

EDUCATION EXECUTIVE

SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES

Digital wrap edition



EdExec live 2021- the review

Everything you need to know about what happened at our recent events!

DIGITAL WRAP

ALSO INSIDE THIS MONTH:

THRIVING IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

St Marks on being mentioned in the EEF report

THAT SINKING FEELING NOT WAVING, BUT DROWNING

Dealing with the feeling of overwhelm - Stephen Peach on how to stay afloat

SUPPORTING STAFF WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Identifying and supporting staff with mental health issues

Editor's comment

We are very happy here at EdExec HQ as, after what felt like a life time, we finally got to hold our EdExec LIVE events. Despite the various challenges of trying to organise an event in a pandemic, we managed to bring our live event to both London and Manchester within the space of two weeks! Usually, we leave around four months between the events, but we were so determined for both to happen as soon as they possibly could we went full steam ahead and held one at the end of September and one at the start of October. Both days were a great success, and it was wonderful to welcome all of you lovely SBLs back again, and (after a much-needed breather) we can't wait to welcome you back again in the new year – keep an eye out for the dates! Talking of the event, in case you missed it - or if you attended and want to relive the day - in this issue we have our review which gives a taster of the day and the seminars which took place across both the South and North events. In the rest of the issue Sue Birchall, who was actually one of the speaker's at the South event, discusses how to support staff who are experiencing mental health problems. We speak to Keith Rondeau, headteacher at St Marks primary school, about being one of just four schools, nationally, to be mentioned in the Education Endowment Foundation report. We also drill down into the numbers and analyse the statistics for admission appeals in England, and take a look at the changes being made to the payment process for schools' business rates. Jonny Coates discusses the importance of good estate management and Stephen Peach explains how to deal with the feeling of being overwhelmed – a feeling SBLs know all too well! As always, we'd love to hear any suggestions you have for the magazine. If you'd like to get involved with EdExec, or if you'd like us to cover a certain topic, please do let us know. Contact leanor@intelligentmedia.co.uk or tweet @edexec with ideas, opinions or success stories.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Is your school doing something wonderful? Do you have an opinion or experience you'd like to share? A story suggestion? Or some advice you'd like to share with your peers?

Get in touch – email leanor@intelligentmedia.co.uk

ELEANOR POTTER
EDITOR

Contributors

The education sector can be difficult to navigate at times, and those in school business management play a pivotal role in steering schools to success. Tasked with everything from finance and procurement, to HR and admin, you keep the education cogs turning.

Education Executive addresses the most pressing matters faced by SBMs, offering meaningful insights and practical advice – essentially, all you need to run your school. Our contributors, drawn from the *Education Executive* team and sector innovators and experts, offer invaluable business insights from both the sidelines and front line.



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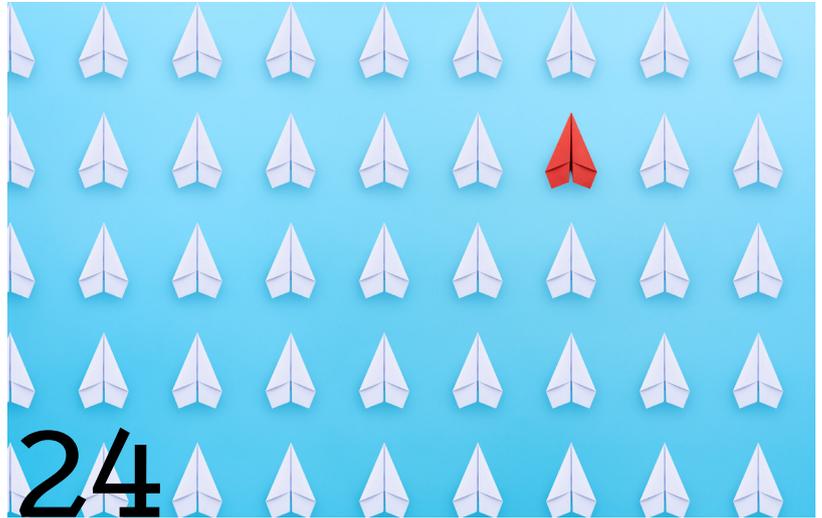
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Close your eyes. Inhale. Count to five... now exhale. Time to take a few moments out for some light and interesting reading – a well-earned break from numbers and statistics!

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Why you need to keep your back-office IT up to scratch

Education Executive is the first business management magazine written exclusively for school business managers and bursars, bringing you the latest issues affecting your role, from finance to premises, procurement to HR. *EdExec* delivers the lowdown on all the hottest topics in education management right here, every month.

 @EdExec

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media** 

NEWS

The latest news and views from the world of education

Plymouth pupils design banner in bid to stop engine idling

Two schools have won a competition for designing a banner that raises awareness about air quality. Ernesettle Community School, and Mary Dean's Primary School, in Plymouth, won the competition, with schools entering from across the city. The two designs, which urge drivers to switch off their engines while waiting at schools, have been put on one banner and will be displayed across the city. The campaign is part of the council's Climate Emergency Action Plan. Noah, who designed one of the entries, said, "It made me want to inspire people to not use gas so much, to help our environment and all the wildlife we have." Ruby, who helped design the other entry, said people should not "drive cars, [but] ride bikes" instead. "Because then our air would get cleaner, and not dirtier," she added.

@LainersSbm: So I'm drinking wine and eating chocolate on a school night - that's how my week is going. How's yours?#sbltwitter

Ozone machine school plans scrapped over safety

Plans to use ozone machines to disinfect classrooms have been abandoned, the Welsh government has confirmed. The machines are potentially 'highly harmful' to children, a review found. Ministers were previously accused of making a 'spectacular U-turn' after plans for the machines were paused for a safety review. Opposition parties Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Conservatives said they welcomed the move. Welsh ministers had previously announced they would spend £3.31m on 1,800 new ozone machines developed by Swansea University. However, the Welsh government has now said this cash will instead be used in schools and colleges to improve ventilation. Swansea University had defended the safety of the machines.

@susie_dent: A reminder of the word 'forswunk' (13th century): exhausted from too much work. To be 'foreswunk' is to be exhausted before you even begin



NI spends least in UK on each school pupils' education

Northern Ireland spends less on each school pupil's education than any other part of the UK, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), one of the UK's leading economic research institutes. The IFS said there had been a 'remarkable squeeze on school resources over more than a decade'. New analysis from the IFS suggests that about £6,400 would be spent per pupil in Northern Ireland in 2021-22, compared to about £7,600 in Scotland. Meanwhile, separate figures from the Northern Irish education authority show that almost half of schools (48%) in Northern Ireland were in budget deficit at the end of the 2020-21 financial year. Previous research published by the IFS in 2019 suggested that Northern Ireland had faced the highest school spending cuts per pupil in the UK over a decade.



Education unions call for urgent action on climate change crisis

As chair of COP26 it is essential for the UK to lead by example to bring about the changes needed for a more sustainable future, education unions are urging. The dire impact of climate change requires an emergency response, including from the education sector, because young people have most to lose from the current lack of direction, the four unions say. They say there is concern the government has yet to grasp the gravity of the situation and are calling for important measures to be embedded in the education system. These are:

- A comprehensive review of the entire curriculum, so that it is preparing and mobilising our whole society for a sustainable future.
- As an interim measure, the government should support Jim Knight's private members' bill, restoring sustainability as a pillar of the curriculum.
- A comprehensive plan to decarbonise the entire education estate by 2030, as part of an overdue refurbishment and repair programme.
- A detailed policy on green travel for students, staff and parents should be developed.

@Positive_Call: When you're overthinking, WRITE. When you're under-thinking, READ.

Protect schools from anti-vax protests – Starmer

Councils should be able to stop anti-vaccination protesters from demonstrating outside schools by using exclusion orders, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has said. Sir Keir said it was "sickening" that protesters were spreading "dangerous misinformation" to children. He urged the government to "urgently" update the law so exclusion zones can be rapidly set up around school gates. Ministers have also expressed concern about such protests. Home secretary Priti Patel said freedom to protest was a fundamental part of democracy, but told the *Daily Telegraph*: "It is

completely unacceptable for children, teachers or parents to be intimidated and harassed outside their schools by protesters peddling misinformation and dangerous lies about the life-saving vaccine programme." Almost eight-in-10 schools said they had been targeted by anti-vaccine protesters in a recent survey by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) union. Most of this had been through emails threatening legal action, but the ASCL said in some cases staff had been threatened with physical harm and on other occasions protesters had gained access to school sites.



School leaders believe ‘phone ban is out of touch

Schools already have pupils’ mobile ‘phone use under control, say leaders in response to government plans

School and college leaders have condemned the government’s plan to ban mobile ‘phones from classrooms as outdated and out of touch, arguing that schools should be allowed to decide on appropriate rules.

Responding to a Department for Education (DfE) consultation on student behaviour, the Association of School and College Leaders said education leaders already had student mobile ‘phone use under control and warned that some

students, such as those caring for a relative, may be disadvantaged by a strict approach.

“School and college leaders are slightly mystified about the education secretary’s fixation with banning mobile ‘phones in classrooms because they have been dealing with the practicalities of this issue for many years now,” said Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at ASCL. “Our view remains that schools and colleges already have strong, tried-and-tested, policies and they are best placed to make their own decisions.”



Emergency measures deployed during the pandemic had helped with antisocial behaviour

McCulloch said schools typically asked students to keep their ‘phones in their bags during the academic day, while some had policies allowing pupils to use their ‘phones to help with learning and sourcing information. Having access to ‘phones also enabled secondary schools to teach about responsible ‘phone use and online harms, she said.

She added that, for some learners, such as children in the care system, mobile ‘phones could be an “essential safety measure”, while young carers might need them to “provide essential support to parents”.

In its consultation response, ASCL also reported that some of the emergency measures deployed during the pandemic had helped with antisocial behaviour, with some schools and colleges planning to keep them. These included staggering the end of the school day, keeping pupils in peer group bubbles, having more time outdoors and appointing older pupils as mentors to support younger ones.

DFE GUIDANCE

The response also endorsed the use of quiet spaces within schools and colleges for pupils exhibiting difficult behaviour, but criticised the DfE’s use of the term ‘removal room’ as “unhelpful and stigmatising” and warned that their use could be particularly inappropriate for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The DfE has said its consultation seeks views from the sector on how schools ban mobile ‘phones, among other things, and will use the feedback to produce guidance later in the year. “Mobile ‘phones can be distracting if used in the classroom and, when misused or overused, they can have a damaging effect on a pupil’s mental health and wellbeing,” a DfE spokesperson said.

“Looking at how schools and colleges are making the day mobile-free is just one part of our behaviour call for evidence, which asked teachers and school leaders about a range of ways to help students focus on their education and create calmer schools – which is especially important due to the impact of the pandemic.”■

CREDIT: *This is an edited version of an article that originally appeared on The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/aug/16/plan-to-ban-phones-from-classrooms-is-out-of-touch-say-uk-school-leaders>*

DfE swamped schools with new rules at start of pandemic, study finds

Staff in England were overwhelmed by more than 200 pieces of guidance issued in first 90 days of pandemic

Teachers across England were overwhelmed by a ‘ridiculous’ blizzard of rules and documents issued by the Department for Education (DfE) during the coronavirus pandemic, alongside major announcements made through the media or press conferences, according to a study.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge and University College London found that the DfE issued more than 200 pieces of guidance in the first 90 days of the pandemic, starting from 18 March 2020, including a dozen days when the department issued at least five separate pieces of guidance.

Headteachers told the researchers that the DfE’s multiple documents often called for immediate action, with some arriving at weekends or at night, creating a minefield of confusing or overlapping advice which was sometimes contradicted by other statements or updates from the DfE and various arms of the government.

Peter Fotheringham, the report’s lead author, said, “Time and again, the message we got was ‘I don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow, nothing is being shared in advance, and it’s overwhelming.’ It was uncanny how often the term ‘avalanche’ was used to describe the ridiculous amount of information they were getting.”

Rather than safeguarding the

The DfE’s multiple documents often called for immediate action

welfare and education of their pupils, headteachers said they were left to untangle the morass of rules issued by the DfE, especially in the first months after schools were closed to most pupils.

Fotheringham said that new policies were sometimes announced to the public before official guidance had even arrived, “so parents were on the ‘phone before heads even had a chance to read it”.

The study, to be published in the British Educational Research Journal, found that the DfE caused problems by failing to clearly show which parts of a policy or guidance had been amended when it made changes, with more than 70 new policy documents each being updated three times on average.

“Leadership teams literally had to print off different versions and go through them with a highlighter, usually in hastily organised meetings at seven am. These things are very, very time-consuming to read, but have highly technical consequences,” Fotheringham said.

The research follows a damning report by the Institute for Government that revealed how ministers, including Boris Johnson, refused to allow civil servants to draw up contingency plans to protect schools in the event of a second lockdown earlier this year.

Kate Green, the shadow education secretary, said, “The Conservatives have operated in panic mode throughout this crisis, with a complete lack of planning leading to confusing, contradictory guidance that has harmed kids’ educations. ▶



AD

The abject failure of Boris Johnson and Gavin Williamson to provide clear leadership has compounded the chaos within the education system. This chaos is now infecting our recovery with Boris Johnson's failing to stand up for children's catch up."

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said the new report confirmed that the government had been "a major source of stress" for school leaders. "Obviously, uncertainty and frequent changes couldn't be entirely avoided during such an unprecedented situation - but the lack of timely and straightforward advice for schools from the DfE caused real problems," he said. "The success of schools was in spite of government, not because of it."

A spokesperson for the DfE said "Throughout the pandemic our focus has been on keeping children in face-to-face education, and back in the classroom as soon as possible when the nature of the pandemic meant schools could only remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

"The course of the pandemic has led to swift decisions being taken to respond to changes in our understanding of the virus, and action has had to be taken in the national interest."

CASE STUDY:

'DfE advice leached away at our confidence' - Jules White headteacher of Tanbridge House school in Horsham, West Sussex

It's no surprise that the research from Cambridge University confirms the views shared by virtually every headteacher in England that the deluge of guidance sent to schools by the Department for Education throughout the pandemic was 'overwhelming'. Any long-held belief that the DfE was struggling to lead schools effectively was underlined by its woeful attempt to guide schools through the COVID crisis in a coherent and credible manner.

On a daily basis, headteachers were bombarded by directives and instructions that changed what felt like hour by hour. Often I was expected to deliver 'immediate actions' on behalf of 1,500 students and 150

The government had been a "major source of stress" for leaders

staff - only for that advice to be changed just as the previous guidance was being read, digested and enacted.

Over time, senior colleagues and I became exhausted trying to understand, and then implement, reams and reams of highly technical and detailed guidance. Along with other headteachers, I craved clarity and certainty so that I could lead my whole school community decisively and safely. Instead, the ever-changing advice from the DfE leached away at our confidence and organisational ability.

The real low point came at Christmas. After delivering a superb service during the autumn term, heads were then told on 22 December that they were now responsible for mass student testing for the start of January. Colleagues and I worked throughout the holiday period trying to prepare for this huge task, which carried significant responsibilities in terms of keeping our staff and students safe. We were ill-equipped to do so and often learned more from social media and news leaks than from the DfE itself.

After a draining period, the first day of term came - and the DfE and government changed its mind for the umpteenth time; all schools were closed and reverted back to wholesale remote learning.

Of course, nobody underestimates the scale of the challenges faced by ministers and civil servants, but schools were given a very raw deal by the DfE. For many years headteachers like me have not been trusted to deliver effectively by those in power but when the chips were down we came through and did a job that made parents, pupils and colleagues feel safe and well led.

If only the same were true of our political leaders. ■

CREDIT: This is an edited version of an article that originally appeared on The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/aug/05/dfe-swamped-teachers-with-new-rules-at-covid-outbreak-study-finds>



AD

ED LIVE
EXEC

EdExec live 2021- the review

Everything you need to know about what happened during our highly successful *EdExec* LIVE events in London on 30 September and Manchester on 12 October!

After 18 months of cancelled events and social distancing, we were so excited to finally be able to welcome SBLs from all over the country to our *EdExec* LIVE events in London on 30 September and Manchester on 12 October. SBLs travelled far and wide to join us for what promised to be a great reunion – and that it was!

There was a real buzz in the atmosphere as people began to gather at both the RCGP building in London and the Raddison Blu Hotel in Manchester. Excitable voices filled the venues as people reunited, face-to-face, after a roller-coaster 18 months. “It’s really great to see you again”, “I’m so happy to see you in person”, “It’s nice to finally meet my Twitter friends in real life” – just a few phrases overheard from many delegates at both events – SBLs were certainly glad to come together again.

After settling into the venue with a hot drink and refreshments, SBLs were keen to start the day of learning. Both days featured a variety of seminars which were packed full of practical information and advice which the SBLs could take back and implement in their own schools.





Sue Birchall –
EdExec LIVE South
Planning budgets in a post-COVID world

The morning began with Sue's engaging talk on the need for planning budgets. In recent years, as spending and costs have continued to rise, the importance of long-term budget planning has taken a back seat for some schools. Sue warned that this was a mistake and, with the pressures on schools now greater than ever, her tips on how best to manage long-term budgets in times of uncertainty were incredibly useful. She emphasised the need for SBLs to make their funding and contracts clear, well in advance. While we know now more than ever that such planning has to remain flexible, having long-term plans in place remains important to overcome whatever problems arise.

Sue looked at some of the variables which crop up throughout the year and how to manage them. Issues such as staff costs and students' needs are ever-changing, as are one-off payments, notably summer school funds, pupil and sports premiums. As a result, strategic planning and a form of 'risk management' is paramount. All such risks should be 'assessed', 'managed', 'shared' and 'mitigated' in order to produce the most efficient results and, as Sue puts it, stay on the road to success.



Justin Smith –
EdExec LIVE South
Sprinkling stardust on your bid writing. What do grant funders expect from us?

It was clear from this session that many leaders felt it unlikely - or even impossible - for their schools to qualify for funding, though Justin urged that there should be more optimism! He said that many unsuccessful bids are the result of avoidable mistakes, or admin errors, with 30% being rejected at stage one. After selecting the appropriate grant for your school, what Justin made abundantly clear in his talk was the importance of personalising the application, 'sprinkling the stardust' and helping it stand out from the crowd. The significance of effective personalisation cannot be overstated. Justin recommended implementing a plan for social media campaigns, daily posts, videos and

@leylatov: Wonderful afternoon with some brilliant and inspiring #sblconnect friends #edexeclive

newsletters to draw attention to, and provide proof of, the need for money. He recommended a 'Why, when, who, where, how' storyboard, using real case studies, showing the pupils themselves - importantly, the very people the money is going to help. The seminar finished with a short Q&A during which SBLs shared their anecdotes and stories which, again, highlighted the need to qualify for these grants and to improve the quality of applications submitted.



Helen Burge –
EdExec LIVE South
How do we squeeze sustainability into the SBL agenda?

With finances scarce, and an ongoing pandemic creating new challenges daily, it's understandable that some schools move sustainability further down the priority list. This, Helen warned, would be a mistake - not just for the environment, but also for the short and long-term needs of schools. Helen did a great job of categorising sustainable plans and projects into 'quick wins', 'fill-ins', 'major projects' and 'thankless tasks'. She said the key is making sustainability a crucial part of the school's planning, rather than an afterthought. This can be done through wide-scale improvement in procurement (suppliers, electricity etc.), HR (promoting schemes e.g cycle to work, car share) and marketing (social media, events). Towards the end of the seminar Helen asked for delegates' personal experiences of sustainability and we heard from SBL colleagues about how they have managed to help reduce their school's carbon-footprint. Be it by setting up a garden in front of the school or, on a larger scale, constructing solar panels - or even wind turbines - on the premises, it was thought-provoking to hear how everyone had done their bit to champion sustainability in their schools. Helen urged the SBLs to use #greensbl on Twitter to further engage in the conversation about sustainability in schools. ▶



**Royden Gothelf –
EdExec LIVE South**
*Delivering remarkable school
improvements with technology*

In this session Royden shared practical advice on how to deliver school improvements with technology, and demonstrated how IT is intrinsically linked to school-wide improvements. The pandemic has highlighted just how important technology is for schools, and more schools than ever are looking at how they can improve their offering and infrastructure to support both staff and pupils. The seminar featured a case study of one of his latest projects with St James's School - a remarkable story that was nominated for the 'TES best use of technology award'! The session highlighted how the school removed unnecessary costs, put in place a platform for remote teaching and replaced their MIS system. Royden explained how delegates could implement these strategies in their schools too.



**Nicky Gillhespy –
EdExec LIVE South**
*Does your catering support
those who need it most?*

Nicky Gillhespy, chief operations officer at LEO Academy Trust, discussed why, after a year that has brought school meals to the forefront, now is the perfect time to reconsider how you do catering in your school. COVID-19, and the resulting lockdowns, have brought children's deprivation, food poverty and the increasing need to improve healthy eating to the attention of us all. Nicky has first-hand experience in transforming the way her trust delivered catering when she helped to set up an in-house catering service. Nicky used this experience

to provide practical tools and strategies to help SBLs assess whether they were doing enough and, if not, how they could go about changing this. Great conversations were had with the SBLs - offering each other advice when questions arose about how to overcome the barriers some delegates had faced when trying to centralise catering. Food for thought!



**Shan Moylan and Kristen
Hughes – EdExec LIVE South**
*Kickstart for the future: how
schools can make a difference
in young people's lives*

Shan Moylan and Kristen Hughes from LEO Academy Trust shared their experiences of working with young people from the Kickstart Scheme and looked at both the benefits and potential pitfalls involved. To date, LEO Academy Trust has employed over 60 kickstarters in various roles within the trust. COVID-19 has had a huge impact on job security and career opportunities - with many young people finding it very difficult to secure a position after graduating, and others being made redundant or losing casual employment. Shan and Kristen explained how the Kickstart Scheme is one way that schools can support the young people in their local community to gain valuable work experience and skills.



**Lucy Alexandra Spencer –
EdExec LIVE South**
*School-led tutoring - how to
make the most of your grant*

The government's new school-led tutoring grant allows schools to choose their providers and offer a blended approach to learning in a completely new way. In this session Lucy highlighted how to get the ▶

@WrexhamSBP:
Great event as
always, thank you.

@sbm_jo: Thank
you so much to
Vicki & the team at
EdExec for another
fab #edexeclive
Brilliant seminars,
quality networking
time, & wine
(lots of), CPD at
its very best!



AD

@laurajbusiness: Thank you @EdExec for having me at #EdExecLiveNORTH2021 It was my fourth year as a speaker & it was an amazing day as always! So lovely to be with so many amazing SBLs in person again!

most from your grant and gave practical tips on how to structure and run a successful blended learning programme. She explained how to incorporate tutors into the school-led teaching programme for better outcomes for the school and its pupils. Lucy told delegates how tutoring will play a huge role within education to re-engage children with learning and provide better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. She emphasised that now is the time for teachers and tutors to come together as educators within the school system to bridge the gap and provide that much needed catch-up support.



**Debbie Sutch –
EdExec LIVE South**
How a good leader can raise
the capacity of an organisation
and reduce fear

The closing keynote at our South event came from Debbie Sutch, director of Fearless Leadership. Debbie explained how fear in the workplace is corrosive, and how the difficulties caused by the pandemic have made people more afraid. Drawing on her knowledge and experience, Debbie discussed how to apply the principles of Fearless Leadership to a post-pandemic education landscape - how to develop the skills to become positive, inspirational, resilient and optimistic. Debbie's anecdotes of her struggles as a school leader during the pandemic resonated greatly with delegates and interesting discussions developed about how to become more resilient and 'bounce back' after the struggles of the last 18 months.



**Phil Burton –
EdExec LIVE
South and North**
The benefits of
community engagement
to your finances

Phil Burton, SBM at Hallbrook and Cosby Primary School, gave an inspiring and joyful seminar which dived into the reasons why engaging with the broader community is so important – both for strengthening relationships and for securing additional revenue streams for your school. Education can be slow to respond in its engagement, and Phil believes that not enough school leadership professionals focus on the wider perspective. On joining Hallbrook, he discovered that the school had no strategy for community involvement or social media, and there was a lot to do in engaging the wider community. Now, during enrolment season, Hallbrook is having to turn people away and Phil – and his team's – work in keeping parents and the wider community engaged played a large part in that. Phil drew on his own extensive experience to discuss how he raised funds for his school throughout the pandemic, as well as looking at why engagement is important to schools and why you should be focusing on it. ▶

@debbiesutch: Loved presenting all about fearless leadership @EdExec South today. So good to be meeting up in person again and attending conferences. Thank you @EdExec for asking me back



AD



Ross McWilliam – EdExec LIVE South and North
 Coping with post pandemic stress – what are the key factors to consider?

Ross delivered a lively session to beat that post-lunch lull. He brought plenty of props with him including raisins, books and eggs! Ross discussed how and why some stress is not only good for us, but is actually essential to our performance in life. However, he warned that too much can become detrimental, so we must implement techniques to ensure that levels do not rise too much. He taught us some quick fix strategies to alleviate stress and longer-term strategies based around five pillars which enhance performance, health and enjoyment for life. The session finished with me (unwittingly) trying to catch an egg on the back of my neck without it cracking – luckily Ross caught it mid-air saving me from having an egg-yolk covered head for the rest of the day!



Richard Harrison – EdExec LIVE South and North
 Pushing career boundaries to aid school improvement

In this seminar Richard, director of community engagement at Regent High School, shared details of his own blended role and the ways in which he has evolved his senior leadership role to respond to the needs of the school while also offering career development. Richard explored how to develop the role of non-teaching senior leaders and how to network beyond your own team. He said this could be accomplished by being aware of your own strengths and boosting your self-confidence through formal and informal CPD. He described why, as the needs of the school change, the staff must adapt their roles to cater to these new needs – even if this means going outside the usual remit of the job description.



John Jackson – EdExec LIVE South and North
 How to tackle digital exclusion and save your school money. #BridgeTheDivide

John gave an extremely energetic talk on how best to tackle inequality and ‘bridge the educational divide’. Approximately 27% of the children in the UK are disadvantaged - and digital inequality between pupils was highlighted more than ever during the pandemic.

LGfL aims to help and #BridgeTheDivide through schemes such as the mass procurement of tech (over one million Chromebooks and WinBooks) and recycling initiatives in which schools are supported to repurpose devices to help their shortages. A particularly exciting part of the seminar was when John spoke of LGfL’s work with recent honorary doctorate, Marcus Rashford. The footballer’s campaign to support children with free school meals has been well-publicised. John explained that the work of the England star had also stretched to helping schools generate potential pupil premium funding claims for disadvantaged children. The last 18 months have forced everyone adapt; John emphasised that the use of technology has shown its potential and should continue post-pandemic. LGfL have pledged to continue to help disadvantaged families and children by upgrading schools’ equipment.

@Jazz_SBM: My first day out!!! It was nice meeting you all didn’t get a chance to say hello to all of you, but an excuse to come to the next event. Came back full of knowledge, ideas and goodies. @EdExec @sbltwitter @SBLconnect





Stephen Blackbeard – EdExec LIVE South and North
The changemaker's guide to process efficiencies

Change is scary. It's only human nature to be wary of the unknown, and we find it far easier to stay put. But staying put doesn't get you anywhere. Why is change still this colossal, scary concept? Stephen explained why change should be embraced and why everyone should be a 'changemaker'. A changemaker is an individual who, quite literally, treats every day like a school day. Stephen discussed how to develop ourselves into changemakers to help streamline operations, improve relationships and work towards a better education system for all.



Tracey Gray – EdExec LIVE South and North
Managing workplace sickness absence effectively and confidently

Managing workplace sickness absence effectively and confidently is something a lot of SBLs will struggle with - particularly if they experience a high level of absenteeism in their schools. To help manage this Tracey Gray, education management consultant, set out an array of ways to tackle and improve how we can manage and minimise absences, covering all aspects from dealing with difficult situations to supporting a returning employee. Tracey explained how to set expectations, communicate with an employee who is off sick and how to support a returning employee.



Paul Day – EdExec LIVE South and North
How to combine efficiency with security in document management

Data security in the education sector is a major challenge and many school leaders can be reluctant to fully commit to a digital system. However, investing in electronic document management software can revolutionise the levels of security, efficiency and communication and even make a positive impact on the environment through reduced paper usage. Paul explained how to successfully implement document management and how efficient document management can increase safeguarding and GDPR compliance.



Mark Osborne – EdExec North
How edtech can be an enabler for transformation

The last year has highlighted just how important the use of edtech is in schools; now, more than ever, it is key to understand how you can use edtech as a driver for school improvement. Mark Osborne, director of ICT and infrastructure at Northern Education Trust, explained how technology has transformed the trust's outcomes, and gave practical advice on how delegates can use it too, to help make improvements at their school or trust. Mark also discussed how the trust implemented a trust-wide digital monitoring system to help safeguard students online - which resulted in the trust winning a BETT award.



Andrew Blench – EdExec North
Learning to silence your inner saboteur

In this session Andrew explored how even the most successful leaders can suffer from a negative internal narrative at times in their careers. He discussed how feelings of self-doubt or inferiority can cloud our judgement and hold us back - this is known as 'impostor syndrome' and can sap our levels of confidence and self-belief. Andrew provided strategies to avoid negative internal narratives, encouraging delegates to interact with him and one another to combat that, 'I'm not good enough' feeling.



Laura Williams – EdExec North
Line management workshop: where to start, how to get it right and what to do if it's going wrong

Laura's sessions were unique, in that she ran five workshops for small groups of delegates throughout the day. Her workshops focused on offering practical strategies to help SBLs develop an effective line management system, adapt their leadership style and navigate difficult conversations with staff. Laura gave those in her workshops the advice and tools to help them manage their teams more confidently, enabling them go back to their schools feeling empowered to lead with determination and self-assurance.

Thank you so much to all of the wonderful speakers who delivered fantastic seminars, and to all of the amazing SBLs who attended on either day. We can't wait to welcome you back next year – keep an eye out for our 2022 dates which we will be announcing in the new year! ■



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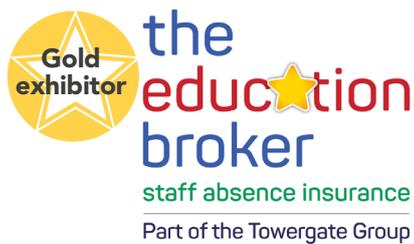
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Supporting staff who are experiencing *mental health problems*

When staff who have experienced mental health problems return to work, it's important for SBMs to listen, be open, and focus on the individual not the diagnosis. Sue Birchall looks at how to identify mental health issues among school staff and help employees settle back into work and continue on the road to recovery



No-one would dispute that we have been through an unprecedented situation which has had a significant impact on all of us; whether this is on a personal or professional level, the truth is that it will inevitably impact on our working lives. Recognising this in our schools, and putting in place a sufficient and useful programme of support, often falls, as least partly, to you as the school business professional.

Time out of school, and the fears that the

pandemic has created, will mean that a high proportion of our school community - students and staff - may find coming back into school difficult. For some this impact is significant and results in mental health issues impacting not only the person but also our school communities. Schools and academies are being encouraged to review their wellbeing policies and practises and to put in place not only blanket policies but also individual support. Recognising this, the government is offering grants for training for a senior member of staff

One of the greatest skills an SBP has is the ability to listen

However, this is not something that can fall to one person, and neither can the solution. How can you, as the school business professional, identify whether any of your staff are struggling, and what can you do to help?

One of the greatest skills an SBP has is the ability to listen. This does not just involve listening to individuals but also having 'an ear to the ground'; often, this will be a way that you will learn if someone is struggling. Another way of identifying is effective staff management - for instance, monitoring and noting absence levels, or numbers of appointments. Regular staff surveys and follow-up are used by many and can be a very good 'opener' in recognising and addressing concerns. I have used this as a means of identifying staff who need additional support and it has been effective in early identification.

Once identified, understanding that all staff are individual and, therefore, will be different in how they deal with stress and anxiety is imperative. Most schools and academies will have access to staff support through their local authority offer or an outside employee assistance programme. These have evolved during the crisis and now offer a much more bespoke service which is developed around the individual. They will offer counselling, as well as sign posting to other support, such as financial, health and fitness and, often, 24 hour helplines. It is worth having done some homework to see which of these best supports your wellbeing programme.

I have used this as a means of additional support for staff and, sometimes, it is enough. Not everyone wishes to share their concerns, fears and anxieties with people within their workplace and this offers the opportunity to do so externally. Many schools will already have a counselling contract in place for their students; this could be extended to staff. Both of these

options offer a confidential method of support for those most in need and are a healthy addition to any wellbeing policy in schools.

SHARING CONCERNS HELPS

For some, the best support can be sharing their concerns and anxieties directly. In my schools this is something we offer and it has been beneficial to many during the long period of working at home and for getting back into school. I was able to support staff through Teams calls during this time, checking in with them and offering support - and sometimes just a chat in addition to the help they were receiving from their line managers and teams. Continuing to do this has helped to alleviate some anxieties about returning.

One of the most important methods of support comes from clear and consistent communication from SLT as well as other admin areas of school. Sharing COVID plans, contingency planning and ensuring that all staff are aware of what is happening in their school and academy to keep them safe helps people to rationalise their fears of coming back to the workplace. As we all know, fear of what is happening can create anxiety; knowing what is being done - and also being able to share these fears to influence practise - is a positive step. Approaching what, in some, can be near to a phobia in a positive way has beneficial outcomes.

For some, their anxieties have become very real disabilities and we also now have staff who have other medical issues. As part of our wellbeing practises, they are able to write a care plan, in their own words, which they share with staff if they wish; this explains how their health issues impact on them in school. I have found that by sharing these with others my colleagues feel supported in managing themselves at work and also this approach also means that their colleagues can offer any support that is needed.

The fact of the matter is that we will be living with the consequences of this pandemic for some time. Any policies and plans that are put in place will need to be long term, regularly reviewed, and are maybe long overdue. ■

Thriving in the face of adversity

We speak to KEITH RONDEAU, headteacher at St Marks primary school in Dudley, about being one of just four schools nationally to be mentioned in the Education Endowment Foundation report - and why failing quickly is the key to succeeding

Tell us a little bit about your school and your role here.

We are a one-and-a-half form entry school in Pensnett, Dudley. We have 328 children on roll, including our nursery provision. I took up the post of headteacher in April 2019 - this is my first headship and I only had two full terms under my belt when the pandemic hit. Fair to say, it has been something of a steep learning curve.

How did you come to be one of just four schools nationally to be directly referenced in the Education Endowment Foundation (EFF) report?

During the lockdown I was participating in regular online forum meetings with the brilliant team at Challenging Education; these were called Radio RADY. Essentially, it was an open forum for school staff and leaders from different settings - specialist, secondary, primary, from across the country, including Wales, and we talked about specific themes that were impacting schools and communities during lockdown, suggesting ideas about how we could overcome them.

Off the back of that I received an email asking me to talk about some of the stuff that we've been doing here at St. Marks. I was a) flattered to be



asked and, b) I think I filled the email in when I had my coat on, just about to leave at 5:30. I sent it off and didn't really give it any thought. Fast forward three months and I had an email to say that we were going to be published in a report, which was great.

What did it mean to you to be mentioned in such a big report?

Two things really. I think that, personally, as somebody who was a new head and is still a new head, it was a validation of the approach that school has taken in terms of moving forward - being child-centred and community-focused. I say a lot of the time, 'Let's not worry about doing things right, but let's do the right things'. I know that can sound clichéd - that it's a nice little strapline - but there is a real merit to it - credible, sustainable, ethical leadership. Secondly - and maybe this was the one thing that I wasn't expecting - was how much it meant to our staff, parents and families; they were really proud to be part of that report. It's been in the local newspaper, and I wasn't expecting it to mean so much to them. St. Marks and Pensnett does have a lot to be proud of, and I think it was great for them to see that in black and white.

Why do you think your school specifically was mentioned?

Mainly because I replied to the email! I think it's key for me to say that I don't think that our school was doing any more or any less than the thousands of other schools across the country. Education, during both lockdowns, really stepped up to the plate, irrespective of the narrative that played out in certain quarters of the press.

In terms of why we were mentioned in the report, I don't know; maybe that's a question better directed at the EEF. However, if I was going to stick my neck out, I would say this; in

Let's not worry about doing things right, but let's do the right things

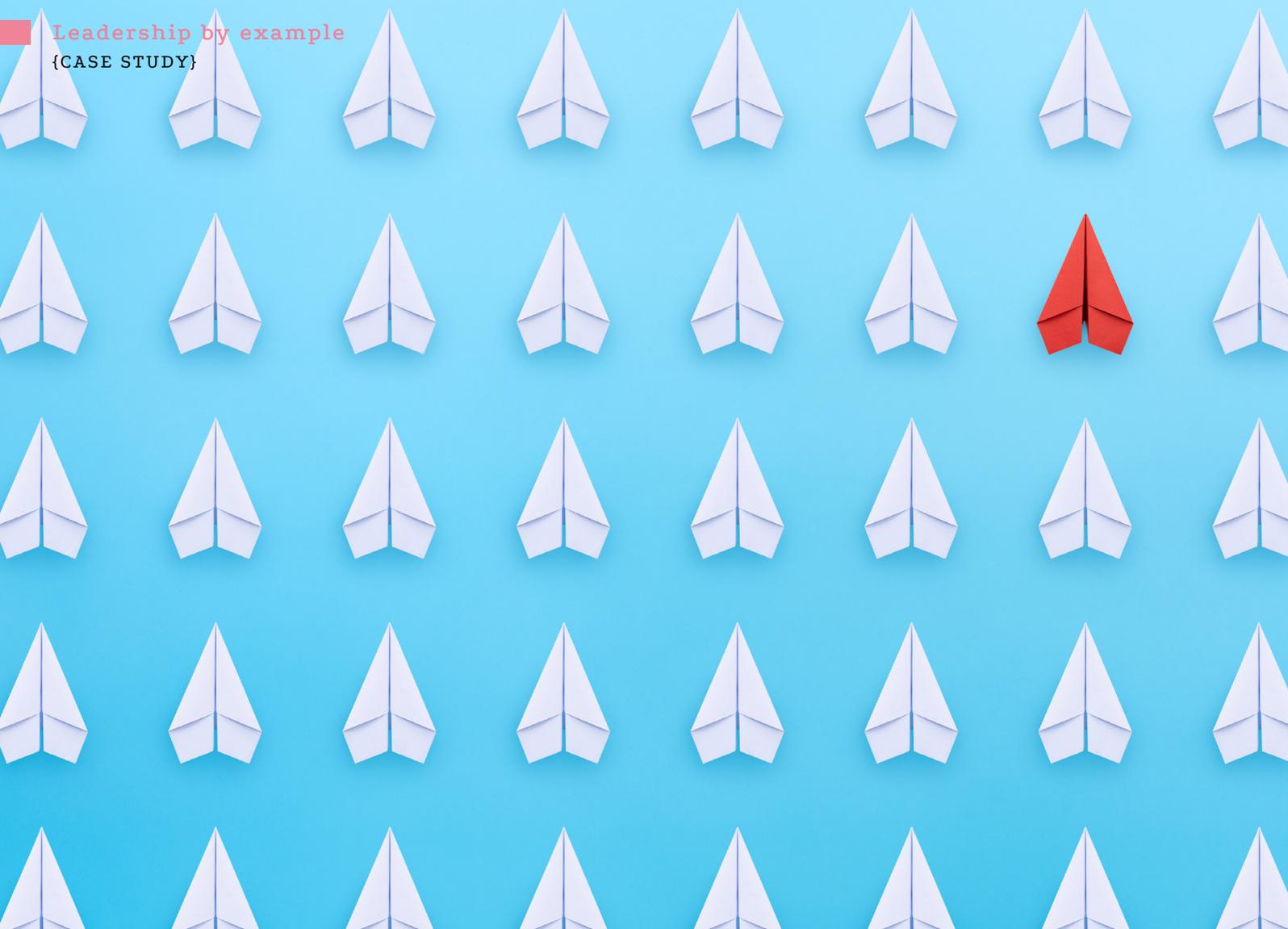
Christmas of 2019 we had the school poverty-proofed, working with Children North East, and with that came a very detailed report. This report allowed us as governors, leaders and school staff, to really understand the children and the families much better.

So, when lockdown did hit, we were able to make decisions that were better-informed, because we knew what the impact would be, or we thought we knew what the potential impact could be. We were able to make more informed decisions that would tackle some of the challenges they would be facing. We established really good systems and strong lines of two-way communication - it wasn't necessarily just dishing out information to parents, but letting them relay information back to us.

A big thing for me was failing quickly. I think that's really important. If it didn't work, we changed, and if it worked for a while, we didn't assume it would keep on working forever. So this idea of failing quickly - being prepared to listen, make changes, adapt and evolve - was really important for us.

What were the immediate actions you took when the pandemic hit in March 2020?

I think, like most people, we were just trying to comprehend the enormity of the situation. Overnight schools went from places of education to key worker childcare, a virtual school, a food bank and community support. As I mentioned previously, it was about ►



If it didn't work, we changed, and if it worked for a while, we didn't assume it would keep on working forever

getting good strong systems set up as quickly as we possibly could. We worked out the key worker provision and we looked at regular communication with parents and families. We thought the frequency and type of contact should be dependent on need – the needs of the child and the needs of the family.

We had fortnightly calls for some families, or weekly contact, or it could be a visit every three days. For some families we identified specific staff who had a good rapport and relationship with that family. It wasn't necessarily 'This child is in this class; it's their teacher who's going to contact them' - we asked ourselves "Who's the best person to speak to them?"

What would you say were the biggest challenges that you faced?

Trying to deal with a rapidly changing situation,

sometimes with very short notice, has been, at times, difficult. But now that we're getting back into school with all of the children, I think the challenge is trying to measure and address the impact of lockdown on children's education and wellbeing.

I have joked that I have had to be the 'COVID police' and make sure that people were sticking to protocols and guidance - and then, on top of that, I was trying to keep the school improvement wheel turning, and somehow digest a raft of government guidance and documentation.

Also, there's the human stuff - caring about, worrying about, and trying to look after staff, kids and families. You could have a positive case at any second. I found myself between 10 and six o'clock not straying too far from home and making sure I had my laptop charged up ready, because those were the hours that the COVID hotline was open to report positive cases. It was like having the 'COVID Sword of Damocles' perpetually hanging over you.

Tell us about your biggest challenges.

Maintaining a focus on school improvement has been huge for us, really. And I know that sounds draconian, but we all buy into the fact



that we want to be a great school. We want to keep strengthening leadership - and I include myself in that; I want to keep improving. We want to keep investing in people. I refer to this as a human industry, where staff feel trusted and valued, and that we invest in them as people. I'm always trying to find a space that allows us to talk about the craft of teaching, where we hone our skills as practitioners. I think that's been a real achievement, to do this whilst navigating our way through a global pandemic.

What would you say are the biggest lessons you learnt, and ones that you will carry forward?

Communication - parental and family communication. We've got an online portal that allows parents to use an app to communicate with school - a bit like you would with Facebook or WhatsApp. Going back to my previous point, we were making all these 'phone calls, and they worked for a period of time, but it came to a point where there was nothing else to talk about and the 'phone calls became slightly redundant. We found that parents were not engaging with them and not always answering. It was a case of 'Okay, we need to shift the way we communicate' and that's why the online platform worked so well. We've kept it; it allows us to have an instantaneous, 21st century approach to communicating with our community.

When we had all the protocols in place we reverted to the children going in through, and being collected from, their class doors and we've kept this going because the parents and families get to see the teacher every day. This has really strengthened the relationships between the classroom and home and, quite often, it means that those small problems, those little issues are able to be solved in an instant instead of them growing and growing and becoming a bigger problem further down the line.

What advice would you give to other schools from the lessons you learnt?

Understand your community. We were trying to find ways of communicating that was right for these families - but the ways that we've done it might not be applicable or right for other

Be prepared to listen, make changes, adapt and evolve

schools. First and foremost, it's about working really hard to understand the barriers that some of the family's face. When you've done that, then you can better establish clear systems and strong lines of communication. Having that two-way communication is key - listen to the feedback.

The third thing, as I mentioned previously, is failing quickly. If it's not working, accept it. Don't feel that changing your approach is losing face; it's not. It is an opportunity for you to get it right next time. Having that candour and honesty with the community, and being prepared to say, 'We tried this and it isn't working. We've listened to what you're saying and we're going to do this instead' - there's real power and real strength to that. Ultimately, it puts families and children at the centre of the decisions you're making and, if we're honest, that is what all schools should be striving to do.

What are your hopes for the next academic year?

The big hope for me, which sits outside of St. Marks, is that all of those schools that are going to be inspected this year feel that the inspection is fair, and that the challenges and the difficulties of the past 18 months are understood and reflected in in the final reports.

I hope that we have an academic year with minimal disruptions. I haven't completed a full year as a headteacher yet; my son has just started Year 1 and he hasn't completed a full academic year either. In terms of St. Mark's, we believe that we have a process that will allow us to be successful and to keep moving forward; we just need a chance to see that process through, to complete a cycle.

Finally, that the Year 6 kids who are leaving us this year do so feeling that their life is brimming with opportunity and possibility. ■

What were the statistics for admission appeals in England in 2020/21?

These statistics provide information about appeals made following the refusal of a school place application

Most appeals are made when an applicant has not received an offer, via the annual co-ordinated admissions process, of a place at their first preference school for entry into primary or secondary school; however, appeals relating to other transfers at the start of the school year are also included. Appeals relating to community and voluntary controlled schools are provided as aggregated totals by local authorities. Academy, foundation and voluntary aided schools provide their own appeal figures via the school census.

The latest data covers appeals relating to admissions at the start of the 2020 - 2021 academic year. The appeals must have been lodged with the appropriate admissions authority by 1 September 2020.

Approximately 11,239 appeals were heard relating to primary school places for 2020/21; this represented 1.4% of new admissions. The number and rate have both been dropping since 2015/16, when 22,820 primary appeals were heard (2.6% of new admissions). Of those heard in 2020/21, 1,823 primary appeals were successful, a rate of 16.2%; this rate is the lowest since this collection started in 2015/16.

Approximately 29,871 appeals were heard

relating secondary school places for 2020/21; this represented 4.1% of new admissions; this is a decline from last year, when 35,648 (4.9% of new admissions) appeals were heard and reverses the increases seen since the start of this collection in 2015/16. In that year 22,964 secondary appeals were heard (3.6% of new admissions). Of those heard in 2020/21, 6,000 secondary appeals were successful, representing 20.1% of the number heard; this rate has been gradually dropping since 2015/16, when 26.3% of secondary appeals were successful.

APPEALS LODGED

Applicants can lodge appeals for any school they have not been awarded a place in, but not all lodged appeals are heard at an appeal panel. A number are withdrawn before that point, for example, because the child has been offered a place at the school via the waiting list.

Therefore, the best measure is the number of appeals which actually reach the stage of being heard by the appropriate authority, and this release focuses on these figures.

In 2020/21, 16,781 primary appeals were lodged, with 11,239 reaching the stage of being heard by an appeals panel. At secondary level, 36,743 appeals were lodged and 29,871 heard.



APPEALS BY SCHOOL TYPE

There were 41,110 appeals in total heard for 2020/21, or 2.7% of all new admissions. The rates by type of school varied from 3.0% for academy schools to 2.1% for community and voluntary aided schools.

There were 7,823 successful appeals for the same time period, or 19.0% of all appeals heard. The rates by school type varied from 25.0% for foundation schools to 14.8% for community and voluntary aided schools.

For 2020/21 a total of 65.0% of all appeals heard related to academy schools, virtually unchanged from last year.

PRIMARY APPEALS

The primary level data is further split into infant (reception and years one and two) and other primary classes. There are regulations in place which require infant classes to be limited to 30 children; this reduces the possibilities for appeal for these year groups. The rate of appeals heard is 1.2% for infant classes and 2.2% for other primary classes.

As expected, there is a greater contrast in the success rate, with 10.5% of heard infant class appeals being successful (849) compared to 30.9% of other primary classes (974).

For 2020/21 a total of 65% of all appeals heard related to academy schools

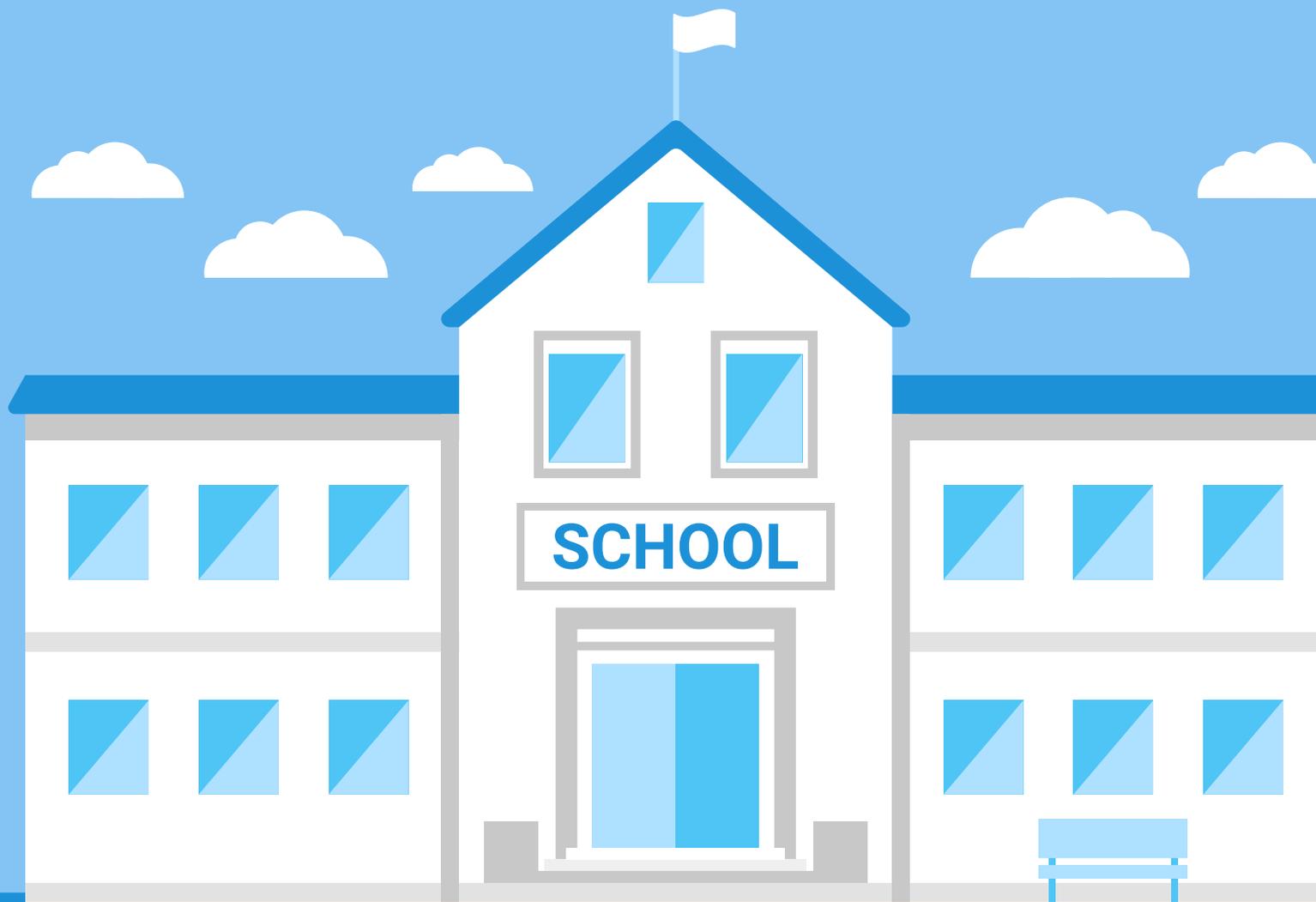
There has been a decrease in the proportion of infant appeals lodged over time, which is likely to be a result of the more limited chances of success.

SECONDARY APPEALS

At secondary level the rate of appeals heard is higher than for primary, at 4.1% in 2020/21. The proportion has dropped from last year, when the heard rate of 4.9% was the highest since this time series began.

Up to 2019/20 the number of new admissions had been increasing as the rise in births between 2002 and 2012 fed into the secondary school system. This year, however, saw a very small drop in the number of new admissions, from 724,700 to 720,600

The number of successful appeals has dropped for the first time, reversing most of the rises seen since 2015/16. The proportion of appeals being successful has, however, been dropping over the whole time period, and has reached a new low at 20.1%. ■



Why good estate management needs to be pushed up the agenda



JONNY COATES, director of business and finance, Tanfield School, explains why more importance needs to be placed on good estate management

The role of school business professionals varies from school to school, or MAT to MAT, and this can also very much depend on the setting/phase. I've worked in both primary and secondary, maintained and academies; each role was different, but all had the same challenges - the estate was poorly funded, overlooked and very difficult to manage.

From experience, understanding the importance of estate management

has always been the most difficult to get across to stakeholders. Whilst bringing in another classroom teacher is a given if it's deemed fundamental to improving results, the same cannot always be said about spending similar amounts on a school building in dire need. My view is quite radical in that the condition of the estate is fundamental to ensuring that students in our schools have access to the best learning environment and are in a position to succeed.

I focus on systems and the people involved in the key estates management roles in schools

However, gaining buy-in from the various layers of leadership, governors, colleagues and LAs/trust boards isn't always easy - but is something I constantly talk about at all levels. It really is a critical part of the operation and I believe presenting visual imagery and evidence of issues of concern, such as health and safety issues, can really help add weight to the argument.

Whenever I've taken up a new post in a school, I've focused heavily on the financial position and the condition of the estate, probably in equal measure. Initially I will walk around the site and highlight some obvious health and safety concerns. Occasionally, I've faced barriers such as 'It's always been like that' or 'There's no money to fix it' but, frankly, this is not good practice, and we should not be allowing young people in our care to be put at risk through mismanagement or negligence.

When I joined my current school in 2019, some big things that really stood out were:

- Single-glazed windows, covering 75% of the site, in such poor condition that they couldn't be opened without a risk of glass panes falling out.
- Dilapidated student toilets with doors missing, urinals hanging off the wall and a permanent stench of stale urine.
- A number of major health and safety issues, such as an inadequate fire alarm system, damaged roofs, unsafe outdoor steps and trees leaning against the sports hall.

Stakeholders were aware of some of the problems but finding a solution was proving difficult. What I suggested was that we, as a maintained school, presented a case to the local authority to make them

aware and request their support. The onus is very much on schools to manage these matters internally, using a portion of budget funds to deal with regular repairs and maintenance. I initiated a health and safety inspection through our SLA and this helped to provide the technical detail required to strengthen the case I would later present.

Whilst the school did receive some support as a result to put the major things right, other funds had to come from the school budget. As there had been no strategy in place to deal with issues over the years and, therefore, these things were not identified in the budget, this presented a problem in terms of prioritising when the remedial works would be carried out.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

In terms of how to make the most out of the resources available, I focus on systems and the people involved in the key estates management roles in schools. The emphasis cannot be placed on one person - be it SBP, site manager or headteacher; we are all responsible, both as individuals and collectively. It's important to communicate effectively with colleagues and explain what they are required to do. They may be aware of a trip hazard or broken light but, if they don't report it, it may never be repaired. Everyone in schools is busy - that is the nature of the role - but it's important not to lose sight of the main reason we are there - to take care of the students!

There has been a noticeable shift by government towards estate management since the pandemic, with funding being

You can make a huge difference to colleagues' self-esteem and the public's perception of your school

made available to improve the condition of school accommodation. I'd strongly recommend putting in place an estates strategy - what does your school need and how much will it cost? A useful guide on Good Estate Management for Schools can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/the-fundamentals-of-good-estate-management>

These fundamentals are a good starting point when reviewing your school or MAT position:

- Develop a strategic approach to estate management and a clear vision.
- Create a three-to-five-year plan to enable decision-making processes and protect assets.
- Understand your estate; review its condition and prioritise the works needed.
- Follow a maintenance regime - this is essential to the overarching strategy.
- Link practices, policies and procedures to health and safety.
- Project management plans should include options, including a 'Plan B' if there could be problems with a scheme, and a fully-costed model - including contingencies for the inevitable unforeseen issues!

Make a big deal out of the small things.

I believe this to be fundamental to an estates strategy. We often think about big ticket items such as heating systems or a roof, but by tackling the niggling issues as they occur, you will prevent a bigger, more expensive project being required at a later date.

Build a culture of excellence.

By having high standards in estate management, and professionalising the services, you can make a huge difference to colleagues' self-esteem and the public's perception of your school. Small things like issuing smart, branded, uniforms and safety footwear/PPE can enhance this position. I would also advocate a regular site walk with your facilities team. This can help to inform procedures and offer assurance and recognition for the hard work that goes into making the school a safe and secure environment for all stakeholders to enjoy. ■

That sinking feeling



Feel like you're drowning? Scared by the complexities required by absolutely everything? Facing the consequences of trying to fulfil a job description you are not skilled to do? **STEPHEN PEACH**, assistant headteacher and business manager, Dacorum Education Support Centre, has felt like this too and has some advice on how to deal with these feelings

I'm relatively new to being a business manager. Before moving across, I was an all-age teacher (literally for-adult, including teaching IT at secondary level) with a degree in architecture and experience of graphic design with a little project management thrown in for good measure. A very useful skillset for a school business manager as all those things combine perfectly in one role. I feel that, if any area of that knowledge or experience was lacking, I wouldn't have sufficient skills to do my job. It's concerned me a lot to see the

struggles that my new colleagues suffer when trying to complete tasks they have no knowledge or experience of, in a context they struggle to empathise with.

Two recent cases in point. A couple of years ago, when the national minimum wage went up six per cent, I had the embarrassment of sitting through a presentation by a representative from county bemoaning the fact and reeling off the potential knock-on consequences. This merely highlighted the fact that they had never worked in schools. The few people on minimum wage

SBM/SBL/WWCTWs simply put in the hours and the effort until everything does work

in a school are those doing the jobs that no-one else wants without whom, schools would close very quickly. No-one actually working in a school would begrudge these people getting a 45p per hour pay increase.

DUMPING GROUND

Recently, during a county briefing for business managers, I had to sit through an entire child protection presentation. Child protection should never be part of a business manager's role as it requires far too much specific knowledge and is more than a full time roll itself. If school business managers are being asked to take this on as well, even in a small way, it seems to me that either someone has completely failed to grasp the skills and experience required to carry out safeguarding effectively, or they think SBLs have time to spare.

Which leads me to my main point; school business managers (SBM)/leaders (SBL)/whatever we're called this week (WWCTW) are used as a dumping ground for all tasks that headteachers don't know, and don't think through. The attitude I see from some headteachers is, 'It's not teaching or learning, therefore it falls under the remit of the SBM/SBL/WWCTW, regardless of whether they have the skills, experience or capacity to do the job'.

TASK OVERLOAD

Take COVID, for example. The job of delivering...pretty much everything has almost universally been deposited into the laps of SBM/SBL/WWCTWs. Now, as (hopefully) they are H&S trained, that makes sense - but a lot of people appointed to the role were given the job for their financial administration skills, with a mumbled expectation from the headteacher that they will be able to pick up everything else. Unsurprisingly, many SBM/SBL/WWCTWs have struggled with the sheer scale and weight of the tasks required of them. The role models held up by county as examples for us to follow are frequently people who have been absolutely dumped on and run ragged, appearing to be on

the verge of a nervous breakdown.

From my observations, the reason for this is that they are just expected to perform, regardless of their skillset and, of course, SBM/SBL/WWCTWs simply put in the hours and the effort until everything does work – and sometimes it nearly breaks them or their families in the process. Headteachers just seem to dump things on the poor SBM/SBL/WWCTWs – many of whom don't even have degrees, or have much experience of the demands of delivering education or even have developed sufficiently robust thinking processes to be able to plan and manage the people involved to achieve successful project outcomes.

How to do address this

- 1. Get qualified:** ask your school to put you on an apprenticeship degree/MBA before it's too late.
- 2. College courses:** highlight the areas where you feel your knowledge is lacking and go on courses and learn about them to boost your confidence.
- 3. Surveys:** work from a plan made by a professional. If you don't know how buildings fit together and work, get a condition survey by an independent surveyor to work from. If you don't know about IT, work with an external consultant and teachers to plan developments that will make the biggest impact and not just give you new kit to complete the same old tasks. (Always get quotes for these - some companies really push their charges.)
- 4. Try to be proactive:** don't give yourself the additional job and stress of trying to fix things when they go unexpectedly wrong.
- 5. Find out about, and understand, the pressures that teachers in your school work under:** I would highly recommend that SBM/SBL/WWCTWs spend quite a bit of time watching the work of the SENDCO. Observe their interactions with young people and make a note of what they do that is successful. Then you will have a benchmark with which to judge what you see happening around the school and you can ensure your chosen strategic priorities help, rather than hinder, the work of the school. ■

What changes are being made to the payment process of schools' business rates?

National non-domestic rates, more commonly known as business rates, are a tax charged on the occupation of most non-domestic properties, including schools



Schools' business rates costs are currently funded through the National Funding Formula (NFF), which the government uses to calculate core funding allocations to mainstream, state-funded schools in England. From 10 March 2021 to 5 May 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) consulted on a proposal to centralise the payment of business rates for state-funded schools from 2022/23 onwards.

Essentially, this will involve the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) paying billing authorities directly on behalf of state-funded schools from April 2022. This will replace the existing system in which schools, typically, receive funding in respect of their rates bill in their annual budgets, via the NFF, and pay their

business rates to billing authorities themselves. This change will reduce administrative burdens for schools and simplify the existing process. The government has already confirmed that it will go ahead with the proposals to centralise the business rates payment system for schools from April 2022 alongside the publication of the schools notional NFF allocations for 2022/23 in July 2021.

ABOUT THE CONSULTATION

The consultation included two proposals to support the centralisation of business rates; the first was for ESFA to pay schools' business rates directly to billing authorities on behalf of schools in June each year, and the second was for ESFA to make a single reconciliation payment to billing authorities in March each

year to allow for adjustments before the end of the financial year. The DfE sought views from schools, local authorities and other interested individuals and organisations on whether the proposals were preferable to the current rates payment process and whether they were workable. They also asked respondents if they anticipated any new burdens as a result of centralising schools' rates payments, or whether the proposals would result in any savings for local authorities and schools.

They asked respondents to suggest the best way to take forward discretionary relief (whereby authorities may grant a reduction to schools' rates bills) under the new system. Lastly, they welcomed views on whether any of the proposals might have a positive or negative equalities impact, in particular on those who share protected characteristics.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Overall, the response to the consultation was positive, with strong support received from respondents who agreed that the move to centralised rates payments for schools would be simpler, and less burdensome, than the existing payment system. There was particularly strong support from schools which agreed that the new system would be an improvement to the current circular and resource-intensive process for paying business rates. The second largest group of responses was from local authorities and billing authorities which, overall, expressed the view that the proposals were workable subject to some operational considerations being addressed during implementation.

After careful consideration of the responses, the government intends to proceed with implementing the proposals. From April 2022, the business rates payment system for schools will be centralised. This will involve ESFA paying billing authorities directly on behalf of state funded schools, removing schools from the payment process. The first business rates payments made directly from ESFA to billing authorities will be paid in June 2022.

The government intends to proceed with implementing the proposals

Billing authorities will have until 31 May 2022 to upload bill data

NEXT STEPS

The new business rates payment process for schools will come into force next financial year, with the online business rates portal due to open on 1 April 2022. Billing authorities will have until 31 May 2022 to upload bill data for all of the schools within their area, with the first payment to billing authorities due to be paid in June 2022. The online billing portal will reopen in June 2022 to allow billing authorities to upload any adjustments to billing amounts which arise, or come to their knowledge, after the first instalment has been paid.

The upload facility to record adjustments will remain open until February 2023, with a reconciliation payment made to billing authorities in February 2023. If they have not already done so, the DfE strongly encourages schools with multi-use sites to register buildings which are not used to deliver education for pupils at the school as a separate entity on the Valuation Office Agency's rating list. This will ensure that two individual bills are generated - one for the school - which will be paid by the ESFA - and one for any other buildings which are not used to deliver education for pupils at the school, which can then be settled by the appropriate ratepayer.

Bill data which pertains only to the parts of a school site used to deliver education, and excludes any other bodies, can then be uploaded by billing authorities. When the new system comes into force ESFA will NOT be funding rates associated with buildings that are not being used to deliver education.

From 1 April 2022 the functionality for academies to submit historical claims for previously unclaimed years will be removed. Academies have until the end of March 2022 to submit any outstanding historical claims relating to the 2015/16 financial year onwards via the National non-domestic rates (NNDR) portal. From 1 April 2022, ESFA will no longer accept, process or reimburse academies for historical claims relating to unclaimed years.

The DfE would strongly encourage academies to submit any historical NNDR claims for unclaimed years as soon as is practicable so that ESFA can meet such claims promptly. ■



How up-to-date is your back office and how could it be improved?

STEPHEN MITCHELL, CEO Keystone Knowledge, discusses why you need to keep your back office IT up-to-date

The pace of change is accelerating and we all know, first-hand, just how much has changed in the last 18 months. If you'd asked any of us before the pandemic and lockdown started in March 2020 if we would have been able to do our jobs from home routinely, most people would have thought it to be a very niche proposition - but we have all become adept at working from our kitchen tables or breakfast

bars, juggling multiple Zoom and Teams calls, when before we would have driven 45 minutes to have a face-to-face meeting.

IS YOUR TECHNOLOGY UP TO THE JOB TO FACILITATE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

You have to ask the question, 'What state is our back-office IT in, and when did the technology last get some (much-needed) TLC?'

As school business leaders, we understand the need to maximise financial efficiency, focus on the academic return on investment, and benchmark how much we spend on all different avenues. This process is hugely beneficial and allows the focus to remain solely on the children; it is also paramount that we make sure each of these systems remains sustainable, now and into the future.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

We have, by and large, become accustomed to the use of cloud computing - or, at least, cloud-based systems. Many of us will now have cloud-based accounts systems (even if we don't know it), meaning we can log in from anywhere and do the bank reconciliation (everybody's favourite job, right?) Most of the software our teachers use in classrooms will be web-streamed content, and a good internet connection is now essential to how academic settings need to operate.

So, is a broadband failure on your risk register?

The days of software ownership are slipping away like that of your CD collection at home! We're becoming used to software as a service (SaaS) where we no longer own our software, but rent it from a third party. The implicit change in ownership may have gone unnoticed by many across the sector, but SaaS is a term we will need to become more aware of, and pay greater attention to, as the proposition here is definitely to stay.

The kit in our schools, academies and classrooms is often purchased outright, but we have seen an increase in leasing options over recent years, allowing us to spread and manage costs accordingly. This is an excellent way to boost cash flow, and should be considered in every educational facility.

Now though, there is a new tool for our arsenal coming our way.

DEVICE AS A SERVICE

'Device as a service' (DaaS) has begun gaining traction - not just the operating leases mentioned above, but also the full-on rental provision of computers and other hardware (including laptops, desktops, tablets, and mobile 'phones). DaaS helps organisations mitigate these costs.

Few suppliers are currently offering this service; still, it can be assumed that this drive

The days of software ownership are slipping away

will go through amplification as initiatives like Windows 365 take hold. You now have the ability to 'rent' a computer in the cloud from Microsoft and configuring it to your unique specifications, using cloud systems, and access it from any internet-connected device you have access to. DaaS makes any device capable of being 'your' own computer - all you have to do is log onto a designated portal system and access your personalised, remote computer.

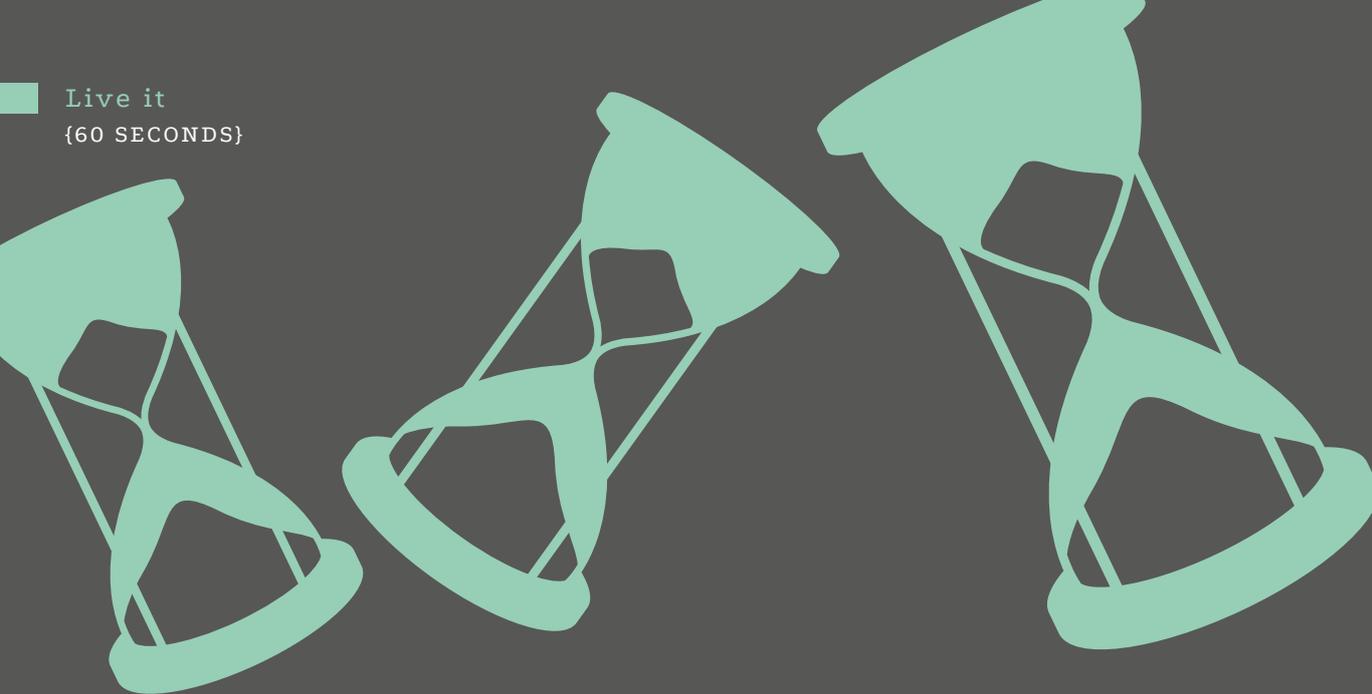
These changes may profoundly affect how we budget for IT refreshes in schools and educational facilities in the future; we will now have up-to-date software and systems without the upfront capital cost, and these can be scaled up or scaled down according to the school's specific needs. This process will work very much in the same way you would get a mobile 'phone contract - choice!

TOP QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- How do you make sure you're working effectively? (Set aside what you know about your current system - what is the art of the possible when it comes to better productivity and greater efficiency?)
- When is the demand there for equipment across the school?
- Could you consider funding purchases differently in the future?
- How will you be working, and what will you need, 24 months from now?
- What will you do with all that extra space if you don't need server rooms full of bulky bits of machinery anymore?

As we emerge from the last 18 months it is undeniable that processes have changed, and many of the new procedures will remain in place as schools and academies return to some level of normality. We must remain poised and adaptable to changes and embrace these reforms to secure the best outcomes for our education providers and, fundamentally, the pupils and students they support. ■





Sam Finch, school business manager



60 seconds with

SAM FINCH, school business manager, tells us all about why she loves being an SBM and how using the wrong key led to her meeting her now-husband!

What led to your current role?

Natural progression, having worked in independent, special and an AP – I wanted to move into a large maintained high school for variance of experience.

Tell me something unusual or interesting about yourself.

My friends call me Judith Chalmers as I am apparently always on holiday!

What has been your favourite aspect of working as a school business professional so far?

The fact that no two days are ever the same and that what you do can shape the lives of young people.

What's been your greatest professional achievement to date?

Completing my AAT and then completing my DSBM whilst being a single mum with three children.

How do you ensure that you continue to grow personally and professionally?

I stay connected with colleagues in similar roles and continually try and make new connections. I love to read and learn. I value my own time – I think that is really important.

Where do you take inspiration from, both work and life-wise?

I like to read blogs – for example Laura Williams writes lots of blogs and releases podcasts and she is really inspirational within the SBL world. Personally, I like to take part in hot pod yoga – quiet me time!

What three words would you use to describe your role?

Rewarding, challenging, motivating.

If there was one thing about your job you could change, what would it be?

That it was recognised more widely as a professional role equal to those within senior leadership at school.

Funniest SBM moment you'd care to share?

On my first day in my first SBM role, I couldn't open my drawer and had been trying for over an hour. The site manager came down to help me, and it turned out I was using the wrong key! That site manager who helped me that day is now my husband and our children still joke that, had I not been able to open that drawer, our lives might be very different! ■

That site manager who helped me that day is now my husband

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LIVE IT

Time to take a few moments out for some light and interesting reading – a well-earned break from numbers and statistics!



Caption competition
 Let us know your funny caption ideas by tweeting us @edexec

AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH

A man who has had both his legs amputated has completed a 13-hour crawl to the summit of Snowdon, *BBC News* has reported. Paul Ellis, 56, from Widnes, Cheshire, said he was in good spirits after completing the nine-mile (14.5 km) Llanberis route on Friday. He has, so far, raised more than £3,000 to send amputee children on holiday. Ellis suffered a spinal injury in a fall in 1992, leaving him in excruciating pain and unable to stand for more than few minutes at a time. In 2008 he chose to have both legs amputated below the knee to gain more mobility. “I did the first three miles in about three hours,” he said. “The last two miles took me more or less nine hours probably.”



LIFE HACK

If the inside of your microwave looks and smells like something it shouldn't then halve a lemon and put it into a glass dish or jug, along with some water. Microwave it until the water starts to boil, then switch it off and leave the door closed for a minute or two while the lemony steam works its magic.

Pub quiz

1. How many of Henry VIII's wives were called Catherine?
2. What was the most popular girls' name in the UK in 2019?
3. Which comedian was the second permanent host of *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* after Mark Lamarr?
4. Which popular video game franchise has released games with the subtitles *World At War* and *Black Ops*?
5. In what US State is the city Nashville?



Answers: 1. Three 2. Olivia 3. Simon Amstel 4. Call of Duty 5. Tennessee



Return of the cat

A cat missing for 10 years has been reunited with his owners, *BBC News* has reported. Forbes had gone missing in Aberdeen in 2011, leaving Neil and Lucy Henderson “distracted”. The Scottish SPCA was called in after a thin cat was spotted in Aberdeen, and a microchip scan led to the owners. He was found less than two miles from where he went missing. Now living in Edinburgh, the owners are delighted to have 12-year-old Forbes back in their lives. They had searched for their pet for months after he went missing.



Well,
knock me
down with
a feather!



FLY ME TO THE MOON

Sky News has reported that cows in Switzerland have been airlifted to the bottom of their Alpine meadows in a bizarre spectacle. Around 10 of the animals were taken by helicopter off the ridges in the Klausenpass region in the centre of the country. Using a mesh harness, the creatures were suspended by a length of cable below the chopper as they took to the skies. Waiting farmers used guide ropes to help bring the cows to land safely, before moving them into more conventional trailers. Meanwhile, the more fit and able livestock made their way down the mountainside by hoof.



“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.”

Dr. Seuss

DID YOU KNOW?

The crown jewels contain the two biggest cut diamonds on earth. They both came from the Cullinan Diamond, a 3,106-carat gem found in South Africa in 1905. The largest stone, called the Great Star of Africa, is in the Sovereign’s Sceptre, while the second largest is mounted in the Imperial State Crown.

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