Insight
Updates, guidance and resources for your whole leadership team

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Welcome to Optimus Education Insight

Dear Reader

There was barely a spare seat in the house when Tim Coulson, regional schools commissioner, was interviewed by conference chair Laura McInerney at last term’s MATs Summit. We took the opportunity to quiz him further about the road ahead for trusts and accountability: read his answers on page 9. And if you're in a MAT which is ready to expand, take a look at Paul Ainsworth’s piece on some of the pitfalls to avoid (page 10).

The prospect of academy conversion or a merger can be a source of stress. If you're concerned about the morale of your team members, make sure you read Julia Stead’s article on managing workload and fostering wellbeing on page 48. Pupil mental health is a topic of concern for many members too: Laura Nuttall, winner of the MIND Blogger Award, shares her experiences and hopes for the future on page 62.

Here at Optimus HQ we're beginning the year with a positive change as we join forces with Prospects, an employee-owned company with strengths in employment, skills, education and school improvement. We're looking forward to working with our new colleagues and sharing their commitment to ‘inspiring people: developing potential’.

Liz Worthen
Head of Content,
Optimus Education

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Optimus Education’s one-day conferences bring school leaders and managers together, helping you go back to your school ready to implement practical strategies and new policies that work. Find out what’s coming up in your focus area.

**January**

**Accurate & Effective Data Use in Secondary Schools**
TUESDAY, 17 JANUARY, LONDON
Following a period of reform, make sure you are equipped to set reliable targets, track progress and manage the impact of 1-9 GCSEs, KS2 scaled scores and Progress 8.
Leadership and Governance

**February**

**SEND Assessment to Support Progress**
WEDNESDAY, 8 FEBRUARY, LONDON
Clarify the impact of the Rochford Review and accurately assess and evidence holistic learning and academic progress for SEND pupils working below the National Curriculum.
SEN and Safeguarding

**Practical Strategies for Safeguarding in Education**
WEDNESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY, LONDON
With safeguarding obligations constantly growing, get best practice guidance to protect against dangers online, emerging threats and mental health issues.
SEN and Safeguarding

**Celebrating Diversity and Promoting Equality in Schools**
THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY, LONDON
Get the knowledge and strategies you need to ensure SMSC, character education and British values are embedded across your school and that diversity is celebrated.
SEN and Safeguarding

**March**

**Admissions & Appeals in MATs and Single Academies**
TUESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY, LONDON
With oversubscription in schools at an all-time high, and appeals a time-consuming and costly process, knowing how to manage admissions and appeals in your academy is essential.
Leadership and Governance

**Positive Parental Engagement to Support Pupil Outcomes**
TUESDAY, 21 MARCH, MANCHESTER
Ensure you know how to effectively engage all parents, including the ‘hard to reach’, and support learning at home.
Teaching and Learning

**Establishing or Joining Multi-Academy Trusts**
WEDNESDAY, 29 MARCH, LEEDS
Clarify the process of joining or forming a MAT, retain your school identity and understand the pros and cons of different models.
Leadership and Governance

**April**

**Teaching Schools Summit**
THURSDAY, 27 APRIL, LONDON
Come together with Teaching School Alliance leaders to share and solve challenges, discuss income generation and leave confident that you can successfully drive school improvement.
Leadership and Governance

**May**

**Employment Law in Education**
TUESDAY, 2 MAY, LONDON; THURSDAY, 4 MAY, MANCHESTER
Now on its 16th year, this is the only event where you can hear from three of the country’s leading education law firms on your key employment law and HR challenges.
Leadership and Governance

**SENCO Update**
THURSDAY, 25 MAY, LONDON
The essential annual event for SENCOs. This year, revitalise your provision by taking away strategies, resources and staff training ideas to ensure you can be a truly accessible and inclusive school.
SEN and Safeguarding

**September**

**Child Protection in Education 2017**
THURSDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER, LONDON; THURSDAY, 5 OCTOBER, MANCHESTER
Book ahead for this essential annual conference and get legal guidance and vital updates on pressing safeguarding issues.
SEN and Safeguarding

**October**

**The Multi-Academy Trusts Summit 2017**
THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, 12-13 OCTOBER, VENUE TBC
An immersive two-day event which aims to provoke thought, inspire you to move beyond boundaries and enable you to network nationally and build relationships.
Leadership and Governance

For a full list of our upcoming conferences, half-day briefings and training days please visit my.optimus-education.com/conferences. For further information or booking queries please call the conference team on 0207 954 3421.
What’s in this month’s Leadership and Governance section?

Developing leadership skills in your school is always a priority and this issue has something for everyone. Middle leaders can check out the tips on time management to help achieve a healthy work-life balance. If you’re ready for your next leadership role, catch up on our ‘Aspiring to senior leadership’ webinar to explore ways of self-assessing skills and then discover what to expect in senior leadership interviews with example tasks and practice questions. With the number of multi-academy trusts increasing, we spoke to regional schools commissioner Tim Coulson on how MATs can work with their RSC and look at the areas to consider when expanding a MAT. One of our main priorities is to save you time and provide resources to help you in your role. Turn to page 8 for a preview of some of the content and training coming up this term then head online for much more!

Lisa Griffin, Content Lead

Contributors in this issue

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How to maintain a work-life balance while getting the work done oego.co/TimeManagementWebinar

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This term: learning for your leadership team

Your Optimus membership gives you access to a range of exclusive events and resources. Here’s a sneak peek at what you can expect.

The best professional development comes from finding ways to embed best practice from an Inset day or training session, working through specific elements of the learning to engage staff and make sustained improvements over time.

To help Optimus members in developing a culture of continuous improvement in school, we plan training, events, webinars and content to complement each other, help you address pressing issues and provide a long-term package of support and learning for your whole school.

Take a look at our preview of just some of what we have planned for you and your leadership team this autumn term. And don’t forget to head to our website for more resources and upcoming events!

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<td>Check out our Middle Leadership Essentials training programme online for our new units on ‘Being more productive’ and ‘Monitoring team performance.’</td>
<td>Network with peers and hear from practitioners and lawyers at our new event on working in a MAT. Establishing or Joining Multi-Academy Trusts. Leeds 29th March.</td>
<td>Be confident that you’re using data efficiently to set reliable targets and track and drive pupil progress. Accurate &amp; Effective Data Use in Secondary Schools. London 17th January.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use our middle leader skills audit to identify what you need to focus on and how to get the most out of training.</td>
<td>Catch up on our MAT myth-busting webinar exploring the advantages and disadvantages of being part of a multi-academy trust.</td>
<td>Sustainable professional development is key to long-term improvement. If you’re responsible for CPD in your school, our In-House Training area is home to programmes on CPD leadership focusing on sharing and embedding good practice.</td>
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<td>As part of our Middle Leadership Essentials training course, we’re hosting a live networking event for participants in March. Head online for the programme and more details.</td>
<td>If you’re looking for collaboration and partnership options but aren’t sure what’s right for your school, use our list of questions to ask when joining a group.</td>
<td>The school improvement plan is vital in communicating and tracking progress against school priorities. You can download the template SIP online from the Knowledge Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch up on our middle leader webinars focusing on developing key skills such as time management and techniques for managing difficult conversations and delivering feedback.</td>
<td>Look out for our annual Teaching Schools Summit taking place this term. Now in its 3rd year, this is a chance to network with peers and share expertise around building capacity and ensuring sustainability of your teaching school. London 27th April</td>
<td>Designed to save you time and demonstrate your compliance, our statutory model policies and documents are approved by our legal partners Browne Jacobson and customised to meet the needs of your setting.</td>
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Download the Growing your own middle leadership toolkit for expert advice and training on areas including managing change and leading a team.
What do you think of the earlier suggestion that MAT inspections be based on an appraisal system with progress towards objectives assessed? It's not far removed from what RSCs currently do. At this time of year we meet with every trust. We don't necessarily call it an appraisal but we discuss what their plans are, what they're doing and what help they would like.

In this review we focus a lot on how the schools are doing now, in terms of progress in the trust, but I do understand it's also important to look at the trust in the long term in relation to their development plan.

The bottom line is that the main job of an RSC is to license people to get on with their work but to be pretty fierce about their performance while doing so. For us if schools aren't doing well this will always be discussed.

The relationship between an RSC and a trust can be tricky. RSCs are there to support trusts and help them expand where they are able but ultimately you are there to hold them accountable.

How can a trust build a successful relationship with their RSC?
In the past RSCs used to only visit those academies performing badly and of course in some cases underperformance is the reason an academy joins a trust.

We're doing things differently this year which we hope is better. We're visiting an underperforming school and a school within the same trust that is doing well to better understand how the trust is working with its schools.

We're trying to establish why the trust is finding it hard with a school that is underperforming. We want to determine whether the trust is struggling, whether it was the right decision to take on this school, or whether the trust have a great plan in place that they are working towards to improve the school and time is needed.

Visiting a school that's doing well and an underperforming school in the same trust will allow us to better understand how the trust is working with their schools.

We're hoping these visits will help to form more of an open relationship with the trust, rather than the trust feeling that an RSC is only there when something isn't going well.

I would also advise trusts to get in contact with their RSC and talk to them. A successful relationship is a two-way thing.

With the new health checks coming into force next year, will we see a slowing down in the expansion of MATs?
I don't think so. The health checks will be based on a volunteer scheme and the trusts who volunteer will be those who have a plan to grow.

I think the checks will actually encourage trusts and give them the confidence to expand, particularly those who have been identified by RSCs as being in a strong position to grow.

A CEO, finance director and chair of trustees from different trusts will help an RSC decide whether a health check is met and a trust can expand. These will be volunteers from experienced, successful and larger MATs than those wanting to expand.

The panel of three will visit a trust and undertake the health check, offering advice and support, and report back both to the RSC and the trust.

The panel have been in that position, they know what worked for them and what didn't and I think the shared experience will enable very honest, down to earth discussions.

As we see more MATs in the future, how important is it that they talk to each other?
Extremely important. The risk is that everyone is reinventing the wheel and we ought to be better as trusts now.

The system now needs to accelerate those MATs in the early stages of growth and not have them go through all the bumps and bruises that earlier trusts went through.

A revolution is happening and we are probably seeing an irreversible change in the system. We want trusts to be able to talk to each other, learn from each other and be really honest about what worked and what didn't.

We want the trusts two years behind those who first developed to learn from the mistakes made and not repeat them.
There are over 950 multi-academy trusts in the country. Compare this with the end of 2015 when there were 846.

Just like children, when any organisation expands in size there are growing pains. In addition to the difficulties in expansion there are some sizes of MAT which are difficult to handle. Many commentators point to the idea that between five and ten academies is a good size, providing economies of scale and ease of leadership.

When MATs grow bigger than this they are often sub-divided into clusters of academies.

As your MAT expands there are common areas which will develop and you will need to consider what actions to take to make the process as smooth as possible.

Vision

As a standalone school you are likely to have a clear vision of what you are trying to achieve but when you begin to form a MAT there needs to be an overarching vision. Leadership and management consultant Simon Sinek describes this as 'Your Why?'

In the initial stages of growth leaders at the beginning of the MAT journey may shy away from developing a strong 'why' in case it is threatening to the academies. The danger is that leaders can fall into the 'why' being focussed on efficiency or cost savings. Unfortunately this can be difficult to share and does not give staff something to strive for.

When times are hard colleagues may even dispute whether there are cost savings and feel disgruntled as to the purpose of the MAT. If you have developed a strong vision for your MAT, then once more academies join you it is important to consider how you gain their 'buy-in' and develop their belief in the vision.

Leadership

Often one of the key challenges when expanding a MAT is determining the point at which the MAT leader stops being a principal and instead introduces principals or associate principals for every academy. There can be a temptation to move to this structure quickly but this is obviously a large expense to the organisation. There may also not be a clear role to pursue and leaders can get in the way of each other.

There will come a point though when the MAT requires a CEO or executive principal. For some leaders it can be very difficult to give up the reigns to their own school and they may try and do both roles for too long, meaning that neither are developed properly.

Governance is also a key aspect of leadership. A growing MAT will have to decide on clear schemes of delegation so that both the trust board and local governing bodies (LGBs) are clear on their remit.

Talent pipelines

At the heart of any MAT should be the drive for school improvement. As MATs first grow this is often achieved by seconding or moving leaders from the original academies into the newer members of the MAT.

The concept is often that those leaders are tried and tested, understand the vision of the MAT and can take their skills into the new academies and improve them.

This has proved very effective in many MATs. However it does not take too long before leadership capacity is reduced or spread too thinly across the MAT.

As the MAT expands it is likely that the board will have to give LGBs a greater role and this can be difficult for board members who still have a strong affinity for one of the original academies. A further challenge is to ensure the board is representative of the changing MAT while remaining true to its original aims and objectives.

Whatever the size of a MAT, the vision and the mission must have the pupils and young people at its heart
School improvement
As MATs grow they need to develop their own school improvement strategies. Some MATs have built their own advisor system replicating that of local authorities with former principals taking executive roles and having responsibility for a group of schools.

MATs may also recruit a wider range of advisors such as those focussing on key subjects or elements such as post 16, pupil premium and EYFS. There are obvious difficulties and significant costs in developing a centrally based school improvement team.

Other MATs have focussed on a school led system with a very small central school improvement team and colleagues in individual academies identified and given time so that alongside their core role they can support other academies.

This second model is probably more complicated and time consuming to develop but has the advantage of colleagues retaining their in-school focus.

However a MAT organises its school improvement it is often best developed through its teaching school which can then bring together talent pipelines, school to school support through NLEs, NLGs, LLEs and SLEs and develop its Initial Teacher Training strategy.

Back office support
It is important to quickly develop appropriate financial systems as the sums of monies can soon become large. We have become used to reading stories of financial issues in MATs over the last two years and many wonder if this is tip of iceberg. Appropriate systems will protect leaders and governors and ensure probity in their system.

MATs will often look for cost savings from back office support, including contracts across the trust such as photocopying and printing. Business managers need to ensure that as the trust grows contracts support this growth and do not increase tie in.

If the MAT is expanding through the acquisition of poorly performing schools, developing a HR function can be invaluable. There will be colleagues in the new schools whose capability may not be in line with the trusts and this will lead to staffing issues so central HR support is necessary to help make the process of transition as smooth as possible.

If you look at different MATs there will be a whole range of centralised support including estates, central processing of payments, PR and communication, careers advice and guidance and enrichment. You will need to decide which you can afford and which are the most vital for your stage in development.

Forward planning
All MATs will have a period of (relative to size) rapid expansion and this will be difficult to deal with. It will cause teething problems and mistakes will be made. Those MATs who have managed small growth (up to six schools) the most effectively are those who have spent time at the beginning planning their expansion, especially around the governance and leadership model.

At this size there will not be large amounts of central services to plan and implement but what is crucial is that vision and mission are communicated, understood and owned by all.

Once MATs grow beyond this size they become very different entities and there needs to be a focus on ensuring the benefits of this expansion outweigh the complexity of a big organisation.

At this stage the vision and mission becomes ever more important and colleagues need to be on board. If not they will start to feel that they aren’t part of the MAT but instead that the MAT is a different organisation and ‘does to them.’

Whatever the size of a MAT, the vision and the mission must have the pupils and young people at its heart. There are times when we must return to the basics of being here to educate and build life chances, not just form large organisations.
Converting to an academy: a case study

With academisation firmly on the agenda, SUZANNE O’CONNELL finds out why one school took the decision to convert and what the process was like.

In September 2011, Richard Middlebrook was appointed as headteacher at Alsager School. It’s his first headship and the school had already received a ‘good’ judgment from Ofsted. It had a successful headteacher for 17 years and Richard recognises that there were many features in its favour when he became the new head. The governors had already considered applying for academy status before then, but with the headteacher due for retirement it was felt it would be better to delay the decision until the new appointment was made.

Richard was aware that academy status was under consideration and following his appointment it was discussed with the governing body. The pros and cons of the conversion were carefully compared, a consultation took place and by September 2013, the school had converted to an academy.

Benefits
It was felt by the school that the local authority, Cheshire East, were finding it more and more difficult to support their schools. With many secondary schools in the area already having converted to academy status, LA resources and capability were dwindling further. ‘There just wasn’t the support there that the school needed,’ says Richard. ‘It wasn’t the fault of the LA, they were struggling.’

In addition, the school building at Alsager was tired and it urgently needed serious capital investment. ‘I knew the kind of money we required would only be available to us if we became an academy,’ explains Richard. As an academy the governing body would be able to bid to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) for money to invest in the school and over the intervening years they have received in excess of £2 million to make the alterations and improvements that were needed.

The final reason for conversion involved the school looking to the future and the changing educational climate. Alsager was already part of a co-operative foundation trust that consists of themselves and five local primary schools. One of the primary schools had become a sponsored academy within a multi-academy trust (MAT). As such the influence of the co-operative trust on the school dwindled and Richard was aware that there was a level of vulnerability in terms of the existing co-operative trust if they did not become an academy.

‘If we had been an academy we could have sponsored the school ourselves and it could have remained with us,’ explains Richard. ‘We wanted to make sure that this kind of takeover wouldn’t happen again.

‘We wanted to put in place a structure that would ensure the long term survival of the current trust. The only way to do this would be to become a MAT ourselves, even though we were only one school at the time. Other schools could convert to join or be sponsored in the future.’

Alsager and its primary schools are very much part of the local community and want to remain that way. ‘I can see that we might take more schools into our MAT in future, but we have set down a limit of only schools within half an hour’s drive. We want to make sure that there are all the benefits in our MAT of being able to reach each other’s schools easily and provide local, collaborative support as and when required.’

The consultation process
Alsager is part of two trusts, the co-operative trust and its own MAT. ‘We’ve still retained the co-operative values and

School information
Name of school: Alsager School
Type of school: Academy converter
Number on roll: 1,323
Headteacher: Richard Middlebrook
Other information: Alsager is part of a co-operative foundation trust with five partner primary schools. It converted to academy status in 2013.

Comments from Ofsted
‘The headteacher is a quietly inspirational leader. He has the highest expectations of all his staff and pupils. Over the last three years, his outstanding leadership has enabled the school to move up to the next level from the good judgement it had been given before converting to academy status. Particularly impressive is the way he has taken the whole school community with him on his journey.’ (Effectiveness of leadership and management)

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ethos and this is shared throughout the trust,’ says Richard. ‘Before we converted we had to have the approval of the co-operative board of trustees.’

The two trusts sit side by side, however, at times there is an overlap and Richard speculates that at some point in the future the co-operative trust may well become subsumed within the MAT.

The consultation process was extensive and governors, the trust, parents, staff, trade unions and the parents of the local primary schools were all involved in the discussion.

‘There are 15,000 people who live in Alsager and 95% of the children in primary schools here come to us,’ says Richard. Very few parents came to the parents meeting about the proposed conversion, possibly explained by the fact that the school circulated a lot of information about academy status, including a list of FAQs in advance.

In Richard’s discussion with the governing body and the co-operative board of trustees, he was keen to point out that the decision should not be based upon individual political views but on what was best to drive the school and community forward.

‘I believe the majority of the school’s improvement would have taken place whether it was a maintained school or not. Just converting to academy status does not guarantee school improvement. However, there have been some aspects of being an academy that have assisted our drive forward.’

Building the team
When Richard came to the school he was keen to press the point that improvement wasn’t his job alone. ‘It’s down to everyone. It’s a collective responsibility and consistency is vital. The fact that as an academy he could employ all his own staff has been a key component in the building of this consistency. ‘Everyone is a leader in our school and they share the same goal and vision.’

With everyone subscribing to the school’s ethos and hired within the umbrella of the school’s culture, Richard feels being an academy has helped him to fine tune the team that is Alsager. ‘Our inspector described it as leadership running through the school like the wording through a stick of rock. Everyone must pick it up if there is a problem with uniform, for example. We all have a collective responsibility and accountability. We don’t have a “what are the SLT going to do about it mentality”; rather, what are we going to do about it?’

Academy status means that Richard has been able to pick and choose between the different services that the LA still offers. ‘In some cases we buy back from the LA but if we feel that the service doesn’t deliver what we want, we go elsewhere. We’ve also benefited from having less top-slicing of our budget.’

A smooth process
Richard concedes that the smooth conversion was mostly to do with the efficiency of his SBM and the finance team rather than through his own direct involvement. ‘I don’t think many staff were even aware what was happening when it was happening. We didn’t change the uniform or name of the school and most things carried on as normal. We’ve also benefited from having less top-slicing of our budget.’

Richard advises schools considering academisation to think carefully about whether they would prefer to be a MAT themselves or join one. ‘Don’t just base your collaborations on your existing relationships either,’ he suggests. ‘You might have a good relationship now with a local headteacher but they may not always be there. There have to be other reasons for linking together with a school.’

He is also keen to emphasise the importance of the scheme of delegation. ‘You must be clear about where the decision-making lies within your collaboration. How much control is held centrally with the MAT and how much is delegated to individual schools and local governing bodies? If you are a sponsored academy you don’t necessarily have that option but as a converter you do. Your articles of association need to clearly outline the lines of delegation, autonomy and responsibility.’

Create or join a MAT?
Richard is looking forward to the opportunities that being an academy sponsor will bring. ‘I’m aware though that being a RSC is a phenomenal responsibility. Our RSC has 3,000 academies to keep an eye on and although I see him on a fairly regular basis it is an almost impossible job unless you have a huge team to support you.’
Aspiring to senior leadership: preparing for interviews

Ready to progress to deputy or assistant head? Catch up on our webinar where Marva Rollins explored how to prepare for a senior leader role.

Headteacher of Raynham Primary School Marva Rollins began the webinar by asking the attendees to think about the leaders that they have worked with. What were their strengths and weaknesses? What would you do differently and why? If aspiring to senior leadership, how do you know you’ll be able to do it differently?

As a leader there is often a feeling that you must get things right all the time and this can be scary and exacting. You won’t get things right all the time, but you do need to be as prepared for a leadership role as you possibly can.

This means having the stamina to handle both the expected and unexpected challenges that you will face on a daily basis. It means being emotionally, physically and mentally prepared for the role of leader. So how do you know if you are ready to progress to the next leadership level?

Identifying strengths and weaknesses

One of the best ways of doing this is to observe yourself. Think about what you are saying in different situations and why. Think about what you are doing and why. You need to become acutely aware of what you do on a day-to-day basis as a leader.

We all work on autopilot sometimes and don’t always take time to reflect. Get yourself an A4 notebook and use one page to record your principles, one for values, one for your vision etc. Refer back to this book often and don’t lose sight of what you have written.

Think about what do you do well and consider how you know that this is an area of strength. Evidence your skills and talents in your notebook and give examples.

Then look for any gap and find ways to close them. Be open to self-critique and critique from others. Look at your last appraisal. Which areas were identified as goals and objectives to work towards?

As a leader you need to be self-aware. You need to stop doing some of the managing to which you are so used. We often find it hard to let go of things until we’ve finished them.

A lot of managing is about ‘doing’: doing tasks, doing the day-to-day job etc. As a leader you need to be able to let go, allow someone else to get on with finishing tasks and make sure your middle leaders have the knowledge, skills and expertise to get the job done.

Self-assess your skills

Give yourself at least six months planning time ahead of applying for a new role and use this time to develop your skills and knowledge and practice interview situations.

Identify a coach, perhaps a senior colleague, to help you. Hopefully you work in an environment which places emphasis on succession planning and talent management but unfortunately not all leaders are talent spotters, so you may need to identify an external person outside of your school.

Look at some job description and person specification examples and map your skills and experience against what is being asked for. By evidencing what you can and can’t do you should be able to better identify your readiness for the role.

Talk to your coach about where there are gaps in your skills. Budgeting is a common one for those new to senior leadership. You may be used to managing a curriculum or department budget but how does this fit into the bigger whole-school budget? How prepared are you to manage budgets on a larger scale?

A question on budgeting in an interview is likely, perhaps even an in-tray exercise. It’s important to realise that while you don’t need to be able to do the budget, you still need to have a strong understanding of it.

Coaching methods to use for interview preparation

Research example questions for the role you are applying for and coach yourself in how you would answer them. Use your notebook to record your answers to common questions, such as ‘how do you support a colleague who is struggling?’

Having a coach is a great way to prepare for interview. Having someone to take the time to listen to you is extremely helpful.
A coach is there solely for you to talk to and help you think through the answers. Undertake practice interviews with your coach. It’s perfectly normal to feel nervous before an interview, but it’s important not to allow those nerves to affect your performance. By practising interview techniques beforehand, you will hopefully feel calmer and more comfortable when the situation arrives.

**Showing leadership qualities in an interview**
The first impression can often be the lasting impression in an interview. Be friendly, enthusiastic and genuine. When answering questions you should do so from the point of view that you are already in the leadership role that you are applying for. For example, if you are interviewing for the role of deputy head then the questions you answer should be from the position of a deputy.

As well as being a good speaker in the interview, you will need to show that you are a good listener. This will be shown by how well you answer questions. Listen to what the interviewer is expecting, be aware of key skills or examples that are required and answer accordingly.

How you distribute leadership is an important aspect of a leadership interview. The higher up you are on the leadership ladder, the more aware of and confident in distributing leadership across the school to develop staff and achieve whole-school objectives you’ll need to be.

It may seem obvious but you must know yourself. What makes you tick? What makes you ready to step up to a new leadership level? How would you react to a new challenge or stressful situation? Be ready to articulate all this with examples and evidence.

You need to have a mix of non-negotiables and flexibility as a leader. Teacher performance, pupil and staff wellbeing and high quality teaching are always going to be non-negotiable areas. When dealing with something unexpected like sudden staff absence or changes to policy and legislation, you will need to show that you can adapt to change positively and take your team with you.

All this needs to be portrayed in an interview. Ultimately you need to show what it is that makes you the leader that you are and why you are the best person for this leadership role.

**Questions**
At the end of the webinar there was time for the questions from attendees, some of which are below. You can go online to hear the rest of the questions put to Marva.

**What are the common pitfalls in an interview? Why do candidates who are strong on paper not get appointed?**

**Marva:** One of the most common pitfalls is simply not providing enough examples or evidence of what you say you can do or have done on paper. Not being sufficiently prepared for an interview will quickly become obvious once questions start.

**Is it best to have someone you know well coach you?**

**Marva:** It doesn’t have to be someone you know. What is important is that you have someone who knows how to coach. Some people prefer to use someone new as they feel more comfortable discussing challenges or weaknesses with someone who doesn’t know them. The main thing is to feel comfortable enough to be able to undertake a practice interview with your coach and to be open and honest.

Marva finished the webinar by encouraging the attendees to reflect on their current position with the following questions.

- What has prompted you to say ‘I am ready for this step into senior leadership?’
- To what extent have your current leaders enabled you to prepare for this step?
- What have you done to ensure that you are emotionally and physically prepared for the role of leader?

Download the podcast and presentation slides at my.optimus-education.com/webinar-aspiring-senior-leadership-preparing-interviews
Senior leader interviews: tasks and questions

Good preparation is essential for a successful senior leadership interview. LISA GRIFFIN outlines what the interview involves and example questions you may be asked.

Interviews for a senior leader role are commonly held over two days. The first day will involve a number of tasks which may include any of the following:

- a group exercise
- panel interviews (pupils and staff)
- presentation
- teaching a lesson
- in-tray exercises
- data analysis.

Day 2 will usually consist of a presentation and a formal interview with the headteacher and governors.

Group task
A group task enables interviewers to consider the interpersonal skills of each candidate and their natural responses to situations. It helps to assess emotional intelligence, interaction, leadership and improvisation skills. The candidate will lead a discussion about a possible incident that may occur in school, such as the examples below.

- A parent rings you just before break time to say that her Year 7 son has been physically hurt by a Year 10 student on the school grounds before school started. This is not the first time the Year 10 student has been accused of physically assaulting a younger student. What do you do?

- A member of staff comes to you with a grievance against her head of department. Both colleagues have a history of disagreements but this is the first time they have been officially brought to a member of the senior leadership team. What do you do?

Student panel
The student panel could consist of representatives from the student council. Prior to the interview they work with a staff member to create suitable questions for the candidates. Questions could include those below, as well as one or two that are specific to the school's context.

- Can you describe a project you have led that has benefited all students in the school?
- Can you describe your leadership style and how, as students, we would benefit from it?
- What do you believe are the key elements of teaching a successful lesson?

You will be asked questions around driving attainment, how to ensure outstanding teaching and learning and ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum.

The teacher observing the panel will collect this information together and consider, for example, two aspects of the candidates such as their rapport with the pupils and the professional regard they might be held in.

Presentation
This will likely be around 10 minutes on an aspect of school life. You'll be judged on such things as your leadership style and style of presenting as well as whether you show initiative and confidence, clearly convey ideas and engage your audience.

Teaching a lesson
You will be observed while teaching a lesson and may also be asked to observe a lesson taught by someone else and provide feedback. This will of course be in the unfamiliar territory of a stranger’s classroom so is a real test of how confident and assured you are in an unknown environment.

In-tray exercises
You will be presented with a list of various tasks or scenarios, encompassing a range of responsibilities.
You’ll be asked how you would prioritise those tasks and be expected to explain why you prioritised in that order. Examples include:
- an email from a parent complaining about a teacher
- a note from a staff member concerned about the behaviour of a pupil
- a safeguarding concern raised by a teacher.

Data exercise
There is a wide range of data you may be asked to analyse, including levels of progress matrices, attendance or behavioural data, in a timed exercise. You will be expected to understand and interpret the data, answer questions and explain what strategies you would implement to plan school improvement and how you would measure the success of these strategies.

Day 2: interview panel questions
The first interview question is likely to be asking why you applied for a role at that particular school. A question like this is trying to determine if and why the candidate wants to work at this school or if their sole aim is to find any senior post.

The next question may be about the lesson you led. If it didn't go to plan, it provides the chance to recognise this and suggest improvements.

After that the questions are likely to be whole-school or leadership-specific questions.

Senior leader interview questions

Opening questions: getting to know the candidate
- Tell us a little bit about yourself. What inspired you to apply for a job at this school?
- You have just taught your lesson. What went particularly well and, if you were to repeat the lesson, what would you do differently?

Strategic direction questions
These will focus on areas such as the vision and ethos of the school and your leadership skills.
- Can you describe a whole-school initiative you have led and how successful it was?
- How would you characterise your leadership style?
- As a member of the SLT, you may need to oversee the running of the school in the absence of the headteacher. What would you need to know about to do that effectively?
- Give us an example of when you managed change in your current school. What was the impact of the change and how did you ensure people were brought along with you?
- How do you embed your school’s vision in day-to-day practice with your team?

Educational focus questions
You will be asked questions around driving attainment, how to ensure outstanding teaching and learning and providing a broad and balanced curriculum.
- What support would you suggest we provide for a teacher who has had unsatisfactory lesson observations?
- How would you arrange a variety of suitable interventions across the whole school?
- Please describe how you have raised standards across your school.
- The school is committed to a ‘stage not age’ programme of learning. What advantages and challenges does this bring to school leadership?
- Please provide an example of how you have moved a colleague’s teaching forward from good to outstanding.

Operational management questions
This area will cover processes to support the day-to-day running of the school, budget management and maintaining a high-performing team.
- What should a good policy document do?
- A member of staff comes to you with a complaint about a fellow member of staff; how would you deal with it? (Interviewer to give example)
- Provide an example of how you have delegated effectively to colleagues in your team. What did you learn from this experience?
- How have you driven efficiencies through your current budget? What was the outcome?
- How would you support an under-performing staff member?
Time management tips for middle leaders

Balancing teaching and leadership responsibilities is key for middle leaders. JO SMITH offers practical ideas and strategies to successfully manage both.

Whether you’re new to middle leadership or just looking to restore a bit of that elusive work-life balance, there are things you can do to work smarter.

Teach smart
You’ll be expected to practice what you preach, so make sure what’s going on in your classroom passes muster. That doesn’t mean spend more time preparing amazing lessons - your leadership role means this can’t be your single focus.

Instead you need to find the short cuts to excellent learning, such as routines. Build routines into the start of your day: projector on, registers loaded, lesson resources laid out on the desk and so on.

Have a classroom that’s kept tidy so pupils know where to find things for themselves.

Ditch those over fussy, labour intensive resources you used to have more time for. Now your best friends are smart planning, routines, ICT and your charisma (and if all else fails your experience to fall back on).

The three part lesson is still possible. Keep the opening activity short. While pupils work on something you organise the next steps of the lesson. Get to the deep learning quickly and use the sharpest pupils to run the plenary.

Quality assurance: observations, learning walks and work scrutiny
After the impact of your own teaching this is perhaps the biggest way to affect a positive difference across a department or area. Visiting other lessons provides you with a conversation about learning with your team.

Delegating is one of the hardest skills. How do you get people to do things when it’s probably quicker to do them yourself?

Delegate
Delegating is one of the hardest skills. How do you get people to do things when it’s probably quicker to do them yourself?

Many leaders make the mistake of thinking that delegating will be interpreted as shirking one’s responsibilities. In fact colleagues often value the trust you place in them and are keen to take on the next level of responsibility.

Of course there are tasks you can’t delegate, including examination board or safeguarding accountability.

Use performance management to share responsibilities for the year ahead. This ensures staff are clear about the contribution they are making and the deadlines they are working to.

Be prepared for people to complete a task differently than you would have done and perhaps, especially the first time, not as well.

You’ll have to honour what you tell pupils - it’s OK to not get things perfect first time, that’s how we learn.
Plan and prep
The best middle leaders make sure their time is spent efficiently, especially when it comes to preparation for planning and analysis of pupil attainment and progress.

Assessment results analysis for example can be done so that the information is useful to you, can be shared to good purpose with the team, can be used in meetings with line managers and even reported to governors or shared with inspectors. Think about how one format can suit multiple audiences before you start a task.

Create good filing systems
Create main electronic folders, no more than six to ten, and then create sub folders within them. Think carefully about the folder headings so your expanding library of documents remains tamed.

With paper documents don’t be afraid to purge at regular intervals. Your school will have a records retention policy for sensitive or externally used documents but if you haven’t used it for 18 months you’re not likely to again.

Encourage the department to do the same. Try to be as electronic as possible and set up clearly assigned folders for resource sharing and storage.

One paper based tip for new middle leaders is to keep a file with the months of the year marked for each section. As annual school or department events occur, store relevant prompt sheets or reviews of what’s gone well/needs doing differently in each month’s file. The following year you will have a ready set of help sheets.

Spend wisely
Spend your increasingly tight budget wisely. Don’t buy gimmicks or splash out on new untested initiatives without careful budgeting. Consider time saving resources first: online versions of textbooks, homework workbooks and subscriptions you will actually use.

Prioritise and compartmentalise
Central to managing your time is prioritising and compartmentalising different aspects of your role(s) to make sure they’re all given the attention they deserve. It’s tempting to check emails constantly in an attempt to keep on top of that inbox; more effective is to assign a specific time slot to check emails each day. Discard junk and deal with replies in one sitting.

Working this way you may even find that people who are quick to email for instant advice have actually sorted their own problems while you have been working on your most pressing tasks.

Sometimes not being there might mean you aren’t always relied on to sort/advise and your team might just become increasingly self-sufficient.

If you’re an early bird and work most effectively first thing, find somewhere to work productively. Get lots done so you can be more available to others at the end of the school day perhaps.

It’s not about being less helpful but balancing your time so you can use it to best ends.

Tips & Strategies
For more time management tips and strategies to achieve a better work-life balance, Premium and Unlimited CPD members can access our new Middle Leadership Essentials training course online at my.optimus-education.com/training/teacher-leader-middle-leadership-essentials

With units including developing and implementing a vision and managing change, this training programme is about the practical realities of team leadership, managing people and managing yourself.

Log on and download ‘Growing your own: a middle leadership toolkit’ at my.optimus-education.com/growing-your-own-middle-leadership-toolkit

Webinar
If you missed our recent ‘Time management for middle leaders’ webinar you can download the presentation slides or listen to the podcast at my.optimus-education.com/webinar-time-management-middle-leaders
JO SMITH provides a template to help upper pay scale (UPS) teachers evaluate skills and prepare for a performance management meeting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>0 = no proficiency or experience</th>
<th>5 = an average standard of proficiency for someone with your teaching experience</th>
<th>10 = considerable proficiency or experience in your opinion</th>
<th>Provide examples of when you have demonstrated this, throughout the past 24 months in order for it to be substantial and sustained, using the following prompts</th>
<th>Measureable outcomes for the school as a result of your work/contribution</th>
<th>Any other comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set high expectations, which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils</td>
<td>Establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect</td>
<td>• Classroom environment (e.g. displays)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds and abilities</td>
<td>• Evidence of target setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils</td>
<td>• Assembly contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils</td>
<td>Be accountable for pupils’ attainment, progress and outcomes</td>
<td>• Sustained positive assessment outcomes both external (e.g. GCSE) and internal (e.g. department assessments)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Be aware of pupils’ capabilities and their prior knowledge, and plan teaching to build on these</td>
<td>• Lesson plans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Guide pupils to reflect on the progress they have made and their emerging needs</td>
<td>• Evidence of dedicated improvement and reflection time (D.I.R.T) in lessons and exercise books</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching</td>
<td>• CPD undertaken and evidence of use in the classroom</td>
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### Leadership Skills

**Encourage pupils to take a responsible and conscientious attitude to their work and study**

- Logs of homework completion
- Sustained high quality presentation and work in exercise books
- Work scrutiny findings
- Lesson observation feedback
- Classroom climate

**Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge**

- Have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils’ interest in the subject and address misunderstandings

- Subject specific CPD undertaken and/or delivered
- Lesson observations
- Marking and feedback
- Professional reading
- Excellent syllabus knowledge

**Demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship**

- Responsibility regularly taken for own CPD
- Professional reading
- Use of online learning tools e.g. Twitter/blogs

**Demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher’s specialist subject**

- Sustained accuracy of own shared writing e.g. pupil reports, letters to parents, items for school newsletter or website

**Plan and teach well-structured lessons**

- Impart knowledge and develop understanding through effective use of lesson time

- Lesson observation feedback
- Peer coaching activity
- Sustained pupil achievement outcomes

**Promote a love of learning and children’s intellectual curiosity**

- Lesson observation feedback
- Extra-curricular contribution
- Pupil voice surveys

**Set homework and plan other out-of-class activities to consolidate and extend the knowledge and understanding pupils have acquired**

- Planning of extra-curricular learning
- Homework evidence in exercise books or on school homework logging platform

**Reflect systematically on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to teaching**

- Lesson observation feedback conversations
- Performance management reflections over two full cycles

**Contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area(s)**

- Schemes of work contributed to
- Regular evaluation of learning resources

**Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils**

- Know when and how to differentiate appropriately, using approaches which enable pupils to be taught effectively

- Lesson observation
- Learning walk feedback
- Positive outcomes for different pupil groups over a two year period

**Have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils’ ability to learn, and how best to overcome these**

- Lesson observations
- Tutor role

**Demonstrate an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children, and know how to adapt teaching to support pupils’ education at different stages of development**

- Positive outcomes for pupils in different year groups and pupil groups over two years

**Continued >>**
### Leadership Skills

#### Have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, high ability, English as an additional language or disabilities and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them

- Fulfilment of advice in an individualised education programme (IEP)
- Lesson observation feedback
- Pupil voice surveys

#### Make accurate and productive use of assessment

- Know and understand how to assess the relevant subject and curriculum areas, including statutory assessment requirements
- Sustained accurate assessment evidence in department standardising activities and in comparison of predicted versus actual outcomes

#### Make use of formative and summative assessment to secure pupils’ progress

- Sustained and regular marking and feedback on pupils’ work
- Accurate input into school tracking systems
- Accurate and regular application of school assessment system

#### Use relevant data to monitor progress, set targets and plan subsequent lessons

- Regular use of school wide available data
- Evidence in lesson plans

#### Give pupils regular feedback, both orally and through accurate marking, and encourage pupils to respond to the feedback

- Lesson observation and learning walk evidence
- School marking policy adhered to and progress of pupils monitored

#### Have clear rules and routines for behaviour in classrooms and take responsibility for promoting good and courteous behaviour both in class and around the school, in accordance with the school’s behaviour policy

- Evidence of sustained use of school rewards and sanctions
- Lesson observations

#### Have high expectations of behaviour, establish a framework for discipline with a range of strategies and use praise, sanctions and rewards consistently and fairly

- School policy fairly applied to pupils
- Parental support

#### Manage classes effectively, using approaches which are appropriate to pupils’ needs in order to involve and motivate them

- Lesson observation feedback
- Performance management review conversations over two full cycles

#### Maintain good relationships with pupils, exercise appropriate authority and act decisively when necessary

- Fair application of sanctions system
- Pupil voice survey findings

#### Make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the school

- Regular running of extra-curricular activities such as clubs, sport or music activities
- Run/attend educational trips and visits
- Deliver assemblies
- Participate in fundraising activities

#### Develop effective professional relationships with colleagues, knowing how and when to draw on advice and specialist support

- Sustained participation in peer coaching
- Evidence of seeking and offering advice when necessary

Download the full template online at my.optimus-education.com/skills-audit-template-ups-class-teachers
What’s in this month’s School Business Management section?

Can teachers be replaced by computers? It’s a topic likely to give rise to lively discussion, but in this issue Mathew and Heather Clements-Wheeler take a practical look at the pros and cons of online tuition. Relationships between SBMs and the SLT are another potentially tricky topic. Jo Smith gives the headteacher perspective on page 22, while Cate Hart shares her advice on thriving rather than just surviving SLT meetings on page 24.

Our members seem to be in a philosophical mood: we recently received some interesting questions about the role of the SBM in shaping a school’s ethics and values, and maintaining the balance between efficiency and value for money – turn to page 28 for our expert’s response. As we enter 2017, one of the only certain things in schools is that nothing remains certain for long! Make sure you’re equipped to communicate change clearly and effectively by reading Nickii Messer’s blog post.

Contributors in this issue

Caroline Collins is the head of school business strategy and resources at Miles Coverdale Primary School. She is a NASBM fellow and keen champion of the value of SBMs as leaders.

Cate Hart is an experienced school business manager. She has a background in banking and has delivered a number of training sessions for NASBM and Capita.

Matthew Clements-Wheeler is a business manager and deputy head at Bordesley Green Girls’ School. He is a NASBM trustee and led the development of the professional standards.

Nickii Messer was a school business manager for many years in three school phases. She now works as a consultant and is Anglia Ruskin’s operational lead for their SBM programmes.

 Forgotten your log-in details or want to add more members from your school or organisation? Email our customer services team at customer.services@optimus-education.com or call us on 0845 450 6404.

Top tweets from @BusinessOE

Stephen Morales: We need to remember that our client is the child and focus on impact, not just accountability #oeMATs

Interesting - will some MATs meet apprenticeship levy threshold of annual paybill in excess of £3 million? http://owl.li/sqPY305Ko7h

Crisis? What crisis? @adept_education looks at what's going on with teacher recruitment http://oego.co/recruit-crisis

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What do heads really want from a great SBM?

A supportive, knowledgeable SBM can be the cornerstone of an effective school. JO SMITH explains what headteachers look for in their most depended-upon colleague.

It’s tough being a school business manager in times like these. Admittedly we headteachers and SBMs aren’t exactly living through the glory days of education, but we remain in close daily contact with young people, energised by their aspirations and largely optimistic view that life is theirs for the making.

Having worked with four different school business managers over the past six years, my experience is that the SBM’s role has become less about increasing provision and more about urging caution, limiting spending and passing on bad news about reduced income and increased outgoings. Hardly a positive hand to bring to meetings with a headteacher who is under pressure to make improvements.

So, staff could be forgiven for thinking that SBMs are the fun sponges of a staff room. Only the headteacher and key governors will truly appreciate the difficulties faced by an SBM over another academic year of austerity, such as:

- increased staffing costs, mostly due to changes to staff pensions and increased National Insurance contributions
- reduced income streams
- delays to the Fairer Funding formula.

From a headteacher’s perspective, what might I, and my peers, be looking for in a really great SBM in the current climate? What would we really like to rely on our SBMs for?

Knowledge

A good SBM is expected to know the answers to questions that a headteacher doesn’t! Headteachers will often feel their knowledge is limited because for much of their earlier career they were a teacher. Everything related to organisational leadership has been part of their more recent learning and professional training, or scaled up from their experiences of leading smaller teams focused on pupil achievement.

Depending on their level of experience, a headteacher may depend on you for factual knowledge not only in every aspect of finance and accounting but also:

- commissioning
- estate management (including health and safety)
- human resource management and law
- governance and legal responsibilities pertaining to all of the above.

Of course you can’t be an expert in all these fields, but a headteacher will expect a good SBM to know who to contact to get quick answers and reliable advice.

'SIn the political landscape of academatisation and system-led improvement, an SBM's knowledge and understanding of different governance and school funding models is key'

Perspective and honesty

The best SBMs I have worked with have a great sense of perspective, and understand that the current academic and financial year is as important as future ones.

Planning ahead for financial security is great, but less effective SBMs are so busy making sure that both the longer term budget balances and the year-end financial report looks positive, that it hampers spending for the months beforehand. Two things are likely to happen in this scenario.

1. A budget holder is told that there is no money for development in their area at the start of the year. However, later in the same financial year they are told that some money has in fact been found. The budget holder is unlikely to use that money as effectively as if they had had time to plan its use.

2. Like the boy who cried wolf, telling budget holders that there is limited funding (no matter how much evidence there is in support) will always fall on deaf ears. Staff will just see SBM as a tight fisted controller rather than a strategic operator.

Great SBMs can explain budgetary constraints to impatient staff, while also making plans for the year ahead clear. Clear, practical language will help show
that money is being targeted for the benefit of that year’s students. Ensure you have a few minutes at regular staff briefings to lay out that detail for staff.

Optimism and warmth

Schools and academies depend on good working relationships as much as any other organisation but they are different from businesses. Teachers don’t follow the ‘rules’ set down by senior managers simply because they respect a staffing hierarchy. In a staff room of similarly qualified employees, teachers will in fact frequently question management decisions.

For a business manager as with any other senior leader, getting staff on board is therefore all about winning hearts and minds rather than rolling out a series of management decisions. Staff will respect you if you take time to explain (with supporting evidence) why a financial decision has been made.

Directly engage budget holders in discussions about the budgets that are in place. If staff feel like they’re being consulted, any headteacher will be reassured that you are working to bring staff along with them.

Take the time to discuss department capitation with budget holders before and while the budgets are being set. Show you are listening to their agendas as well as your own when prioritising spending. Be supportive of staff by helping pastoral teams with tricky parental enquiries that deal with issues such as Pupil Premium entitlements or educational visit payments.

Above all, find time to either get out of your office and speak directly to teaching colleagues or invite them to join you in discussions about financial planning at a level that impacts on their roles.

As far as a headteacher is concerned, the worst thing for a SBM to be is an aloof member of the support team, determined to stop staff spending money. Present yourself as a glass-half-full personality; be warm, friendly and optimistic. We all like being around this sort of person, and a headteacher will certainly value this attitude.

Taking one for the team

An SBM is likely to be one of the most well-remunerated members of the school staff. This places them squarely as a member of the senior team, meaning they must occasionally handle the less glamorous jobs in a school.

With increasingly smaller senior teams it is important that a SBM takes their share of such tasks, which could include:

- attendance at whole school evening events (including those with no financial connection) such as performing arts evenings or extra-curricular celebration evenings
- dealing with enquiries and complaints from parents and members of the wider community
- delivery of staff training and induction
- showing visitors or prospective stakeholders round the school
- investigating allegations or staff grievances
- whole school events like fundraising, end of term events, off-timetable day duties and educational visits.

A headteacher will appreciate a SBM who naturally sees additional responsibilities as part of their role.

An eye to the future

Without intending to contradict myself, best serving current pupils has to be balanced with ensuring long-term development for the school. The SBM plays a key role in advising the headteacher on how best to manage this. Through participation in SBM networks and their own professional reading, a SBM needs to use their awareness of national and local change to help a headteacher anticipate and plan.

Alone, a headteacher can plan for the implications of the government’s curriculum and pastoral initiatives. Furthermore, any headteacher worth their salt should be able to predict local community development and identify opportunities for collaboration. An SBM must be prepared to explore with the headteacher the implications of any financial changes that may threaten or enable such plans.

In the political landscape of academisation and system-led improvement, an SBM’s understanding of different governance and school funding models is key. This involves due diligence, TUPE processes and the incentives and support provided by the DfE. If a headteacher is going to take the plunge and recommend to governors a change in organisational direction, they will rely on you to do much of the legwork.

And finally…

There is no doubt that an SBM will prove most popular and be judged to be most successful if they are able to generate additional income. It’s becoming increasingly difficult to find revenue streams or government initiatives to bid for, but any money you bring in will be celebrated far more than any savings you make. Spend some time every month looking to make this happen.

Please forgive any oversimplification. I have never undertaken the role of SBM, and I probably don’t fully appreciate the pressures you are under just as you might never fully appreciate those of a headteacher.

What I do know is that an effective headteacher and supportive, knowledgeable SBM will be a formidable force, capable of leading a highly effective school.

Use the NASBM professional standards to develop your career: www.nasbm.co.uk/standards/index.aspx
SLT meetings: tips to thrive

For a SBM, making meaningful contributions to senior meetings might seem a challenge. CATE HART offers some advice for bringing business strategy to the table.

A good SBM needs to know everything that is happening in school. In her webinar on ‘surviving the SLT’ and getting your voice across (my.optimus-education.com/webinar-sbms-surviving-slt-have-your-say), Nickii Messer referred to the SBM Competency Framework (CF), which states that SBMs ‘undertake a key role within the SLT’. This means attending meetings!

According to the NASBM Professional Standards, operating at the top level (Tier 4) requires you to demonstrate a particular set of ‘behaviours’. These are listed as: change catalyst, decision maker, skilled negotiator, collaborator, resilient and challenger.

Here’s how you can overcome some of the challenges faced when becoming a member of the SLT meeting team.

Earning respect as a senior colleague

Taking part in a meeting means you need to be well-prepared with the provision of concise and relevant information, a commitment to your theme, and possibly the ability to accept defeat.

As a change catalyst, are you simply listening to the issues arising, ready to embrace change (Tier 1) or driving a culture that supports continuous improvement and innovation (Tier 4)? The school development plan may suggest a shift in focus which would require funding to be applied in new areas. Being able to present a number of scenarios to the meeting, with data and rationale, would place you in a strong position.

You’d be surprised how many assistant or deputy heads will start coming to you for advice once you have been in the team a short time. Don’t be the tea maker!

Chairing meetings

The chair should be allocated on a rotational basis, giving all the opportunity to develop their leadership skills. A good chair should:

- ensure that discussions are based on an agreed agenda and ground rules
- ensure that debates involve contributions from anyone wishing to articulate a view, particularly where conflicting viewpoints are being expressed
- allow decisions to be reached, helping participants to agree on the way forward and any further action that needs to be taken.

Operating at Tier 4 means ‘securing consensus across a range of complex issues in a sensitive and challenging situation with a range of stakeholders’. You may need to lead and give guidance when addressing complex issues in order to come to a decision, giving an overall direction.

Knowing the full picture

Not only will you be able to participate in the meeting, but you will focus all your teams and responsibilities on moving in the same strategic direction. Another good reason for attending all the meetings! Changing the curriculum or timetable will impact on other aspects of school life, and you can react on the spot with strategies to weather the storm.

Giving strategic input

Showing awareness of the long term strategy is another way of demonstrating leadership as part of the SLT. Keeping up to date with all education legislation and changes shows how you are ahead of the game, as does providing scenarios on which to base decisions.

Showing emotional intelligence

It is not always easy to stand alone in meetings on business strategy, especially in a team where you may well be the only non-teaching SLT member. Good schools will have a total parity of esteem in school leadership between pedagogy, governance and business management: a three-legged stool, where removing one would result in collapse.

Setting out your stall at the meeting with confidence can show you are the expert in your field. Getting a positive response or decision also requires you to be a skilled negotiator, working with the different stakeholders and influencing the decisions made.

Using feedback

Finally, if you are new to SLT meetings, ask for feedback from colleagues on how your contribution and behaviours have influenced and improved the team. Equally, give feedback to the team on how effective the meetings seem to you, with tips for improvement.

Download our ‘SBMs and the SLT toolkit’ for more advice on how to work effectively with the SLT my.optimus-education.com/sbms-and-slt-toolkit
A guide to writing your first report to governors

Governors need accurate information in order to support and challenge the SLT. CAROLINE COLLINS outlines why, how and when SBMs need to report to governors

The role of the SBM changes from person to person and from school to school, but many SBMs now have far-reaching responsibilities including finance, HR, marketing, admissions, attendance, health and safety, project management, premises maintenance, administration, CPD, school trips, support staff and ICT.

A crucial part of having responsibility for these areas is ensuring that governors are fully informed and able to support, challenge and hold the school to account.

Why report to governors?
While the SBM is responsible for the business of the school, it is the board of governors that will be the ones to face the public in the unfortunate event of an incident. Having a professional working relationship with the chair of governors and regular communication with the board is important to build trust so that governors feel confident that school business is being managed competently.

Formal, regular, reporting by the SBM ensures that governors have sufficient information to hand about non-teaching matters. A termly report that is succinct and informative should be sent to governors and presented by the SBM at the full governing body meeting, allowing governors to ask any questions they may have in their role as critical friend.

How to report to governors
A formal report should be sent to governors in advance of meetings. A good starting point is to establish a template with headings that relate to school business such as finance, health and safety, marketing, attendance and so on.

The report is then based around those headings although there may be times when sub-headings need to be added in order to accommodate additional information and provide a logical sequence. Governors do not want to be overloaded with unnecessary data and information but at the same time they need to have sufficient information to allow them to make informed decisions.

Whatever is being reported needs to be clear and succinct, ideally no longer than 1.5 pages (although this may increase if there has been a specific incident that needs to be reported). Where nothing needs to be reported in specific areas, a simple ‘nothing to report’ statement will show that.

A board of governors will be diverse in terms of members and will, undoubtedly, comprise a mixture of individuals from different backgrounds with different skills and knowledge. There will be the staff governors who have a wealth of knowledge about education on the one hand, and on the other there may be business individuals or retired people who have suitable skills to offer.

When writing the report, you should bear this in mind and exclude unnecessary jargon. It’s better to be too simple than have a report that only a small proportion of the governors will understand and will result in either a complete lack of understanding or a whole range of questions that the SBM will need to answer.

To help ensure that relevant matters are addressed in the minutes and approval is granted or denied where necessary, it is helpful to make it clear within the report. Each heading or sub-heading could have outcome wording alongside it such as ‘For Action’ or ‘For Information’.

Once the report has been written, the SBM should present it at the governing body meeting. This won’t necessarily be a long agenda item, but an opportunity for governors to raise questions they may have.

Frequency
There are likely to be full governing body meetings each term which will require a report and half termly meetings for sub-committees.

Governors are there to support the school and by working with the SBM can only strengthen their knowledge and your relationship.

Additional resources
For more information on how to prepare a budget report for governors, and an example calendar for breaking down your reporting responsibilities, read Nina Siddle’s article at my.optimus-education.com/preparing-budget-report-governors

Follow the nine top tips on fostering a positive relationship with your governors at my.optimus-education.com/reporting-governors-9-top-tips

Download a meeting minutes template from my.optimus-education.com/access-minutes-governing-body-meetings
Procuring to save money

Getting procurement right alongside demonstrating value for money is key. CATE HART offers advice to get the best value

Schools are becoming increasingly autonomous when procuring goods and services. The pressure is on to make savings across the sector and schools and academy trusts are increasingly looking to work together to generate efficiencies in their contracts and spend profiles.

The benefits of getting it right include:

- reducing costs and making savings
- ensuring contracts are legal
- covering schools financial value standard and assurance (SFVS) Q.13
- increased collaboration
- clear rules for staff to follow.

Value for money

The SFVS asks in Section C: ‘Are there processes in place to get best value for goods and services?’ Can you demonstrate this in your school?

For schools and academies, especially those not in a MAT, finding better ways to procure is key. The first point of call is to ask if there is there a clear procurement strategy in school.

The strategy and policy are there to protect the school from legal challenges during tender processes and ensure benchmarking is carried out and easy to follow for all personnel who make buying decisions. A policy needs clear levels of spending allowed with the quotes/tender levels in place. This should be clearly communicated to all those involved in the process. Depending on the whole value of the purchase, a procurement decision tree can help to focus on how to make the right decisions and in which order.

Procurement in schools is wide ranging, from pens and paper and catering contracts, to finding new staff and premises management. Each one is equally important to get right.

Keeping records and tenders

There should be a comprehensive file of all ongoing contracts with alerts to when they end and the timescale for renewal. Monitoring reports will make it easier to identify which contracts or procurement processes went well, or not.

Have you benchmarked against other schools to see if they are spending less and finding out why or how? If you have written a really good specification brief, you can adapt and use it again for other contracts.

'The current position on the EU

'The public sector is a slow mover. Although the global market has advanced significantly since the UK’s pre-EU regime, the underlying principles of achieving value for money and accountability in public authority decision-making remain the same. These principles are now entrenched in a public sector which has, over time, become hardened to the arguably burdensome EU procurement regime. It is unlikely that authorities would quickly embrace an unregulated, or indeed an under-regulated, regime.’

(Publiclawtoday.co.uk)
• Improving economies of scale.
• Contract time limited collaboration which expires at the end of the contract.

Collaboration is increasingly important as prices can be driven down if larger quantities are needed, but where to start? Is there a group of SBMS in your area who meet regularly? If not, start one up. It’s not just good for procurement but general networking.

The NASBM Professional Standards expects that at Tier 4 you are developing and leading joint service level or working agreements.

Collaborative procurement - why it matters

‘Procurement has to demonstrate that it is able to influence 100% of its organisation’s spend. If it can’t then there is little chance of procurement being seen as relevant in the future or of it being able to drive value from over £200bn worth of third party spend.’ David Shields, Director of Markets & Collaborative Procurement Office of Government Commerce

Working with other schools

When working with other schools, a statement of intent or memorandum of understanding between the schools is important. This outlines who is responsible for what, such as payments, signing contracts, ordering and distributing, monitoring and renewing. Setting up a joint procurement committee is also a good way of working with another school or schools. Decide on the level of collaboration from:

• shared information
• one off venture
• lead school
• joint venture
• fully shared service.

Collaboration case study

Two neighbouring schools wished to outsource the cleaning contract, both currently in house. The very close proximity of the schools and their SBMs’ working relationship led to tendering for a joint contract.

Savings were made on the cleaning company’s supervisor costs, larger equipment and an improved service as cleaners could move between schools to cover for absence. The contract was over the EU threshold and complicated so the cost of employing a tendering company was shared between the two schools.

It was agreed by the governors that one school would lead on the contract, but both would be involved in the interview process during tendering. Invoices would be sent to individual schools to lessen any financial risk to either school.

Procurement

Procurement is becoming a more complex and vital operation in the day-to-day responsibilities of SBMs so ensure you have a strategy for your school in place. Regularly benchmark against similar schools and collaborate with those schools doing it well. Research tender management companies or learn how to carry out the process yourself and remember to always have your files in order and up-to-date.

Checklist (either single school or collaboration)

• Do you have a good business case to use as evidence in SFVS and for governors to discuss?
• Have you followed the procurement decision tree?
• Is there a clear specification brief?
• How will quality assurance be carried out?
• Have you done your benchmarking against schools and included that in the business case?
• Is there a real value for money result?
• Have you reported on past contracts to show how they worked well? Or referred to an even better scenario?
• Do you need expert advice and do you know where to get it?

Optimus have created a toolkit which includes advice on buying, contracts and benchmarking. You can download the toolkit online at my.optimus-education.com/procurement-toolkit
Also head online for:
• a procurement decision tree
• a procurement model policy
• webinar: procurement procedures and guidelines for effective buying
• a step-by-step guide to procurement.
Ask the experts: achieving efficiency and promoting ethics

Expert consultant NICKII MESSER answers two questions about the role of the SBM in shaping a school’s ethics and values, and maintaining the balance between efficiency and value for money.

Is it really possible to achieve efficiency and value for money at the same time, especially in the short term, considering that efficiency doesn’t just mean effective deployment but also CPD, restructuring, recruiting and retaining the best people, all of which incur a cost?

With the ever increasing pressure of budgetary constraints it is, of course, essential that SBMs and their schools achieve value for money. Efficiency is one of the three strands of value for money (Effective, Efficient, Economical) and it concerns the relationship between output and resources to produce them. So, simply put, are you spending well?

School budgetary processes often focus solely on how much we are going to spend and on what, but an essential part of the process, which often gets missed in schools, is the review. This is where you check back to see whether that spending achieved the results that the school needed and expected, whether you might have spent less and still achieved the same, or even more.

To answer your question more specifically, where staffing is concerned we need to think strategically. The one resource that makes the most significant impact in schools is staff; it makes sense to recruit, deploy and develop them effectively. So, again, we have to find efficient ways to do that.

Reviewing staffing structures regularly is essential. You would do it in business, so you need to do it in schools. Reviews need to question and challenge the status quo. Just because we have always delivered lessons in that way, for example, is that still fit for purpose and affordable? Proactively marketing the schools to ensure it is consistently full is obvious – yet many schools don’t do this. We are used to making the budget fit around our staffing structures, so it takes a significant shift in our thinking to look at it the other way. This is how much money we have, so how do we deliver a fit for purpose, high quality education with that budget? The capacity to deliver the very best education must take priority.

As far as CPD is concerned, many schools still consider externally sourced CPD as the norm, certainly for teachers. But is that an efficient use of our money? Could we spend the same and achieve more, or spend less and achieve the same?

Schools are finding that in-house CPD is often more efficient, and just as effective – certainly more economical. This might mean using staff expertise to deliver training and/or buying in consultants who deliver a training day which the school or MAT invites other schools to attend. The cost is then shared across the schools.

It is my view that the really effective business managers will need to also be entrepreneurs. These colleagues will absolutely understand education and be able to ‘think outside the box’, coming up with creative solutions to the challenges all our schools face.

All business managers will need to set a minimum of three-year budget plans, and will need to establish a whole school value for money strategy, where everyone – especially senior leaders and governors – understands that the way we spend has to improve.

SBMs are urged to use the new DfE/EFA Efficiency Toolkit and I am sure you will find it useful. Some other resources you may want to explore are:

- National Audit Office’s guide to ‘Assessing value for money’
- policy paper on ‘Efficiency and value for money in schools’.

What is the role of the SBM in shaping a school’s ethics and values?

This is a good question, and one that many SBMs will ask.

Before I relate this more explicitly to the Professional Standards, I equate it to school improvement planning. The very foundation of any school development or improvement plan is provided by their values.

The Learning Centre for Education and Values explains that ‘the school’s core values should be evident in “the way we do...’
things around here" [...] In order to be professional and ethical it is important that school leaders are explicit about those values they hold to be most important. Only once these values are agreed, established and articulated, can the school move on to determine its vision, and from there determine a plan of action.

This quotation implies that school leaders, if they are to be professional, will need to be explicit about the values they hold to be most important. We are moving away from the term school business manager, and recognising that these colleagues are intrinsically school leaders.

The ethics and values described in the NASBM Professional Standards, though technically ‘belonging’ to NASBM and its members, set the standard for any SBM. In his foreword, NASBM chief executive Stephen Morales says that the Standards are 'enshrined in the integral ethical code which explicitly puts pupils at the heart of all school business management activities.'

In terms of the impact of the SBM role in relation to these, my advice would be to use this code of ethics as your framework. Determine, with evidence, what you do that contributes to each of these, and which of them – if any – you do not yet contribute to.

From that starting point, you should be able to start reflecting on the impact. If you find that difficult for some of them, try looking at it from another way. What would be the impact if you didn't contribute to them? If you didn't, for example, comply with all statutory regulations and provisions, or if you didn't make the wellbeing and improvement of life chances of pupils a basic principle in all decision making and actions?

I think that if you can do that, it will reinforce for you, and others in your school, the essential leadership contribution that you make to the school and, essentially, the children. It is reaffirming and sets a moral compass for you to work towards. I would be using it as part of my performance management and appraisal. It’s fundamental to everything that we do.

Of course, I would like you to go further, and explore your school’s values, and consider how you contribute to those, as a leader, as a professional. This duality of approach will really deepen your understanding of your role, your professionalism and your contribution.

In all of the school reviews and training that I do, I include focus on values; on professionalism; on improving the life chances of children. This code of ethics provides the framework to make your business related conversations so much more meaningful and rigorous.

We are moving away from the term school business manager, and recognising that these colleagues are intrinsically school leaders'

Deliver our Achieving Value for Money training course, written by Nickii Messer, at my.optimus-education.com/training/achieving-value-money
Using online tuition: what you need to know

MATTHEW and HEATHER CLEMENTS-WHEELER share the benefits of online tuition and explain the pitfalls to avoid

As budgets get tighter and it becomes harder to maintain a broad curriculum, schools are increasingly turning to online teaching. If you're considering using online teaching, then here are some rules to follow:

1. Be realistic about what can be achieved in the time available before the end of the course
   If a course requires 130 guided learning hours, then commission that amount! Expecting an online teacher to deliver it in just 20 weeks of two 45-minute sessions per week won't work. When schools try to use e-tuition as a halfway house in a rush at the end of Year 11, both pupils and school leaders are often disappointed with the results.

   Tell the online teacher the level to teach the pupils at and provide past data as part of the planning process. Knowing nothing about pupils is a recipe for disaster.

2. Select suitable online teachers/providers
   Make sure you commission competent teachers. If a teacher couldn't hold pupils' attention in a classroom, they have no hope online! This means you should interview online teachers the same way you do with your own staff. Don't simply let an online tutoring company allocate a teacher on your behalf – ask to speak with them and see a sample online lesson.

   Check if they have QTS and probe subject knowledge. Aim to find someone who knows the exam syllabus your pupils are studying.

3. Avoid chopping and changing what you require
   Schools must be clear about what they want from the outset and communicate this properly. Online teachers plan schemes of work sequentially and build towards the intended outcome. If you ask for ten revision sessions and pupils go on study leave after week six of the programme because you forgot to tell the online teacher, neither your pupils nor your online teacher have used their time effectively.

4. Remember intervention and support from the school's own staff will be needed
   Allocate one person the online teacher can communicate with before, during and after lessons. This person needs to be accountable for outcomes and can help chase up overdue homework tasks. Remember an online teacher may not be able to hear or see all a child is doing and cannot confiscate items through a screen!

   ICT support staff will need to prioritise support for online teaching. Computers need to be working with functioning audio, working headsets and preferably webcams. Give the online teacher a named SLT contact if ICT issues are regularly interrupting learning.

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Pros and cons of online teaching

Pros
- Great for pupils who are too ill to attend school
- Good for schools struggling to recruit a subject specialist
- Pupils can draw all over e-resources and keep screen shots for revision
- Facilitates smaller group sizes and discussion
- Pupils can still attend when on holiday
- Good for learning social norms of discussion
- Virtual teaching rooms allow for annotation of PowerPoint screen
- Most online lessons are recorded, so can be watched again later
- Behaviour problems can be reduced by ensuring pupils are nothing more than observers in lessons if needed
- Breakout room facility for some people to work in smaller groups (in some rooms)

Cons
- If you are the online teacher there is a lack of control over pupil behaviour
- Schools may agree to one thing but deliver another
- ICT and Wi-Fi are unreliable and problems may delay learning
- Smaller class sizes are not always cost effective
- Some of the most disengaged pupils are the most social deprived and they can't log in when excluded if they have no computer or internet access at home
- Punctuality – the online teacher cannot get geographically distant pupils to arrive faster in lessons
Driving change and getting staff on board

One of the most certain things in schools is that nothing remains certain for long! Nickii Messer advises on how to communicate change clearly and effectively.

Change happens all the time, and business managers and leaders constantly have to manage not only the change, but the people who are impacted by the change.

The NASBM Professional Standards (2015) included Change Catalyst as one of the six behaviours SBMs need to demonstrate.

The NASBM Professional Standards suggest that SBMs working at higher levels of Change Catalyst are able to 'drive a culture that supports continuous improvement and innovation', and that all staff within the business management team should be 'open to new ideas and embrace change'.

The wise SBM consistently communicates the school's aims to their colleagues, and makes pupil wellbeing and achievement part of their everyday language. They articulate that everyone should be open to change, in order to ensure 'continuous improvement and innovation'.

This takes time and commitment, but keeping staff on board will pay dividends whenever change becomes necessary.

Why do people resist change?
Change inevitably creates strong emotional responses, such as fear. We are hardwired to cling to what's familiar and safe (even if it doesn't work very well) and resist the new and uncertain. Understanding that people will naturally resist change warns us to be ready to limit and manage these emotional responses. This requires careful communication.

What are we changing from?
When we think of communicating change, we often think of what is going to change. What we need to communicate first, however, is what or where we are changing from.

If you are unsure where you are starting from, it is impossible to navigate any journey successfully. Providing this important information to people involved in the change will also help you explain the rationale for change.

Who is involved?
You need to know who is likely to be involved in, or impacted by the change. Then decide which of these 'change stakeholders' need information and which need communication. There is a significant difference here.

On the one hand, those who are not directly involved probably only need to be told about the change. Those people more closely involved will need you to invest in communication. Communication involves explaining and listening. Listening involves understanding what people are actually saying, taking on board their concerns and fears and determining what they need from you.

When colleagues feel they have your ear, they are more likely to trust you, and take ownership of the change. Enlist the support of a 'change advocate', a member of staff already on board with the change who can help you to communicate positively with colleagues.

Why are we changing?
Psychologist and management coach John M Fisher explained that 'we all go through a series of set, defined stages whilst in the process of changing.' How we move through these stages depends on various factors such as 'ownership and control'.

To feel 'ownership and control', colleagues need primarily to understand why change is necessary. It may be due to external forces such as policy or legislation, or internal forces such as requirement for a more robust management information system.

Be honest and, whenever possible, make colleagues feel the change is worth the effort.

What will the change look like?
It is important to be clear about what the change will look like. Nothing in life is absolutely certain, but getting staff on board is always going to be simpler the more certain they are of what is involved. Be prepared to communicate this to staff in a way that everyone can understand.

Review
Once change has been completed, invest time in reviewing how well it went.

- What is better now?
- How well did it all go?
- What lessons have been learned?

Consult colleagues most affected and work on a 'What went well...', 'Even better if...' basis, starting with the successes first.

Communication is key for all managers and leaders, and being able to communicate well will help alleviate the concerns that colleagues have when change becomes necessary.
This term: what’s in store for SBMs

Your Optimus membership gives you access to a range of events, resources and training. Here’s an overview of what’s coming up this term.

We know that escaping the office for whole-day events can be a challenge for stretched business leaders, so the spring term sees us continuing our series of webinars focusing on leadership skills for SBMs. These webinars are particularly designed to support the NASBM professional standards, and can be accessed anytime, anywhere – making them more adaptable to your schedule.

For your learning to have an impact, you need the opportunity to put it into practice. We’re continuing to develop model frameworks, policies and toolkits which provide resources for you to adapt and use in your own context.

Last term’s MATs Summit and NASBM pre-event dinner were great opportunities to meet finance directors, school business leaders and chief operating officers.

We’re keen to support school business managers aspiring to these emerging roles: look out for more guidance and resources to come!

### Value for money

Download the procurement toolkit from the Knowledge Centre and read Cate Hart’s introduction on page 26 of this magazine.

Use and adapt the units on achieving value for money to train budget holders and senior leaders in key principles (access from in-house training – Premium and Unlimited members).

Have you read the report co-authored with NASBM on creating efficiencies? Get the full report on Improving your school’s financial outcomes or the 9 top tips for driving efficiency by going to my.optimus-education.com/topic/value-money

Download the SBMs Working with governors toolkit from the Knowledge Centre for guidance on managing statutory and financial reporting and example statement notes.

Book now for the 16th annual Employment Law in Education conference, taking place in May in London and Manchester. Get legal guidance and make sure your HR policy and practice is up to date.

### Managing staff

Listen to Nickii Messer talk about courageous conversations for improving performance and build your confidence in tackling staff challenges at oego.co/courageous

Download model policies on staff wellbeing, teacher appraisal and conduct and grievance procedures from oego.co/modelPolicy. Adapt and edit to fit your own organisation.

Read Cate Hart’s nine strategies for reducing short-term absence and adapt for your context (find the article online in the Knowledge Centre: simply search for ‘managing absence’).

### Leading change

If you’re making decisions about whether to join a MAT, go it alone or start your own, this is the event for you.

Establishing or Joining Multi-Academy Trusts
Leeds 29th March

Got a conversion, re-structure or curriculum change on the horizon? Look out for our webinar on communicating change, led by Val Andrew, ASCL’s business leadership specialist.

Read Nickii Messer’s article on driving change and keeping staff on board (see page 31).

Benchmark your skills against the ‘Change Catalyst’ element of the NASBM standards.

Catch up on Matthew Clements-Wheeler’s webinar on strategic planning for school business leaders. Download presentation slides and access supporting resources from oego.co/SBMLeader
What’s in this month’s Teaching and Learning section?

Teaching is all about pupil outcomes. But pupils won’t thrive in environments where teachers are exhausted, overworked or neglected. The popularity of movements like #teacher5aday on Twitter points to the importance of teachers looking after their own and others’ wellbeing. So it’s great to have some really practical ideas for handling workload and prioritising wellbeing in this issue from Julia Stead (p.48). One of the activities that often gets a negative press in schools but can be used far more positively is lesson observation, as Dr Matt O’Leary outlines on page 50; at their best, observations can turn into a process of collaborative action research (p.40). In this issue we’ve also featured some selections from our very popular Teacher Development Programme, an In-House Training course that now has a complete self-study option – we’d love to hear your thoughts.

Owen Carter, Content Lead

Contributors in this issue

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Tom Fay is vice principal for teaching, learning and assessment at Rochdale Sixth Form College. He is heavily involved in school improvement work, with particular expertise in leading teaching and learning.

Top tweets from @TeachingOE

Really interesting paper - hiring teachers during the school year has a negative impact on pupil achievement. Teacher? Interested in education research? You should know that not all effect sizes are created equal. Tips, tricks and skills are not useful if teachers don’t have the underpinning knowledge about how to apply them coherently.

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This term: planning CPD for teaching and learning

As an Optimus member you have access to a range of exclusive events and resources. But it’s important that you plan your CPD to ensure it has an impact – this is what you can expect.

As we work with schools to develop our conferences and training, one of the consistent pieces of feedback we hear surrounds the need for planning: if a teacher is going to commit time to any training they need to know exactly what the outcomes are and how it will fit into other CPD activities.

There are good reasons for this beyond convenience. For any training activities to genuinely improve what goes on in the classroom, it has to be sustained – and teachers have to see the relevance of it to their day-to-day!

We’ve made changes to the way we do training to support this, including increasing the number of self-study routes on our In-House Training service, and attaching resources to every conference so that learning can continue long after the day.

Here are three of the main focuses in teaching and learning over the coming term that will help you to plan your own CPD programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective data use</th>
<th>Evidence based teaching</th>
<th>Improving literacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catch up on our webinar, Effective data use: planning interventions, to get extra advice on putting data to work for targeted support for pupils.</td>
<td>Review our Knowledge Centre resource Evidence-based teaching: five strategies and put education theory into practice.</td>
<td>Improve literacy and achievement across the curriculum by training up your colleagues with In-House Training on Embedding Literacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What to do when Ofsted come in and your school’s data manager is off sick? Check our Knowledge Centre resource, Data analysis for non-data managers.</td>
<td>Either deliver or choose to study for yourself any units from our In-House Training Teacher Development Programme – perfect for NQTs or RQTs.</td>
<td>Understanding motivation to read is hard. Try Jo Facer’s guide on motivating pupils to read: 6 steps to inspire a love of reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using an assessment system that doesn’t rely on levels? Deliver training on assessment methods that don’t use levels or linear flight paths with our In-House Training course on Assessment Without Levels.</td>
<td>Come along to out Mastery Learning and Assessment in Primary conference on 23 March. We’ll be discussing how you can build deeper learning and sharing examples from schools who have been successful so far.</td>
<td>How can you approach the teaching of literacy for pupils with speech, language and communication needs? Watch the literacy and SLCN webinar with Jean Gross to get some practical takeaways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just getting started on your data analysis? Look to our handy walkthrough: A beginners’ guide to teaching and learning data.</td>
<td>Download our white paper Making the link: the role of the teacher in educational research, to find out: • the questions we should ask instead of ‘what works’ • why fads are dangerous in teaching • how to consider and evaluate research context.</td>
<td>Download posters and other practical resources from the Knowledge Centre to help with addressing reading difficulties – and combine this with February’s SEND assessment conference to have a much greater impact.</td>
</tr>
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School CPD trends
We spoke to 228 teachers and school leaders – OWEN CARTER summarises what we found about their professional development

At Optimus we always want to be on top of the way schools are doing professional development – so that we can make sure what we are doing is as useful as possible! Here are some of the CPD trends we’ve noticed so far.

What CPD do teachers use?
While the Inset day is a staple, schools freely mix internal and external provision of professional development – it’s a varied picture!

Teachers prefer face-to-face training
52% of teachers said group discussion and training was one of their favourite forms of CPD.

School leaders know CPD serves lots of important purposes
School improvement is the top motivator for CPD, with retention not far behind.
Formative Assessment

When we think of assessment we usually think of summative assessment: exams or tests that evaluate pupil learning at the end of a topic or unit of work by comparing it against a standard or benchmark score in the school or nationally.

However, to monitor pupil understanding throughout the learning process, formative techniques are crucial. Good teachers constantly assess their pupils’ learning. They recognise the need to understand what and how learners are thinking, and use this to enhance future learning.

Formative assessment enables a better balance between making judgments and engaging in ongoing activities that can be used to support the next stages of learning.

The best of assessment for learning

Many will have encountered formative assessment under the guise of assessment for learning (AfL) techniques. Though AfL techniques went on to be adopted widely and often misused in tokenistic or ineffective ways, the original ideas are still valid and well worth reconsidering.

Dylan Wiliam suggests five key strategies for shifting the focus of assessment to improving learning.

1. Clarifying and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success.
2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions and tasks that elicit evidence of learning.
3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward.
4. Activating pupils as instructional resources for each other.
5. Activating pupils as owners of their own learning.

The ‘big idea’ that ties these together is that we use evidence of pupil learning to adapt teaching and learning, or instruction, to meet pupil needs.

In terms of what these concepts might look like in the classroom, they often translate to clear goals and success criteria for given tasks or activities, or a focus on questioning and discussion. They may also include self-assessment by pupils, peer assessment by pupils of each other and feedback to move forward.

Comparing different activities

One of the barriers in using formative assessment techniques effectively can be teachers being able to assess the relative effectiveness of approaches.

Should you be using traffic light cups, the dot round, hinge questions or live marking? Often the number of techniques available can encourage a ‘more the merrier’ approach, where constant checks on progress consume a large amount of lesson time. This is rarely effective. Formative assessment is about gathering information to adapt teaching; it’s not about demonstrating progress.

Here we’ll introduce a few commonly used techniques. Assess which are likely to be the most effective in your classroom and why (they are not all equally effective techniques). Do they enable any of the features listed above?

Dot round

‘Dot round’ is a simple technique suggested by Doug Lemov on his blog, ‘Field Notes’.

It’s as simple as this: walk around the room while pupils are working independently, and put a dot round

How does formative assessment contribute to learning?

- It provides continuous feedback on pupils’ learning rather than a snapshot from a single test.
- It monitors pupil learning and allows the teacher to change approaches or revisit a topic or concept to improve learning.
- It identifies strengths and weaknesses in understanding.
- It allows students to take a participatory role in their own learning, through clearly communicated success criteria, acting on teacher feedback and through peer to peer feedback.
- It is a low stakes model of assessment – no point value (as opposed to summative assessment such as an exam or portfolio), but ensures learning is happening.
anything incorrect.
This is a subtle way of letting pupils know that there is something that needs checking. You don’t provide pupils with the answers, you just remind them that there is a mistake they need to find and rectify themselves. You could even make this a discussion point: who got a dot? Who has acted on it and what did they do?

**Live marking**

This is a very straightforward technique that takes place in a lesson and focuses on written feedback, but without the delay that normally entails.

During the lesson while pupils are working independently, pupils come to where you are sitting. You quickly mark their book and they then act immediately on that feedback. If this is while pupils are writing work up in neat, you can always only let them proceed if they pass strict quality control procedures, producing a certain quality before moving on.

This method means you can support pupils then and there if they are struggling. It also doesn’t require any complex or time-consuming planning.

However, the timings mean this cannot be of equal benefit to all pupils: some get feedback right at the start, meaning they have only done a little bit, and you can’t as easily assess their depth of understanding. Some will get feedback at the very end, meaning they don’t have enough time to act on the feedback.

**Reinventing questioning**

Wait time: after you ask a question, give pupils time to think about it before sharing answers. This has the potential to improve the quality of response that you get, and can also build a classroom culture where pupils are expected to think long and hard about their work, not just share the first thing that comes into their head.

No hands up: ask pupils not to raise their hand when you ask a question. Instead, you choose who answers the question. This means that all pupils have to be focused, and thinking about your question, as they may get asked.

Lollipop sticks: write all your pupils’ names on lollipop sticks (or bits of cardboard). When you ask a question, draw a stick to determine who answers the question. This ensures that all pupils in the class are equally likely to get asked a question and removes any chance that your own biases or perceptions affect who you ask which question to.

Pose, Pause, Pounce, Bounce: Pose your question, pause to give pupils thinking time, pounce on a pupil to answer the question, then bounce to another for a comment on their response (e.g. ‘what do you think of Ben’s answer, Aysha?’)

**Traffic lighting**

Using coloured cups, for instance, pupils put the red on top if confused and green if happy at a given point in the lesson.

The problem with this method is that this is based on how pupils feel about their understanding: this may be useful, but may not be accurate. We all sometimes think we understand something only to realise we’ve missed the point!

However the technique remains useful for telling you the confidence of pupils in their answer, and seeing how accurately these map onto the quality of their actual work over time.

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**Checklist for formative assessment**

| I tell my pupils what they are going to learn, rather than what they are going to do. |
| I explain to pupils what I’ll be looking for to help me decide whether or not they have learned. |
| I use the learning intention and the success criteria as the basis for feedback to pupils. |
| I try to avoid grade-only feedback and tick-only feedback. |
| I include in my feedback to pupils recognition of what they have achieved and advice about how to improve. |
| I make use of ‘wait time’ or ‘thinking time’. |
| I make a point of asking open questions rather than closed questions. |
| I make use of the information I derive from questioning to shape my teaching and learning programme. |
| I encourage peer feedback, based on the learning intention and success criteria, and provide opportunities for pupils to do this in a friendly and supportive environment. |
| I encourage pupils’ self-assessment and self-evaluation and provide pupils with models and opportunities to develop these skills. |

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This article is adapted from the self-study version of Unit 5 of the Teacher Development Programme. For more, see my.optimus-education.com/training/teacher-development-programme.
Teachers as researchers: 6 ways to encourage action research

KATE HERBERT-SMITH of IRIS Connect outlines how to encourage an action research culture to make a meaningful impact on pupil outcomes

Teacher research: a collaborative process
Teachers are engaged in informal research on a daily basis by being reflective, trying new things and observing the impact on learning. What separates teacher research from the everyday is a teacher’s intent to improve classroom practice through systematic inquiry.

However, it’s important not to see teacher research as an activity to be carried out in isolation. In fact, the process and outcomes are enhanced when teachers collaborate.

When teacher research is carefully planned and based on informed decisions, it can lead to meaningful results that can be confidently used to base future decisions about teaching and learning. It can also be shared with the wider community for greater benefit.

The challenges of teacher research
Time and workload is possibly the biggest one. Although teacher research can be integrated into regular classroom activities, if it’s going to be effective then it needs time to be spent planning, doing, analysing and sharing the research. Teacher workload can make this a challenge.

There can also be an issue with the particular skillset needed to conduct research. Teachers may not have undertaken research before and may need additional training and support to learn about data collection (e.g. using interviews, self-observation, and simple questionnaires). Partnerships with local higher education institutions can work well here.

6 ways to encourage teachers to become researchers in their classrooms
1. Through Lesson Study, a popular way to tweak lesson approaches and observe impact on pupils.
2. Support teachers taking part in action research or teacher triads, and encourage them to share their findings so others benefit as well.
3. Encourage an evidence-informed culture by making research findings accessible; identifying context-specific evidence for teachers; making it a whole school priority; and using appropriate internal and external support.
4. Keep track of the impact of new strategies implemented in classrooms and across the school, so you know what does and doesn’t work.
5. If teachers have shown interest in or are enrolled on a formal qualification, such as a Master’s degree or diploma, encourage them to share their findings across the school and use their classroom as a place to explore and test ideas and strategies.
6. Encourage the use of video. It will save your staff time when working collaboratively and give an objective insight into both learner and teacher behaviours.

But I want more!
Building a research-focused culture is hard and takes time.

So this is why Optimus Education and IRIS Connect have paired up to launch an action research group, focusing on the skills, knowledge and resources teachers will need to make action research successful in their school.

This is available on IRIS Connect’s online platform. It’s free to access and contains lots of practical advice and examples from teachers to help you make the most of action research approaches.

If you’re an IRIS Connect member simply go to the Group Store and join Action Research – Optimus Education. If you’re not, go to oego.co/irisconnect and fill out the form for free access to the content!

Post originally shared on the IRIS Connect blog.

Non-IRIS Connect users can get access to the content by signing up at oego.co/irisconnect, or by looking for the Action Research course on our In-House Training platform.
The art of effective feedback

What types of feedback can maximise learning and get the best out of pupils? TOM FAY explains how to boost the effectiveness of this much misused teaching strategy

Humans, not just teachers, give each other feedback all the time. As social animals, the words we use, our body language and our tone of voice all give forms of feedback. The result is that in general we are expert interpreters of the subtle, and not so subtle, feedback indicators that we have been programmed to perceive. Teachers simply can’t avoid giving feedback!

In terms of education it has long been documented that academic feedback is probably more important in relation to achievement than any other teaching strategy. Yet despite this, and because feedback is something we give all the time (intentionally or otherwise), we can often underestimate its power to alter performance.

The impact of feedback correlates with how well we know the pupils in our care. Feedback has the biggest impact when pupils receive it from teachers that have high expectations and credibility. Teachers who know their pupils well can alter the delivery style of the feedback: we all know pupils that will take a more critical oral or written comment compared to those that require the message to be tempered differently. The Gordon Ramsay feedback style will not work on everyone!

Feedback is so important because it gives rich information to both teachers and pupils that can be used to personalise learning and accelerate progress.

Here I’ll outline what teachers need to know about feedback and the tweaks you can start making in your classroom for greater impact over time.

The principles of effective feedback

There are many ways to offer pupils feedback on their performance.

Some are very simple to implement in a classroom; others require a more nuanced pedagogical approach. The common feature is that improving the impact of feedback to pupils starts with teachers reflecting upon the impact of the types of feedback that they currently offer.

Divorcing ourselves from written feedback

I have lost count of how many teachers report that the time they spend writing positive, coherent and directional feedback in pupils’ books barely correlates with an improvement in attainment, and is not met with any effort in response. This may not be the norm, but this state of affairs certainly exists in many schools across the UK today. With the pressure from internal and external educational influences (government, parents, and leaders) to evidence that teachers are marking work and ‘doing their job’ some have lost their way; the volume of written feedback becomes more important than the quality.

At the same time, the fallacies around written feedback are well documented: written feedback that is not used, not explained and not acted on is likely to have no impact.

Written feedback that is not used, not explained and not acted on is likely to have no impact

‘Written feedback that is not used, not explained and not acted on is likely to have no impact’

Understanding types of feedback

Let’s think outside of the box and consider a different level of feedback. Teachers most commonly use questioning techniques to obtain feedback from pupils orally, and assessments and written tasks to obtain, and supply, feedback in a written format. But does it need to be this way? How can we tweak our practice and flip this on its head to make feedback more impactful and less time-consuming?

Continued ››
Feedback given to pupils can be broadly divided into four areas. As you proceed down through the four levels the feedback strategies get more complex. They unearth more personalised misconceptions that the pupils possess, and barriers to learning that can be used by the teacher.

## The four levels of feedback

1. **Self level**
   - This is the simplest level of feedback provided to the pupils and the teacher. This is the feedback that provides a simple ‘yes I understand the content’ or ‘no I do not understand the content’ based upon questions asked during a learning activity.

   It’s important at this stage of the learning process to ensure that there is a mechanism for pupils, and teachers, to record or evaluate the reasons why a pupil may not understand a task or a question and use this information for future planning. This is the quickest of all the stages and new learning can occur rapidly.

2. **Task level**
   - A task is provided to an individual pupil or a group of pupils.

   The task is designed to assess the application of knowledge in either a familiar or unfamiliar context.

   The ability to perform the task successfully (may be an exam question or a group activity) will provide both the pupil and the teacher with feedback on progress.

3. **Process level**

4. **Self-regulatory level**

### Teacher actions for effective feedback

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher actions for effective feedback</th>
<th>Pupil actions for effective feedback</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunity for pupils to reflect upon the feedback, and offer review time in the classroom to go over feedback</td>
<td>Act upon feedback because they are taught the importance of it as a tool to improve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide feedback in multiple ways (oral, written, body language, formal, informal etc)</td>
<td>Understand that feedback is a two way process – the receiver must feedback to the giver and vice versa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive feedback in multiple ways (feedback boards, email, meeting times with pupils etc)</td>
<td>Use their time effectively (guided or non-guided) to ensure that important feedback is recorded and reflected upon for future use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know the pupils in depth so feedback discussions can be tempered accordingly</td>
<td>Encourage each other to provide feedback through written and oral work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote high levels of esteem and confidence within the pupils; it’s OK to be wrong sometimes!</td>
<td>Work with teachers, parents and other pupils to receive and act upon feedback from different sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act upon feedback they receive from pupils, and train them to provide feedback to each other</td>
<td>Can distinguish between constructive and destructive criticism, and give appropriately worded and helpful feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model clear and constructive language, focused on areas to develop; feedback should be highly specific and directional ('try this so that you can achieve this')</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess pupil understanding using questioning, drawing on a range of question types</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide timely feedback</td>
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and learning. Effective questioning techniques will unearth the comfort zones, knowledge and understanding that the pupils currently possess. Intervention has to become more astute at this stage to prevent knowledge gaps appearing later in learning when the more complex associated knowledge must be processed.

3. Process level. This is the type of feedback a teacher provides a pupil when he/she is applying knowledge in an unfamiliar context or at a greater depth than the previous level. The activities normally associated with this type of feedback are those that ask the pupils to pull together large volumes of prior learning: large projects, essays, presentations.

This feedback is usually written but always requires follow up so misconceptions/misunderstanding and knowledge gaps are ‘filled in’. Effective decoding of questions, quality of written responses and higher order application skills are normally the barriers to progress at this stage. Intervention therefore needs to be bespoke.

4. Self-regulatory level. This is the feedback pupils provide themselves because they are skilled enough to ‘know what to do when they do not know what to do’. It involves the pupils acting upon external input to drive their own learning. It also requires the pupils to understand themselves how they could learn differently in order to do even better.

Moving between the levels

Most teachers spend most of their time in the first two levels. The skill of level 4 takes time to develop, and a dedicated teacher to teach pupils the associated skillset.

Self-regulatory feedback occurs when the pupils master learning in any given topic, can apply it to any novel situation and can think laterally around the content to develop new ideas. They actively seek out opportunities to develop additional expertise. These pupils can also be coached to mentor others.

There are five questions for you to consider as you move between these different forms of feedback.

1. How do you embed these levels of feedback into the classroom?
2. How do you create opportunities for these levels out of the classroom?
3. How well do you know your pupils in terms of what they can do, what they cannot do, their internal and external drivers and their potential to be taught how to move through the levels when required?
4. Who is giving feedback to who and when? (Teachers, peer to peer, coaches etc.)
5. What is the impact on attainment and progress with the feedback strategies a teacher is employing?

Never stop refining your practice

Feedback strategies should be the norm in any classroom setting. They should form part of the learning strategy and be expected in all learning conversations. Only through making mistakes, isolating those mistakes and having a framework to rectify errors will we ever be able to attain the standard we expect of ourselves and others.

A person develops expertise only through constructive feedback; feedback that allows fast change in behaviour to move closer to a common goal or outcome.

Feedback is one of those teaching strategies that we can always tweak to get the gains we desire in attainment and progress. There is no one-size fits all mechanism to make feedback principles work, but there are non-negotiables that need to be implemented in the classrooms of our schools to make it consistent.

The effect we have as teachers on pupil progress and learning are heavily dependent on the way in which we provide and receive detailed, developmental, feedback. Our feedback should allow pupils to move forward; their feedback should allow us to gauge our effectiveness.

Avoiding common feedback pitfalls

These are the top five things to avoid in your feedback strategies.

1. Expressing truisms without solutions (‘you have spelled that wrong’, ‘you need to add more information here’, ‘try this section again’).
2. Providing feedback that is non-directional (‘well done, you have addressed most of the assessment objectives; you are only a couple of marks off your target’).
3. Providing feedback that only focuses on the negative: this will dishearten pupils and can affect your relationship with them.
4. Giving no feedback: absent or extremely delayed feedback can harm pupil motivation and lessen your impact.
5. Allowing pupils not to act upon feedback: feedback should be more work for them than for you. If feedback is not acted upon then pupils will simply make the same mistakes again and again.

References

Douglas Stone, Thanks for the Feedback – the Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well (2014)
Susan Brookhart, How to Give Effective Feedback to your Students (2008)
Metacognition and self-regulation: harnessing the how of learning

Metacognition has become a trendy term to use in schools – but how can we develop it in a way that actually takes advantage of this approach? JAMES MANNION explains

"Metacognition and self-regulation, we are told, provide 'high impact for very low cost'"

It has become customary in UK educational discourse to mention the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) at some point, so let’s just get it out of the way. Since they were set up in 2010 by the then coalition government, one of their major projects has been a review of the existing research literature with regard to ‘what works’, forming the ‘Teaching and Learning Toolkit’: a kind of league table of educational practices ranging from the highly effective to the highly counterproductive.

Perched at the very top of this table we find something called ‘metacognition and self-regulation’, a dynamic duo with a rich history in the theoretical and research literature, but whose names had hitherto only been whispered in the geekiest corners of the staffroom. The toolkit explains: ‘Metacognition and self-regulation approaches (sometimes known as ‘learning to learn’ approaches) aim to help learners think about their own learning more explicitly. This is usually by teaching pupils specific strategies to set goals, and monitor and evaluate their own academic development’. Metacognition and self-regulation, we are told, provide ‘high impact for very low cost, based on extensive evidence’; we are also told that these practices are ‘widely applicable’ across different subject areas. So, what’s not to like?

At this point, I should disclose that I have spent the last six years evaluating a whole-school Learning to Learn (L2L) initiative for my PhD. I’m about as convinced of the value of these practices as it is possible to be. However I do think there are two key problems with ‘metacognition and self-regulation’. First, there’s the problem of language. If these concepts and the practices they underpin are going to be fully embraced by the teaching profession – and indeed by the young people we serve – we need to find ways of describing them that don’t make you feel quite so sleepy. And secondly, there is the problem of implementation. Doing something that’s been found to be effective elsewhere is no guarantee that it will be effective in your context; in fact, you might be making things worse. To understand how we can usher in a bright new future of widespread ‘high impact for low cost’ without falling into the implementation trap, we need to go back to the beginning – to the year of my birth, as it happens.

The dynamic duo defined

In 1976 John Flavell, a developmental psychologist from Stanford University, published a paper called ‘Metacognitive aspects of problem solving’. Flavell...
defined metacognition as ‘the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of [information processing], usually in service of some… goal or objective’ (p.232). From the outset then, metacognition was defined as the co-ordination of multiple internal thought processes – ‘thinking about thinking’ if you will.

If metacognition is confined to the realm of, well, cognition, self-regulation has a somewhat broader focus, and is often defined as the monitoring and control of one’s own motivations, emotions and behaviour (e.g. see Goleman, 1995; Baumeister, 2007). Self-regulation can refer both to immediate situations, as with the pupil who asks to be moved because they are being distracted, and to longer time frames, as with those strange specimens who speak of ‘deferred gratification’ and start revising for the summer exams in October.

The metacognitive movement
In the last 40 years, and especially in the last decade, the literature on L2L has grown exponentially, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Throughout this period, a number of educational initiatives have sought to translate research findings into programmes of study, with the intention of replicating the success at scale. There is not space here to review these initiatives in detail, and I have touched upon this elsewhere (Mannion & Mercer, 2016). However, to distil the literature review down to two points: 1) some of these initiatives have been rather more effective than others, and 2) there is a general sense that L2L initiatives have not lived up to the hype suggested by the research literature. Yet!

Stepping-stones to ‘high impact for low cost’
Step 1. Simplify the language
To my mind, the easiest way to embed metacognition and self-regulation in classrooms is to refer ‘the how of learning’.

We talk about the ‘what’ a lot in schools: lesson objectives describe ‘what’ we are learning, and lesson outcomes describe ‘what’ the pupils need to do in order to evidence their learning. Too often, the ‘how’ is missing. Try book-ending activities with a discussion about the ‘how’ of learning. To do that it will be helpful to have the next step in place.

Step 2. A shared language of learning
If you want pupils to learn about electricity, you pre-teach the vocab – voltage, resistance, current etc – and then you keep a glossary somewhere handy so you can refer back to it when needed. Likewise, if you want pupils to learn how to become more effective at learning, you need to teach them the vocabulary needed to describe themselves as learners. See Mannion & Mercer (2016) for an example of a shared language of learning that was co-constructed with teachers and pupils. If you find the language of ‘learning muscles’ a bit too close to Brain Gym™ for comfort, ask your pupils: what ‘processes of learning’ will we need to engage in today? What ‘learning behaviours’ lead to effective learning? Was it when you were writing that the penny dropped, or when you were asking a question? Make it a whole-school expectation that at some point in every lesson, the ‘how of learning’ will be at least referenced, if not explored or reflected upon. Use it to enrich your plenaries. When you do this regularly, pupils start to internalise this language and develop a stronger identity of themselves as learners.

Step 3. Use metacognitive resources to scaffold planning, monitoring and reflection
As well as a language of learning that elucidates ‘processes of learning’, display key phrases that pupils can use as metacognitive prompts. You can use metacognitive reflection tools like a KWL chart.

Step 4. Use classroom activities that promote metacognition
Journals, wrappers, annotated exams – there are loads of ways to teach knowledge while engaging pupils metacognitively. The key is to teach purposeful reflection and model it as a teacher.

Step 5. Opportunities to exercise agency
Where possible, set up tasks in such a way that pupils can plan, monitor and evaluate their learning. This might include allowing pupils to set their own homework, using reflective tasks in class, or recognising the value of well-designed project-based learning opportunities.

Step 6. Practice what you preach
Teacher research is essentially L2L for teachers, and provides a great framework for reflection and action. Think about your career to date. What practices, feelings and behaviours have characterised your practice over the course of your professional life? How do you feel about your practice currently? Why do you do things in the way that you do? Which aspects of your practice do you feel most confident about? Which do you feel least confident about? How do you know which aspects are effective, and which are less so? Is this knowledge based in evidence, intuition, or a combination of the two?

Take some time to picture an idealised future. What will your pupils say, think and feel? What will you say, think and feel? What strategies might help you make this idealised future a reality? How will you know when you’ve got there? What support/resources/expertise do you need? What can you do today to get the ball rolling?

References
A full list of references is available online at my.optimus-education.com/metacognition-and-self-regulation-harnessing-how-learning
IN-HOUSE TRAINING

Planning for more powerful questioning

How can questioning be used to challenge preconceptions, cause pupils to genuinely think hard and develop their learning? JUDE SANDERS offers some methods.

Questions in the classroom need to be designed for a learning purpose, rather than just to get a response. Straightforward enough, right? But research by Ted Wragg found that in primary schools at least 57% of questions were managerial or procedural (‘What’s the next activity?’), 35% were closed questions focused on recall (‘How long did World War 1 last?’) and only 8% were more challenging, open questions. Similar patterns were observed in secondary schools.

This suggests that many questions are not well thought out and essentially ask pupils to guess what is in the teachers head. However, since the teacher clearly knows the answer, these are of no use for developing thinking! Questioning loses its value if teachers resort to answering their own questions.

How can we improve the situation? By recognising the crucial role that questions play in learning and thinking carefully about the purposes of the questions we ask.

Here I’ll give you some pointers for moving to more challenging questioning and a few strategies to try in the classroom tomorrow.

Clarifying the purpose of questioning

Effective questions stimulate pupils’ thinking, probing further and further to clarify and deepen understanding. They can reveal misconceptions, unexpected or incomplete understanding. They also help pupils make links between new knowledge and prior experiences, and challenge both staff and pupils to explain, analyse, evaluate and create new ideas.

Equally teachers can suffer from their own unconscious biases in asking questions: whether in gender bias in types and numbers of questions asked, or in unintentionally asking low achievers fewer and easier questions than high achievers. Subtle cues like body language, expression and tone of voice can often lead to pupils modifying their answers as they go based on these clues. This can actually lead to pupil dependence and passivity, as James Dillon argued in his 1990 book The Practice of Questioning.

Strategies to use

If you’re convinced so far that questions need to be purposeful, directed at learning and thoughtfully constructed, it follows that just defaulting to your standard mode of questioning won’t quite do.

Questions like ‘Does everyone get this?’ or ‘How is everyone getting on with this problem?’ often fail to encourage pupils to actually voice what they’re struggling with, or can give rise to a barrage of questions and complaints which you’ll struggle to handle.

Here are some strategies for planning and using questions that move learning forward in more substantive ways.

Pupils generating questions

Questions focused on recall, while a fundamental part of the teacher’s arsenal, can lead to the impression that questions...
are only for the soliciting of correct answers. If not balanced with other types of question, this is likely to lead to pupils striving for performance, only offering an opinion if they are sure of it, rather than trying out ideas and taking risks with learning.

To encourage pupils to take ownership of their learning, one powerful technique can be pupils generating questions. However, this typically needs an effective structure and clear success criteria in order to work well.

Here's one way of setting this up for best effect.
1. Teacher chooses a focus. This is a prompt in the form of a statement, visual aid, extract or other form that is designed to prompt meaningful pupil reflection. It should normally not be a question itself. It should link very closely to what you are trying to learn in this sequence of lessons.
2. Pupils generate questions. This should only take a few minutes and they should aim to generate multiple questions in the timeframe, without yet discussing them; this comes next.
3. Pupils improve their questions. This is a crucial step: now the pupils need to think about their questions in more detail (what keywords do they use, are they going to give useful answers, what sort of question is it). Questions are not allowed to be asked before they are improved.
4. Pupils prioritise their questions. The teacher offers guidelines for a good question to ask of the focus material. Pupils use these guidelines to rank their questions in priority order.
5. You use the questions. How you choose to structure this section is up to you. One common activity is to ask pupils to answer their own or another's question, provided they have enough knowledge of the topic. You could use the questions as a basis for discussion about which questions should form the basis of a future homework. You could ask pupils to submit their questions and then draw on them in later lessons. It all depends on what you want pupils to think about at this point in time and the focus of your lesson.

'Questions help learners reflect on their own understanding'

Agree, build, challenge (ABC)
This technique is simple and can be deployed easily in a variety of different teaching situations. Again, it addresses the issue of pupils solely trying to win the praise of the teacher and to make them think more substantively about the topic.

Ask a question. When any person replies, respond to them by bouncing the thinking to others by using the ABC below.

A: Ask ‘Who Agrees?’
B: Ask ‘Who would like to Build upon their colleague’s idea?’
C: Ask: ‘Who would like to Challenge?’

As a strategy for classroom dialogue this works because it gives some direction to responses, forcing pupils to think in detail about their contribution to the discussion, but it also allows space for insightful comments and potentially interesting new directions.

Planning a series of questions
Lesson plans can tend to focus very much on activities and content, laying out when specific activities will happen and what information will be shared. Less common, but possibly more useful, is to script in key pedagogical techniques, of which questions should be centre stage.

Jo Facer's article on mastery lesson planning (see my.optimus-education.com/node/15188) shares how she approaches planning questions. As an English teacher, she first selects what pupils will read in the lesson, and then scripts four or five comprehension questions on words or ideas pupils may struggle with. She also plans short 'checking for understanding' questions to be used throughout the class reading.

This then leads to a more complex question ready for pupils to write at length about, with some modelling of how to answer this before they get going. She also prepares a few ‘do now’ questions for the lesson's starter, to activate prior learning.

From this example, you can see how a whole lesson's structure is already shaped by the advance preparation of questions. This has the added benefit of being able to see at a glance the balance between open and closed questions and other question types, so you can choose the right mix for your pupils. Yet it still leaves space for questions to react to learning as it takes place in the classroom.

Key messages
The main message to take away is this: questioning is an integral part of learning and needs to be planned for as such. Not planning questions can lead to an overreliance on simple recall questions, or checking of confidence, which limits their effectiveness.

Be responsive in the classroom, certainly, but plan for a rich mix of open and closed questions, assessing a range of different skills and really challenging learners – and watch the difference it makes.

This article is adapted from the self-study version of Unit 6 of the Teacher Development Programme. For more, see my.optimus-education.com/training/teacher-development-programme
Managing workload, expectations and morale

When the going gets tough, what do you do? JULIA STEAD offers some practical ideas to address the work/life crisis for teachers

So it’s 3pm on a Sunday afternoon. The country is groaning with the prospect of going to work the next day, and teachers are groaning with them. Planning? Check. Appraisal preparation done? Check. Resources made? Check. Half term data reviewed? Check. The list goes on – and these are run of the mill tasks for a teacher on the lowest pay grade and with no extra responsibility.

The job of making workload manageable, creating happy high-morale teams and presenting realistic expectations to teachers lies with many people. The government, unions, leadership teams, subject coordinators, experienced teachers, and – most of all – yourselves, all play their part in making our job simply feel ok. So let’s look at some tangible ways to achieve this.

The workload burden

I’ll let you in on a conversation I had with my husband a while ago. I was sitting at my desk at 10pm in the midst of my work, wondering how we all can possibly keep going at the end of the half term. I uttered something, tired and mumbled, to which my husband replied: ‘Barack Obama runs the US in the same hours of the day that you do your job. It’s all about deciding what the priority is for right now, and leaving things that are not the priority to the next day. Oh, and delegating!’ While we all have considerably fewer people to delegate to than Mr Obama did, he made a good point.

Consider Stephen Covey’s Urgency Addiction idea (right). The four quadrants describe activities (tweaked to teaching) that take our time. To effectively manage our workload, we need to aim for 60-80% of our time being spent on quadrant 2. We need to avoid relying on the ‘firefighting’ quadrant 1, and focus our energy on quadrant 2. The theory is that if we invest time in the important things of quadrant 2, there will be less need for the urgent, stressful activities of quadrant 1. Quadrants 3 and 4 should take a very low percentage of our time.

There are, of course, an astonishing amount of things to do that are the normal quadrant 2 types of work. Marking, planning, assessment and sourcing/making resources all contribute to an unbalanced seesaw with life balancing on one end and work weighing down the other.

Try these tangible strategies that have been proven to ease some of the burden.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urgent – Important 1</th>
<th>Not Urgent – Important 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crisis with an injured person</td>
<td>Relationship building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergencies with a child</td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis with a parent</td>
<td>Preparing resources for the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadlines</td>
<td>Preventing crises at the ‘bud’ stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late-notice meetings</td>
<td>Clarifying expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactionary activity</td>
<td>Empowering others with training and guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson preparation for the next day</td>
<td>Phone calls to parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urgent – Not Important 3</th>
<th>Not Urgent – Not Important 4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions</td>
<td>Trivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some incoming phone calls</td>
<td>‘Busywork’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some email</td>
<td>Time wasters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marking

- Rotate in-depth marking – mark one group of children in depth each day, and light touch mark the remaining groups. All will receive detailed marking over the course of a week.
- Use a marking key across school to reduce teachers’ written sentences in marking, using symbols instead.
- Have a marking policy that is agreed by all staff to clearly set out expectations and avoid unnecessary and unachievable levels of marking.
- Use stickers for frequently used phrases and next steps.
- Use peer and self-marking to involve children in their own progress and help them see for themselves what to do next to make progress.
- Link your marking to assessments you need to complete – a dual purpose.
Planning
- Be fiercely disciplined with your PPA time. Chatting might feel good now, but won't when you're planning at night the day before your lesson.
- Three heads are better than one – work as a year group team to bounce ideas around and come up with plans. You could even share out the resource making at the end.
- Avoid reinventing the wheel – if it worked last year, use it again after you’ve tweaked it for your current class.
- Have an effective way of archiving your planning so that you know where to find things (both in the current week, and when you need to refer to it next year).

Assessment
- Plan the timings of assessment wisely, avoiding days and weeks when there are other scheduled drains on your time, e.g. parents evenings.
- File copies of blank assessments using an effective system so they are ready for the next time.
- Keep good formative assessment records so that you can be speedily sure of your judgement when undertaking teacher assessment.

Resource making
- Plan ahead – teaching assistants are often very willing to make things, but when you only realise you need them that morning or at a critical point in the lesson, it's little use.
- Keep copies of resources in an understandable and manageable system to re-use.
- Make use of resources available online – but be a critical consumer and judge for yourself before blindly using.
- Share the burden if there is more than one class doing the same activities.

Challenging expectations
Expectations of teachers from the government and senior leadership have increased dramatically over the last few years. To mitigate this, it's vitally important for each member of staff, from leadership to trainee, to empathise with all the other roles' responsibilities. If the whole school's responsibilities are clear and there for everyone to see, it's easier to create a chain where people delegate to others, and understand exactly what they need to do in their capacity as a link in that chain.

The teaching and learning process that we guide our children through is the most important part of our jobs: easier to remember for a class teacher, who has that link day-in, day-out. As a middle leader, your link includes data, performance management and higher level accountability. As a member of the senior leadership, there is HR, national data, infrastructure and a myriad other responsibilities to juggle. Taking care of your link makes the chain strong. Ultimately, if you are a class teacher, it is the teachers' standards that you will be judged on, so this should be your blueprint for managing your time and workload.

Wellbeing and morale
I once asked my headteacher for permission to go to my child's Christmas concert at a neighbouring school. Without hesitation, a sentence came out of her mouth that I often quote, and will never forget: 'Of course. I know if I give you an hour, I will get eight back.' It's not a question of the maths, it's the acknowledgement of the flow of goodwill – a colossal tool that works exquisitely when people feel valued and appreciated.

At our school, we have an active 'Wellbeing Team', with representatives from each phase's teaching staff and from other staff such as midday supervisors, governors, TAs etc. It meets once a half term, so isn't a burden on time, and considers:
- the current morale in school, and why it's positive/on a decline
- event planning to include every staff member and contribute to friendship, collaboration and fun (we've enjoyed an evening at the races, a staff rounders match, a quiz night and a staff bake-off among other events)
- slips that have been anonymously put in the suggestion box – the leadership team is then consulted for action if necessary
- specific problems that staff are facing, suggesting places to go for counselling, health services and support.

This means that everyone's views can be heard, six times a year, anonymously if desired. It also shows a real willingness to respond to the mood of the school, and address problems when things start to go wrong. A climate of openness is one to be fostered – morale suffers if problems are purely spoken about behind closed doors in tired and isolated classrooms. A 'team' acting as a spokesperson offers a feeling of safe and secure dialogue within the school.

A focus on wellbeing
The wellbeing of staff can be very difficult to maintain. Clear guidance and mentoring from those with experience and responsibility can teach other staff the skills of time management, which will invariably improve morale. Each school's needs will vary, but with some transparent, clear and kind actions from school leaders, steps can always be made to improve the way teachers feel. Keep in mind the spirit of generosity encapsulated in those wise words from my late headteacher Catherine: 'If I give you an hour, I will get eight back.'
In 2013 I ran the largest and most detailed study of the topic of lesson observation in the English education system to date. Although focusing on the views of staff working in the Further Education (FE) sector, 'Developing a National Framework for the Effective Use of Lesson Observation in Further Education' highlighted issues relevant to colleagues across the education spectrum.

In particular, the report focused on graded lesson observations, a practice common across the phases in England. The research raised serious questions about the fitness for purpose of graded observation schemes and the extent to which they were able to achieve their purported goals i.e. improve the quality of teaching and raise student achievement.

The report's overriding message was that not only were such schemes failing to assure and improve teaching quality, but the reductive and punitive ways in which observations were often used was responsible for a catalogue of detrimental effects that were continuing to impede improvements in teacher learning and the educational experience as a whole.

Little change in mindsets and working practices

Sadly, a few years on, the landscape has not altered as much as we hoped.

The report triggered debates about the continued use of graded observations, led to a growing number of institutions changing their practice and even resulted in a switch in Ofsted's policy, with the removal of graded lesson observations from their inspection framework.

Yet this shift in policy has not necessarily been matched by a parallel shift in practice in many circles. Many teachers claim that in spite of these developments there has been little change in the mindsets and working practices of many senior leaders and managers in how they view the use and purpose(s) of observation.

This is unsurprising given how engrained the normalised practice of graded observations has become.

Normalised behaviour

'How can we measure and improve quality if we’re not going to grade anymore?'; 'Even though we’ve switched to ungraded observations, teachers still want to know what grade they’d get, so what’s the point?' These are just two comments that I repeatedly hear from senior leaders and managers when talking about the use and purpose(s) of observation. Such comments exemplify what I’ve referred to in previous work as ‘normalised behaviour’.

In other words, staff have become institutionalised into associating observation with a performance ranking exercise, regardless of the context or approach. They’re unable and/or unwilling to conceptualise the use of observation outside of a performative context and see an umbilical link between their classroom ‘performance’ and attempts to measure it.

I can understand the incentive for this for some teachers, though such mentality does little to foster a collegial and collaborative culture in the workplace.

The ‘grade profile’ comfort blanket

From a management perspective, there’s undoubtedly an attraction about the reductive nature of attaching a number to a teacher’s performance.

Some senior managers are fearful of moving away from graded observations because it would mean casting aside the spurious ‘grade profile’ comfort blanket, which they may have formed an emotional attachment to as a means of measuring and managing teacher performance. And such a move would mean more managing and supporting real staff and less managing and manipulating performance data.

In some cases, the divide between what classroom teachers and senior managers do has widened so much that many have become so far removed from the realities of what it means to be a classroom practitioner that they simply don’t have the skills or knowledge to support improvements in teacher learning even if they wanted to.

What matters is redefining observation as being about professional growth, not performance. Observation should be a platform on which to build sustainable, collaborative communities of teacher learning. And it should support rather than sort teachers!
What’s in this month’s SEN and Safeguarding section?

There’s much for SENCOs and DSLs to look forward to this term. Check out the content plans for SENCOs on page 52 and DSLs on page 59 for an overview of what you can expect from us at Optimus HQ. Following the publication of the Rochford Review and the proposed replacement of P scales, we caught up with review group member Richard Aird OBE to discuss the implications for SEND assessment. Gareth Morewood explains how open evenings can provide a valuable opportunity to address specific SEND issues. We also have the answers to the most popular questions asked at our recent Child Protection in Education conference. Finally, prominent mental health blogger Laura Nuttall explains how vital school support can be for pupils who struggle – well worth a read.

Don’t forget to check out our Knowledge Centre for even more information and resources!

Jack Procter-Blain, Content Assistant

Contributors in this issue

Gareth D. Morewood is director of curriculum support (SENCO) at Priestnall School. He has worked voluntarily supporting parents and carers with SEN legislation and in preparing cases for SENDIST.

Laura Nuttall is a mental health blogger and student mental health nurse, who won last year’s MIND Blogger Award. She runs a popular YouTube channel dedicated to discussing mental health.

Sue Birchall is an experienced business manager with knowledge across the sector both in maintained and academy through all phases. She is registered as an associate trainer for NASBM.

Richard Aird OBE has had 30 years’ experience as a special school headteacher in four schools, and has published widely on SEND matters. Most recently, Richard served as a member of The Rochford Review.

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This term: support and learning for SENCOs

Improve your provision, re-think your assessment and plan your CPD with our termly plan for SENCOs

Staying on top of priorities could not be easier for SENCOs over this forthcoming year, with plenty of expert advice and support on offer at our SEND-focused conferences. As the final report of the Rochford Review suggests, our methods of measuring the progress of pupils with SEND continue to be a matter of intense debate, and SENCOs need to know how best to ensure that pupils working below the national standards of statutory testing are not left behind.

Improving provision for all pupils should be the priority, and we've put together this list of resources, training ideas and live events to help you secure the best possible outcomes.

**Leading SEND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accurately evidencing how provision is made for SEND pupils shouldn’t be difficult. For advice on how to create your SEND Information Report, read our guide on the Knowledge Centre.</th>
<th>Check out our SEND Inclusive Teaching Programme, which has a unit dedicated to ‘Developing inclusive teaching’.</th>
<th>Out with the P scales and in with ‘engagement scales’. How is SEND assessment changing, and what can you do to accurately measure progress?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you collaborating effectively with pupils, families and others to create the best possible SEND outcomes? The resources from our Efficient Partnership Working to Improve SEND Outcomes conference are now available on our Knowledge Centre. Check them out!</td>
<td>A formal TA/teacher agreement is a good way of arranging week-to-week liaison and ensuring effective deployment. Check out our template on the Knowledge Centre.</td>
<td>Our SEND assessment toolkit has practical resources to download for optimising assessment. Download it from the Knowledge Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download Anita Devi’s full toolkit for establishing a strong working relationship between SENCO and governor in order to secure the best outcomes.</td>
<td>Is the class teacher directly responsible for setting the PEP targets for a looked-after child? Debs Ward offers an expert answer.</td>
<td>At a school for pupils with a variety of complex needs, Simon Yates explains how SEN assessment without P scales has captured what progress really means for the pupils. Read his article on the Knowledge Centre.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**From training courses to conferences, we have plenty to offer SENCOs this term**
Understanding your SEND budget

If you’re a SENCO without access to your budget, getting the necessary funding can be difficult. **SUE BIRCHALL** explains what you need and how to ask for it

**SENCOs will understand** the importance of effectively spending the money allocated to the school for SEND provision. However, you may not have any input in the school improvement plan and budget setting, meaning that your budget may not clearly indicate SEND provision. Below I have listed some things to consider before approaching your SLT or SBM for finance.

**What funding do you have?**

The Designated School Grant (DSG) is allocated as part of the core notional funding, which includes the age-weighted pupil unit as for all pupils and notional funding set by the LA. A mainstream school is expected to cover the first £6,000 of pupil cost from its main budget, which contains the school allocation of DSG or core notional funding. Special schools receive this as part of the £10,000 place funding.

1. Core notional provision
   This not only has to provide for the extras that your SEND pupil needs, but also contribute to the running of the school, academy or unit. This funding will likely be for any SEN staff and resources, as well as general running costs.

2. High needs funding
   This is based completely on needs, and you will have some, if not all, of the input into accessing this through your personal education plans. To access this, you have to be able to evidence expenditure that will exceed the £6,000 notional funding for mainstream schools and £10,000 funding for special schools and units. This money is more discreet, and allocated for particular pupils. It is monitored closely and should be spent as per the application.
   If you have pupils in a specialist resource provision, they are funded separately and do not count in pupil numbers for age weighted pupil unit.
   Both of these funding streams come in with the main budget and are quickly allocated, so forward planning is key. Use available tools to evidence the need for your proposed budget, along with evaluations and outcomes.

**A SMART plan**

**Specific:** your plan needs to be set out to include your day-to-day costs as well as your individualised requests. The specifics need to include the details of how you assessed the need.

**Measurable:** this is where you justify the funding request using information from individual pupil plans. Using current data, evaluate the proposed outcomes if the budget bid were granted.

**Achievable:** your school improvement plan is what you will reference when showing that your aims are realistic.

**Relevant:** again, data can help you validate the bids that you are putting forward.

**Timed:** remember that budgets are annual, so while you bid over a period of more than one financial year, the evaluation needs to be at least annual.

**Funding request template**

Use this template to set out your funding requests. Include supporting documents such as the SEN improvement plan, EHCP and any supporting statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding request for:</th>
<th>Class/year group:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specifics</td>
<td>Details of the funding required: include information about product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>Describe measures of evaluation, terms of evaluation, data as at start and method of evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievable</td>
<td>Include measures of success – relate to EHIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Detail expected outcomes, include data and research to support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time specific</td>
<td>No intervention should be never ending – set time limits to useful life of funding request and detail reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total funds requested</td>
<td>£</td>
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</table>

**Insight 11 Secondary Book 1.indb**

www.optimus-education.com OPTIMUS EDUCATION INSIGHT SECONDARY 53
Co-ordinating SEND support at open evenings

At a time when many schools are holding open evenings, GARETH D MOREWOOD explains how they can provide a valuable opportunity to address specific SEND issues

In the modern world of education, we have many different types of school with many different circumstances regarding student numbers, popularity with parents and carers in the local community and provision for pupils with SEND. Some argue that competition is good and drives up standards, others suggest that it creates a divisive system that offers fewer options for the most vulnerable and those with complex needs.

I am no marketing expert, nor as SENCO do I want to be. However, I have always been acutely aware of the need to ensure that parents and carers have clear and open lines of communication with school, irrespective of the circumstances in which the school finds itself.

Our research Morewood & Bond (2012) indicates that it is best to ensure:

- that we keep parents and carers informed about provision
- that they know who to contact and how they can do so
- that we provide honest communication
- that we listen to parents and carers, giving them time to discuss and explain so we can work together (co-production)
- that we avoid uncertainty or misinterpretation.

Open evenings and days

All schools and settings will be hosting open evenings for prospective pupils and their parents. I often wonder as to the historic reasons for these events and the motivation for staging them. Perhaps if the school is on an improving journey, they are a good opportunity to ‘sell’ the new vision to parents and carers. Perhaps families new to the area will require opportunities to ‘weigh up’ competing local schools. From the SENCO’s perspective, I see them as an excellent opportunity to answer lots of SEND-related questions for prospective families about provision and ethos in one go, rather than holding several separate meetings during a very busy period of the academic year.

I think it is very important to have a clear vision about how the school considers young people with different starting points and specific SEND.

Evidencing provision

Since the passing of the Children and Families Act in September 2014, all schools are required to have a ‘SEND Information Report’ on their website, clearly outlining for parents and carers the manner of provision at that particular

Statutory information

One of the most important documents all schools are required to have is the ‘SEND Information Report’. This is statutory and, for those who like to know, something Ofsted will specifically look for prior to any inspection or visit. Guidance from the ‘SEND Code of Practice’ (Jan 2015), the Equality Act (2010) and Part 3 of the Children and Families Act (2014) relating to school systems for responding to the needs of students and young people with SEND, indicate the information schools must report on in their SEND Information Report.

Information on the inclusions in the ‘SEND Information Report’ can be found in Schedule 1 of ‘The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014’. This list is similar to the list included on pp. 95-96 of the SEND Code of Practice (July 2014) but in addition includes:

- a requirement to identify additional support for learning that is available to pupils with SEND
- the contact details of support services for the parents of pupils with SEND including those arrangements made in accordance with section 32 (notices sent by a local authority in regard to mediation)
- information on where the Local Authority’s local offer is published.

There are thirteen statements in Schedule 1 which are statutory inclusions, and must be included to ensure that the SEND Information Report complies with the legislation. However, it is important to check the requirements as regulations develop and evolve, and moreover that the Information Report is properly co-produced and developed with parents and carers.
school. Any ‘open school’ events should be an opportunity to see and hear first-hand what the Information Report shows; there should be clear links between documentation and reality. That said, nothing can beat an opportunity to experience the attitudes and values of staff face-to-face, and chat with various specialists about individual needs.

We have just had our open evening, and our ‘tried-and-tested’ formula involves pupils and key staff directly explaining ‘what it is really like’ and how we operate. One key aim of this event is to provide an open and transparent opportunity for young people and their parents. As our research into parental confidence showed, there is absolutely no benefit in offering anything but trust and an open honest dialogue.

The evening itself
I try to ensure the evening is relaxed, as for many parents and carers there has been a battle to get appropriate provision or diagnosis. We need to do our best to offer an informative and supportive approach for their visit. The key to this is offering positive role models from the existing pupil population and keeping key staff available to answer specific questions. We also make sure that we have enough copies of our parent and carer guide printed off, as people always like to have physical copies to refer to.

We set-up a ‘coffee morning’ event, with plenty of hot and cold drinks and snacks, various activities and games for the young people to play, demonstrations of the technology we use to support access and promote independence and leaflets and information to support discussions. In addition, our faculty pet tortoises (Jake and Doodles) make regular appearances. They are always a massive hit with young people and adults alike!

Often initial conversations that evening pave the way for an individual appointment in the subsequent weeks, to allow for a more specific and personalised discussion. However, if the initial engagement is approached correctly, young people and their parents/carers will be far more relaxed when these second discussions take place. We can begin co-producing individual plans and support mechanisms that inform the wider whole-school approach.

Valuable starting point
I hear many people asking why we need to have an open evening, but during the event itself and through subsequent conversations the answer is plainly obvious. Parents and carers enjoy seeing and hearing from current pupils and staff, as it helps them to consider how provision will match their child’s specific needs. Over the next few weeks we will see individual families at follow-up appointments, which were scheduled at the open evening, to start planning for September 2018 and beyond.

If I have learnt anything during my 15 years as SENCO, it is that working in partnership is a powerful position. Co-production is often banded about, when in reality only lip-service is paid to the engagement; ensuring proper joint working together right from the start is one of the most positive steps SENCOs can take.

Open evenings are important regardless of your school context; be they vital in selling a new message, or as the first foundation block in a truly co-produced package for the years to come.

Additional resources
’How to create your SEN information report’, Anita Devi. oego.co/senReport
oego.co/parentConf
’Curriculum Support Faculty Information Booklet for Parents & Carers, 2016 – 2017’. oego.co/parentsCarers
Morewood, G.D., Priestnall School Educating for Life, Inclusion Now Magazine. oego.co/inclusionPriestnall
Equality Act 2010. oego.co/equalityAct
Rochford Review: the implications for schools

Review group member and former special school headteacher RICHARD AIRD explains what the Rochford Review has concluded, and what it means for SENCOs.

Richard, as a member of the review group could you tell us a bit about the journey to this final report? Consisting of a diverse range of representatives, the review group first convened in September 2015. We were occasionally supported by civil servants from various government departments, often to provide information or explain any relevant data. The original commission was for six meetings over a four-month period, but it soon became apparent that the group would need to meet for at least a further six times.

Many of the first six meetings were devoted to analysing the statutory assessment aspect of the new national curriculum, particularly the perceived 'gap' between P8 of the old national curriculum and Standard 1 of the new national curriculum. Rather than trying to replicate or revise the old P levels, it was decided to extend Standard 1 of the new national curriculum to incorporate learning matter at P5-P8 and add additional assessment criteria to ensure there would be no learning 'gap'. Learning matter from P5-P8 was selected for inclusion because the concepts and skills associated with these levels were judged to be demonstrably subject-specific; the learning matter could be readily identified as representing the earliest stages in the acquisition of either English or maths.

The group was also required to consider how the ambitions of the most recent SEND-related legislation (primarily the Code of Practice and Children & Families Act) could be supported by recommending changes to the way in which statutory assessment of pupils with SEND and disadvantage is undertaken nationally. During these discussions, members noted how desperately poor the quality of life outcomes for school leavers with SEND have become. Any changes in statutory assessment should also seek to improve assessment in all of the Code of Practice EHC areas of need, not just in the area of cognition and learning.

What about assessment for pupils working below subject-specific levels (below P4)?
The learning matter at P1-3 has always been 'generic' across all subjects because the learning matter is not subject specific. P4 was the bridge between the earliest stages of child development and those of subject specific learning.

There was insufficient time for the group to agree how best to statutory assess pupils working below the level of subject specific learning. Consequently, we agreed to meet a further six times in order to identify a way forward.

A period of research and intense discussion among members of the group culminated in the recommendations that you see in the final report. 90% of the membership was in agreement to take all of the recommendations forward.

How did you organise consultation over the course of the review? Consultation was organised on an ongoing basis throughout the first phase of the review via online surveys. At the end of the phase, two face-to-face consultation meetings were organised; one for professional associations and the other for schools and organisation representatives with an interest in SEND. Responses from these consultations were very positive about the review's proposals. A further two consultations were organised towards the end of the second phase, giving an outline of what was being proposed for pupils working below P4 and below. Again, the response was largely positive.

The report recommends that P scales are removed. What are they to be replaced with?
Pupils previously assessed as working at P5-8 are judged to have subject-specific concepts and skills. Our report recommended that these pupils should have as great an opportunity to be statutorily assessed as all other pupils. Because the new standards for English and maths were set above the level of P8, the report also recommended that a small number of additional standards be added to extend the range of pupils eligible for statutory testing.

The report was cautious in making this recommendation, adding that participation in statutory tests should only occur when pupils working at P5-8 have been deemed ready to participate in statutory assessment and only in ways that respect individual learning styles. The statutory assessment of SEND and disadvantaged pupils ought not to be age-specific, but instead tailored to individual circumstances.

Even with such modifications to the national framework for statutory assessment, there would remain a small number of pupils for whom statutory testing remains irrelevant, perhaps for the whole of their school careers. The majority of pupils with profound, multiple and complex learning difficulties (PMLD) are currently assessed as working at P levels 1-4, and according to the current DfE definition they will likely remain in the P1-P4 range throughout their school careers. Clearly, it has always been officially accepted that pupils with PMLD are unlikely to make linear progress.

The group discussed this anomaly, and agreed to modify statutory assessment approaches in order to make them more inclusive of the lowest attaining pupils. The decision to consider a modified approach to statutory assessment was in keeping with findings from the ‘Commission for Assessment without Levels’ (CAWL 2015), which stated that ‘assessing pupils with complex needs and those with very low attainment can be more complicated than assessing other pupils.’

'We reviewed research into the education of pupils with PMLD and complex needs from the DfE report, ‘Complex Learning Difficulties & Disabilities’ (2011). Subsequent debate informed the report's recommendations about the statutory assessment of pupils working below the standard of subject-specific learning. We reviewed research into the education of pupils with PMLD and complex needs from the DfE report, ‘Complex Learning Difficulties & Disabilities’ (2011). Subsequent debate informed the report's recommendations about the statutory assessment of pupils working below the standard of subject-specific learning. What do schools need to consider in the short and long-term?

Schools must try to avoid negative comments by those who have had no involvement in the review process, and instead seek expert advice about the review’s recommendations by attending well-informed conferences. After ensuring school leaders have a good understanding, both of the substance of the recommendations and the Engagement Scale, schools need to reflect on the real-life outcomes currently affecting learning-disabled school leavers, and judge whether the historical reliance on an outmoded national curriculum and its P scales have delivered the best quality of outcome for these pupils. Is there a better, more pupil-centred way of educating and assessing these vulnerable learners?

Once aware of what these recommendations have to offer in terms of improving outcomes for pupils, schools should communicate their support to the DfE however possible. It would be a shame if the vocal, negative minority had undue influence on the consultation findings, particularly those who are unwilling to let special education progress into the 21st century.'
As school leaders develop their own understanding of the recommendations, I would advise them to consult with parents and carers. Find out what they feel their children need to learn in order to succeed in their education and make a successful transition to adulthood. In-school curricula should adequately reflect the needs of a school’s own pupils, and a combined formative and summative approach to assessment can help to monitor progress and inform pedagogy. Revisions to policy and practice, although time-consuming, will accrue the most benefits for pupils in the long run.

On a longer timescale, schools will need to revise their curriculum and assessment procedures. Teachers must be sufficiently skilled to ensure that their teaching can be monitored according to the extent of pupil engagement. Schools already have a statutory duty to publish their SEND-related information, and these recommendations provide an ideal opportunity for school leaders to review the effectiveness of their specialist SEND provision. Schools should participate in peer review of SEND provision, working in partnership to raise standards.

**How would you respond to the challenge that the new Engagement Scales could limit aspiration?**

Change is never easy to accept and members of the review group appreciate there are many teachers and school leaders who have never known SEND provision without the overarching framework of the old national curriculum and its P levels. It’s understandable that some practitioners may feel anxious. However, there is no excuse for people to make the kind of subjective, misguided statement as the one you refer to about limiting aspiration.

‘Engagement’ represents variations in attention, interest and involvement which pupils demonstrate when they participate in new learning. It’s fundamental to the process of learning for all pupils, regardless of their individual academic ability.

Measuring the different ways and extent to which pupils engage in learning can readily provide an inclusive approach to statutory assessment, hence our recommendation of the Engagement Scale.

**Are the P scales still valuable?**

Any claims about pupil aspiration show scant regard for what little value may actually be attributed to the P scales. Aside from the very first year when the submission of P scale data was made statutory, the DfE has not undertaken any forensic analysis of P scale data; P levels themselves could not be moderated nationally and therefore had no status. Despite efforts to benchmark P level progress (via the government’s ‘Progression Guidance’), the approach has never been regarded as an accurate measure of pupil progress.

The CAWL report was sceptical of assessment by levels, reporting that ‘depth and breadth of understanding were sometimes sacrificed in favour of pace’. Ofsted, rather than relying on P scale data, has increasingly looked for a range of evidence to judge standards of pupil progress rather than relying on P scale data.

The recommendation that schools should be more accountable for pupil outcomes in all EHC areas of need will mean that raising pupil aspirations stays at the forefront of SEND provision. The ultimate goal of education, particularly for disadvantaged and SEND pupils, should be to provide the best possible adult life. In order to ensure robust accountability, the report recommends that schools must provide evidence to support conversations with parents and carers, inspectors, RSCs, LAs, governors and those engaged in peer review.

This is surely more favourable than the undecipherable and often irrelevant P scale data generated by commercial software, in the mistaken belief that it’s what Ofsted inspectors look for. When consulting with parents and carers about the statutory assessment of pupils with SEND, over 90% of parents or carers said it was important that their child made progress in relation to their own needs as opposed to progress in the P scales.

Since the publication of the report some incorrect challenges have been made on Twitter and in the press which need putting right. One teachers’ union recently tweeted to say that they need to hear the views of Ofsted before making any judgements about removing P scales. In fact, two HMI lead SEN Ofsted inspectors served as members of the Rochford Review and Ofsted inspectors have increasingly looked for a range of evidence to judge standards of pupil progress rather than relying on P scale data.

The same teachers’ union has also suggested that the actual application of the Engagement Scale will be dictated to schools, but this is incorrect. The manner in which assessments are undertaken via the Engagement Scale will be for schools to decide, based on how they respond to the diverse needs of their pupils.
This term: support for DSLs and pastoral leads

As an Optimus member, staying on the front lines of effective safeguarding is that bit easier. Here are some of the resources you can expect over the term.

**Designating safeguarding leads (DSL)** need to ensure that their procedures are in-keeping with the most recent statutory guidance, and that pupils are resilient to emerging and evolving threats. The newly-updated ‘Keeping children safe in education’ (KCSIE) statutory guidance outlines the measures that safeguarding leads need to take in order to maintain watertight practice, and there will be plenty of opportunities to discuss what this updated statutory guidance means for your school – and raise any concerns - at our upcoming practical safeguarding conferences in the new year.

We’ve collated the best of our resources, expert advice and content to give you everything you’ll need to maintain effective practice. Be sure to check out our website for even more resources and information on upcoming events!

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<tr>
<th>Mental health</th>
<th>Sex and relationships education</th>
<th>Leading child protection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All the resources from our Mental Health and Wellbeing Conference in November are available on our Knowledge Centre, to help you make early, appropriate interventions.</td>
<td>If you’re looking to re-think your approach to teaching the importance of healthy sexual relationships, download our consent toolkit from the Knowledge Centre.</td>
<td>Develop a whole-school safeguarding policy that’s tailored to your setting and mindful of the latest guidance for 2017. Protecting Children Update, London 22nd Feb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety is a fast-growing problem for young people in schools. Watch our webinar with Dr Tina Rae on supporting young people with anxiety using therapeutic techniques.</td>
<td>Sexting has become the new ‘first base’, and it’s vital that teachers and DSLs are aware of the legal implications for pupils. Education lawyer Dai Durbridge’s guide to ‘Sexting: what you need to know’ is available to read on our Knowledge Centre.</td>
<td>For an effective, step-by-step approach to making a child protection referral, download our ‘Making a referral’ poster on the Knowledge Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you confident you know how to spot the early warning signs of self-harm? Our download-and-deliver training course, Managing Self-Harm with Dr Pooky Knightsmith, will help you to identify, understand and respond to cases as they emerge.</td>
<td>Whether you’re concerned about a suspected incident of sexual exploitation in school, or looking to train your staff to spot the signs of grooming, head to the In-House Training area for our Sexual Exploitation and Grooming course.</td>
<td>Unsure how to act on concerns? Our Safeguarding Whole School Update course has been updated with self-study versions, complete with end of unit tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is exposure to pornography becoming an issue for your pupils? Download our useful pornography toolkit of lesson ideas to promote a healthier view of sexual relationships.</td>
<td>KCSIE has been updated, and you can watch our webinar with education lawyer Dai Durbridge on ensuring implementation in your school or setting.</td>
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Our upcoming conferences will cover the latest statutory guidance and practical responses to emerging threats.
Responding to awkward or embarrassing questions

SRE is an important topic for young people to study, but one which can often be loaded with embarrassment. VICKY FENLON suggests some responses and rules to follow.

Lay the groundwork
An effective series of SRE lessons should include time and space for questions and we would all hope to be able to answer them accurately, with respect for the person asking them and in a way that clears up any confusion for the whole class. However, there are times when these questions can make us giggle with shyness, cringe with discomfort or even panic with the concern that we might go too far in our answers or cause offence to any children whose family's attitudes differ from our own.

When embarking on a unit of SRE lessons, it is important to lay the groundwork thoroughly. This can be done by creating a class agreement about the responsibilities that each child has during the lessons, and starting the unit with a clear and concise look at male and female sexual anatomy.

Class rules for SRE lessons
When teaching SRE, you need to aim to create a safe, sensible and respectful area for learning, while also pre-empting some of the more common questions that may arise. This can be done according to an individual teacher's best judgement of their class, but should ultimately result in the whole class agreeing to stick to certain rules during lessons.

1. **We will use agreed language**
   This helps to deal with the use of infantile or obscene words.

2. **We will not ask, or have to answer, any personal questions**
   Even if a teacher is comfortable answering questions about their own opinions and experiences, they should avoid doing so in order to create a learning environment where no person feels pressured to share details about themselves or their families.

3. **We will allow others to learn at their own pace**
   Some children may have a more extensive knowledge of sexual matters than others going beyond what you plan to cover in lessons. You need to encourage pupils to bear in mind that nobody should feel rushed into finding out about things that they may find confusing or that their families may prefer them not to know just yet.

'Most young people are full of curiosity and are well aware of an increase in openness around sexual matters in the world around us'.

As every class is different there is no typical set of rules, but including the three points above will help to deal with certain questions or statements should they arise. At the same time, you should be aware that most of these questions are asked out of a genuine desire to know and understand, so the facts should be included in the answer where possible. Here are some examples.

**Pupil:** 'Why do boys' willies get bigger?'
**Teacher:** 'Remember that we have agreed to use scientific language in these lessons. Try again using the correct anatomical word.'

**Pupil:** 'Miss, when did you start your periods?'
**Teacher:** 'Remember that we agreed not to ask any personal questions – that includes me too! Most girls start their periods at around age 10-11.'

**Pupil:** 'Can you catch HIV through oral sex?'
**Teacher:** 'That’s a question that you will find out the answer to when you are in secondary school. It is a little advanced for our lessons this year, but if you are still curious to know the answer, you could ask an adult at home.'

The biological basics
Spending some time in the first few lessons to ensuring that the class have a sound understanding of the names and functions of the female and male genitalia, as well as the process of sexual intercourse, will get the children used to using the correct scientific vocabulary. It will also make certain other potentially embarrassing questions more straightforward to answer.

It is important to make clear that the penis and clitoris feel good when touched, and therefore that sex is a pleasurable experience.
This can demystify many aspects of sexuality for young people, and can be part of an effective answer to many different questions.

Pupil: ‘Why do people enjoy sex so much?’
Teacher: ‘Because it makes them feel good, as it involves the penis and clitoris being touched.’

Pupil: ‘What is masturbation?’
Teacher: ‘When a person has some time to themselves, in a private place, and they touch their penis or clitoris in a way that feels good.’

Pupil: ‘How do gay people have sex?’
Teacher: ‘It is possible for people to take part in sexual activity without full intercourse taking place. A couple will find ways to stimulate each other's penis or clitoris so that they feel good.’

Some of these questions, while very commonly asked, may also be deemed as inappropriate to be answered in a whole class setting. A teacher should use their judgement in conjunction with a sound understanding of their school’s SRE policy to help them decide which questions to give a detailed response to, and which to decline to answer.

Practice questions

All of the examples given below are genuine questions asked by year 5 and 6 pupils, either in class or through a confidential ‘Question Box’ scheme.

How would you answer them?

- Why do men’s nuts get hairy?
- Miss, why are you such an expert on erections?
- Is it better to go on the pill or use condoms?
- Should girls shave their pubes?
- Why are so many music videos about sex?
- How much jizz comes out in an ejaculation?
- Sir, how often do you masturbate?
- What is a paedo?
- Does it give a woman an orgasm if she uses tampons?
- One of the boys in this class says he had a wet dream. Can you get him to tell us about it?
- Is it sex abuse if someone gives you a cuddle?
- Does a girl have to have big boobs to wear a bra?
- How do they do an abortion?
- Why do people play with themselves?
- What’s the point in people having sex when they don’t want to make a baby?

Awkward and difficult topics

Most young people are full of curiosity and are well aware of an increase in openness around sexual matters in the world around us. There are also those who worry about things they may have heard in the news, or who have genuine fears about sexual matters.

Here are some other difficult questions that arise, with an idea of how to answer them.

- Pupil: ‘What is porn?’
  Teacher: ‘Pornography consists of pictures or videos of people who may be undressed, or are taking part in any type of sexual activity. For young people, seeing these images can feel confusing, scary or weird, so it is important to tell an adult that you trust if you have seen or been shown pornography.’

- Pupil: ‘What is grooming?’
  Teacher: ‘Every adult who cares about your safety and wellbeing would want you to wait until you were old enough and in a relationship with a person that you really trust before you engage in any type of sexual activity.

  ‘Grooming is when an abuser tries to get to know a young or vulnerable person, sometimes online, with the intention of meeting up with them and trying to abuse them. An abuser may say that it needs to be kept secret, but actually it should always be talked about.

  Time should then be devoted to exploring who children would feel safe talking to, who they can talk to at school, and how they can contact Childline if they ever needed to.’
Mental health: don’t let pupils ‘get by’ unsupported

As someone who received support from her school, Laura Nuttall struggled with her mental health illness. How do pupils who don’t have access to adequate support cope?

Many years ago, I was an eight-year-old in a primary school classroom desperately trying not to cry while the teacher was speaking. When break time rolled around, the tears flowed and I found myself unable to self-soothe. My parents had just announced that they were getting a divorce and I was experiencing an unfamiliar, extremely dark sadness. My teacher called me over and asked why I had been crying so much over the last few days. I muttered out a brief explanation and her response was:

“You need to find somebody to talk to.”

Not, ‘Shall I help you find somebody to talk to?’ or ‘I suggest you talk to X, Y or Z’ but you, a mere eight-year-old, needs to find somebody to talk to.

Granted, the problems I was facing at that time were not a mental health problem; I was experiencing understandable sadness considering the turmoil I was facing. I do feel, however, that this example can highlight how alone many unhappy children might feel.

While many people may argue that schools should focus on purely educating children, it is important to remember that school is often the only brief escape children have from their problems. This is why it is important for schools to do what they can to help pupils who are experiencing distress. After all, is a child who is struggling with their mental health going to achieve their potential in school?

‘Recently, there has been a massive improvement in the accurate portrayal of mental illness and more and more people are talking about it’

were the hardest I have ever experienced, I was lucky enough to receive great support from my school.

Having struggled so much while receiving support leaves me incredibly concerned and saddened at the thought of the millions of children out there who are trying to ‘get by’ totally unsupported. I certainly don’t think I could have done it. We had a counsellor at my school with whom I attended weekly meetings. Additionally, I was able to seek her out and talk at any point if I was feeling overwhelmed. My problems were still undiagnosed and my contact with her was initiated purely by a teacher of mine who had become concerned about how unhappy I seemed. I was extremely fortunate.

Spotting signs of depression

Possible symptoms include:
- decline in standards of, or commitment to work
- frequent headaches
- fatigue and tiredness, even after sleep
- being irritable and sullen
- uncharacteristic behaviour
- displaying low self-esteem and self-worth
- introspection and being unusually quiet
- losing interest in favourite subjects, activities or hobbies
- losing or gaining weight
- self-harming
- Speaking about suicide or having suicidal thoughts
- appearing to be sad or unhappy a lot of the time
- increased tearfulness.

Read the full article on ‘Coping with depression: what can schools do?’ at my.optimus-education.com/coping-depression-what-can-schools-do

Counsellors in schools

By the time I entered secondary school, I was struggling with the undiagnosed mental illnesses that would lead to me being admitted to a psychiatric unit for two years, from the age of 16. While the years prior to my admission to hospital
When my support system at school became too concerned about me, they were well within their rights to break confidentiality and seek more specialist professional help. I dread to think what could have happened and I strongly feel that this action alone could save the lives of desperate pupils who are at risk of hurting themselves or ending their lives.

**Educating pupils about mental health**

When I started to become unwell, I had no idea what was happening. I was unable to understand why I was so desperately unhappy and why I sometimes experienced sensory information that others seemingly did not. I strongly feel that this alone is one of the main reasons why I did not seek help or open up about what I was experiencing.

While many important health issues had been, and were still being taught in specific lessons dedicated to health, I had no idea what mental illness was. I had only ever seen the drooling, screaming people in restraints being kept safely away from the general public by metal bars in rubbish horror films.

Recently, there has been a massive improvement in the portrayal of mental illness and more people are talking about it, aiding people’s knowledge and understanding of the subject. Similarly, many schools are now taking note and also teaching their pupils about mental health (what it is, how it can be maintained, what mental illnesses are and so on). I strongly feel that all schools should do this. In fact, I think ‘mental health’ should be incorporated into the national curriculum.

**Helping peers to show understanding, empathy and support**

This could help pupils identify when they, or someone they know, is showing signs of becoming unwell, allowing help to be sought faster (recovery from mental illnesses tends to be more successful the sooner interventions are implemented).

Furthermore, if Joe Bloggs’ dad has cancer and his friends understand the serious nature of his dad’s illness and provide Joe with the social support he needs, surely Joanne Bloggs, whose dad has schizophrenia, should be able to expect the same level of understanding, empathy and support?

Mental illnesses are seemingly becoming more prevalent in school-aged children and I strongly feel that providing support to children who are struggling and educating all children about mental health and mental illnesses in schools can only provide positive results. After all, on average, one in four of us will be personally affected by mental illness in our lifetime. By increasing support and knowledge to children now, perhaps the next generation will be much more knowledgeable, empathetic and ‘mentally healthy’ than those before it.
Safeguarding governor or trustee responsibilities

As a governor or trustee, the safety of pupils is paramount. MATT MILLER describes what governors should be monitoring and questions to ask.

Three golden principles
1. Safeguarding is everybody’s responsibility.
2. Ultimately, if you cannot keep the children safe in school, how well they do at reading and writing doesn’t much matter.
3. You should never look the other way.

Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility
Everyone who works with children, including teachers and voluntary workers, has a responsibility to keep them safe. It is extremely unlikely that any single professional will have a full picture of a child’s needs and circumstances. Everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.

Failings in safeguarding systems are often the result of losing sight of the needs and views of children. They need to be respected, to have stable relationships with professionals built on trust and to have consistent support provided for their individual needs.

The safeguarding governor
As a governor with safeguarding responsibility, you’ll need to liaise with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and report to the governing body:
• any staff training undertaken or required
• any significant issues affecting the school in relation to safeguarding

What to monitor
Governors need to understand the different forms of abuse: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. They should ask a number of questions around safeguarding procedures in order to challenge the headteacher and SLT. Ask ‘How well does the school...’
• provide a safe environment for pupils to learn
• identify pupils who are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, and take appropriate action to keep them safe
• prevent unsuitable people working in schools
• promote safe practice and challenge poor and unsafe practice
• work with other professional partners
• monitor pupil health, wellbeing and safety
• meet the medical needs of children with medical conditions and provide first aid
• ensure school security
• deal with drugs and substance misuse
• deal with any other local safeguarding issues?

Governors should then follow up and constantly ask: ‘How could we do it better?’

Safer recruitment
Every stage of the recruitment process should be accorded rigour and attention to detail.

Advertisements should include reference to the school’s child protection policy or safe working practices, to send out the message that this is a safe school with an unequivocal expectation that individuals will properly adhere to the procedures.

Application forms should be carefully vetted and any inconsistencies checked out with the applicant and their referees.
Gaps in employment history should be checked and verified.
When adhering to safer recruitment procedures, two important questions should be asked by governors of themselves.
- Do I know how many staff and governors are trained in the school?
- Is there a need for more governors to be trained?

Ofsted safeguarding judgement
Ofsted evaluation of the effectiveness of safeguarding will be tested under the judgement on the quality of leadership and management and also its impact on the personal development, behaviour and welfare of children and learners.

Under effectiveness of leadership and management, governors must also monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding, the work to raise awareness and keep pupils safe from the dangers of abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism, and how the school acts when it suspects that pupils are vulnerable to these issues.

Five factors Ofsted look for
Ofsted will look for evidence of:
1. the extent to which leaders create a positive culture and ethos where safeguarding is an important part of everyday life in the school
2. the application and effectiveness of safeguarding policies, safe recruitment and vetting processes
3. the quality of safeguarding practice, including evidence that staff are aware of the signs that children or learners may be at risk of harm either within the setting, in the family or wider community
4. the timeliness of response to any safeguarding concerns
5. the quality of work to support multi-agency plans around the child or learner.

Checklist for the whole governing body

**Culture**
- Build a culture of vigilant safeguarding by promoting trust and providing a safe space for discussion.
- Actively engage with the Prevent duty by engaging staff with training and encouraging pupils to feel supported when discussing difficult topics.
- Be aware of best practice regarding looked after children and young people.

**Staff management**
- Appoint a member of the SLT to adopt the role of designated senior lead for safeguarding, ensuring that the person is given the time, funding, resources, training and support to carry out the role and that effective cover and deputising arrangements are in place.
- Prevent people who pose a risk of harm from working with pupils by adhering to the statutory safer recruitment processes.
- Have procedures in place to handle allegations of abuse against members of staff or volunteers.
- Ensure that internal and external providers of services are compliant with relevant safeguarding legislation and guidance.

**Safeguarding policy**
- Ensure the college has effective and compliant safeguarding policies, including child protection and staff behaviour, which are provided to all staff and volunteers on induction.
- Have in place appropriate safeguarding responses to young people who go missing.
- Consider how pupils may be taught about safeguarding, including online.
- Ensure appropriate filters and appropriate monitoring systems are in place for online safety.
- Have procedures in place to handle allegations of abuse made against other young people.
- Ensure the young person’s wishes are taken into account when determining what action to take to protect a young person, while complying with procedures for reporting, referral and information sharing and the need to act in the best interests of the young person.
- Promote the safety of pupils on site through effective site security.

**Safeguarding governor**
- Nominate a governor, normally the chairperson, to liaise with the local authority and partner agencies in the event of an allegation of abuse made against the college principal.

**Training**
- Ensure all staff and volunteers receive effective safeguarding induction and training appropriate to their level.

**Multi-agency working**
- Ensure the setting complies with the multi-agency child protection process, including the offer of early help, the reporting, recording and referral of child protection concerns and the contribution to inter-agency plans for individual young people.
- Allow access to children’s social care where necessary to enable the local authority to conduct a section 17 or section 47 assessment.
Child Protection: 5 questions answered

From new KCSIE guidance to risk assessment, DAI DURBRIDGE provides answers to the most popular questions asked by delegates at our recent conference.

When a child moves school does the duty of passing on safeguarding records rest with the old school or the new school?

It is the responsibility of the DSL at the old school to pass them on to the new school as soon as possible. Annex B of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (KCSIE) makes it clear that the file should be securely transferred, separately from the main file, and confirmation of receipt should be obtained.

It is good practice for the old school to keep an electronic or hard copy until such time as confirmation of receipt is received from the new school. In the vast majority of cases the copy file at the old school should then be destroyed. This is because the old school has no good reason to keep the file and if a copy were to be maintained after the child has left the school, that school could be criticised by the information commissioner for retaining sensitive information that is no longer relevant or required.

How should schools approach the updating of their safeguarding policy in line with the continuous changes to regulations regarding safeguarding?

The guidance makes it clear that the policy should be reviewed at least annually as a minimum. If you are to review more frequently than that, you should only do so if you have good reason. Too many reviews in a short period of time cause challenges with dissemination to staff and can undermine their confidence in applying the correct, up-to-date policy.

Where there is a significant change to guidance or if there has been a significant safeguarding issue at your school it would be sensible to review policy. Certainly in the latter example it would show good practice to review policy and tweak it as a result of a learning following a review into a safeguarding incident.

When KCSIE says that all staff must read and understand part one, are we including cleaners, canteen staff, sports centre staff and so on?

Yes, all staff must read the guidance. Training should be proportionate to the role and the amount of time that the individual spends with pupils.

Is there any policy or risk assessment that could cover adults entering school who have not signed in, such as parents from other schools who are in the building or grounds to watch a sporting event?

There is no expectation or requirement to carry out any checks on parents or other adult visitors in these circumstances. However, it is sensible to have a basic risk assessment for large sporting occasions or other school events to ensure that no unauthorised persons can find themselves in parts of the school where they have no reason to be.

How can we present evidence that staff have read and understood KCSIE?

In general terms there are two main ways to evidence that staff have read and understood guidance: asking them and having a simple written record that sets out which staff have read the document or received training on it.

When it comes to inspection, it is likely that one or more staff members will be asked questions on the guidance.

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