instead of being told, learning facts for the sake of learning facts or simply receiving information, students ask questions, research, explore problems, and actively seek answers. Teachers act as facilitators encouraging curiosity and discussion. This model helps students understand not just what something is, but why it matters and how it connects to the world around them.

Through inquiry based learning models students have opportunities to discuss, collaborate, present and reflect, undertake independent inquiry, apply skills to problem solving and real life projects. For example, defining a real-world problem such as reducing waste in school. Through guided questioning, they research the issue using a range of sources, gathering data and evaluating different perspectives. Students then collaborate in small groups to discuss and develop possible solutions, refining their ideas based on peer feedback and teacher conferencing.

As part of the inquiry, students present their findings and proposed solutions to an audience, such as peers or their families. This process encourages clear communication,

confidence, and leadership. Following the presentation, students reflect on their learning journey, considering both the effectiveness of their solution and the skills they developed, including problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration.

This approach encourages students to take ownership of their learning and pursue questions that align with their interests, applying skills to real-life projects, demonstrating leadership by proposing actionable changes and evaluating the impact of their work, thereby connecting classroom learning to meaningful, real-world outcomes.

Rote learning, by contrast, requires students to recall facts, definitions, or procedures with limited

emphasis on understanding or application. Learning is typically teacher-directed, with students working individually to memorise content for tests or assessments. While rote learning can be useful for building foundational knowledge (such as times tables or vocabulary), it rarely encourages deep thinking, creativity, or meaningful connections to real-life contexts.

Inquiry based learning strengthens a diverse curriculum, spotlights leadership skills, provides opportunities for deeper learning, inspires pride and leadership and champions children's interests. One major advantage of inquiry-based learning is engagement. When students investigate topics that spark their interest, learning becomes more meaningful and

memorable. It also builds essential skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and communication, skills that rote learning rarely emphasises. Students learn to think independently, evaluate evidence, and reflect on their learning.

This does not mean rote learning has no place in education. Basic knowledge and foundational skills are still important. However, when memorisation is balanced with inquiry, students gain both knowledge and understanding. The shift from rote to inquiry-based models represents a move toward education that values thinking over repetition and learning over testing. In embracing inquiry-based learning, schools help students become lifelong learners - curious, confident, and ready to navigate an ever-changing world.



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