

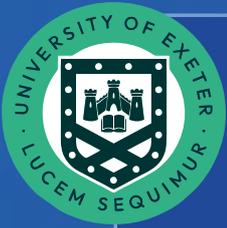


# EDUCATION SOUTH WEST

Annual Report **2025**



# Highlights of 2024/25



Education South West (ESW) featured in the **University of Exeter's Social Mobility Report** for pioneering community hubs that improve outcomes and support families.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER Centre for Social Mobility

SOCIAL MOBILITY  
IN THE SOUTH WEST  
Levelling up through education



Our first **Student Leadership Conference** brought together secondary students to develop leadership skills and hear from **MP Caroline Voaden**. A successful Primary Leadership Conference has since followed.

The trust's primary schools achieved **above the national average** across all external public tests.



**OPPIDAN  
EDUCATION**

London-based mentoring organisation **Oppidan Education** delivered their first oracy workshops in the South West at ESW schools, boosting confidence, character and readiness in **160** students.



**Kingsbridge Community Hub** launched to support local families, offering vital services from **Action for Children**, **Fidget Project** and **MotherBorn**. Leading **Great Lives Foundation** founded.



Our work with schools in Ukraine, as part of our link with the **OECD** continued, with ESW secondary schools establishing successful links with schools in Ukraine. Our CEO also contributed to a number of events including speaking at **Kyiv's curriculum reform forum**, sharing UK strategies to inspire Ukrainian school innovation.



Over **80** new teachers were trained through **SWIFT Teacher Training** with **100** recruited for **2025-26**





## Matthew Shanks, CEO

**WELCOME TO THE EDUCATION SOUTH WEST** annual report. This year, we've shaped our story around three powerful themes - Local and Global Community; Health, Rights, and Wellbeing; Inclusive and Ambitious Education. These themes capture the very essence of who we are and the values that inspire us.

At the heart of everything we do is a commitment to serve our communities and ensure that every young person has the support and opportunity they need to thrive. This year, that commitment has taken many forms. Our feature, *Supporting Families to Raise Life Chances* (pages 13–14), highlights how our community hubs, like the newly launched Kingsbridge Hub, bring together schools, families, and essential services to create meaningful, lasting impact. This pioneering work earned recognition in the University of Exeter's Social Mobility Report, proving how collaboration beyond the classroom truly changes lives.

Our reach extends far beyond the local. *Deepening Support for Ukrainian Schools* (page 13) showcases our ongoing partnership with schools in Ukraine through the OECD, building vital connections and sharing ideas to support innovation even in the toughest circumstances. I was honoured to contribute to this dialogue earlier this year at Kyiv's curriculum reform forum.

When people think of cutting-edge educational research, they don't often picture Devon. But behind the scenes, we are at the forefront of a national movement to make classrooms more effective by grounding teaching in evidence, not just instinct. You can explore this further in *The Evidence Advantage* (page 17), which explains how we support schools in applying research to improve learning outcomes.

The report also highlights how we lay strong early foundations for lifelong success. From primary schools outperforming national averages to initiatives that build confidence and leadership, such as our inaugural Student Leadership Conference and oracy workshops delivered by Oppidan Education, we're nurturing well-rounded learners ready for the future.

Championing health, rights, and wellbeing is another key pillar of our work. The article *Taking a Stand on Vaping: Representing Schools Nationwide* (page 19) shines a spotlight on our commitment to protecting young people and promoting healthier choices across our trust.

None of this progress would be possible without investing in our educators. Through SWIFT Teacher Training, which you can read more about in *Growing Teachers for a Sustainable Tomorrow* (page 16), we welcomed over 80 new teachers this year, with plans to recruit even more for 2025–26. Our people are at the heart of our success, and we're committed to their growth.

Everything you read in this report is the result of collective effort: the expertise of our staff, the support of our families, the strength of our partnerships, and the ambition of our students. I hope it gives you a sense of what we stand for and where we're heading next.

Thank you for your ongoing support and belief in our vision.



## Graham Austin, Chair

**OPENING THIS YEAR'S REPORT** and reviewing the many highlights gave me a real boost. It's inspiring to see how Education South West continues to grow and strengthen its impact across schools and communities.

As Chairman, I am particularly warmed by how deeply the trust puts people first - students, staff, and families alike. That commitment shines through in so many ways, from how children say they feel respected and supported, to the care shown for the adults who teach and nurture them.

In what is only our second annual report, we've introduced a new section titled *Our Schools* (pages 8–12), dedicated to highlighting all 14 of our schools. It offers a rich snapshot of the diversity, strengths, and unique character each school contributes to the wider trust and its communities.

Our trust's focus on wellbeing and rights is especially powerful. The article *Putting People First: Rights, Wellbeing and the Whole Child* (page 22) beautifully captures how the Rights Respecting Schools and Well Schools initiatives are creating environments where everyone, young and old, can truly flourish. When children and staff feel heard and valued, they are far more likely to thrive.

I've also had the privilege of witnessing inclusion in our schools first hand, as shared in the report on pages 24–25: *Inclusion in Action: How We Meet Every Child Where They Are*. For children with special educational needs or disabilities, inclusion means belonging. ESW's mission to educate all children to lead great lives requires us to meet every child's unique needs with care and ambition, building supportive environments where they can excel academically, socially, and emotionally. Last year, the trust made bold and purposeful strides to ensure inclusion is not just an ideal, but a reality.

I'm proud to say the trust has also taken an important step with the founding of the Leading Great Lives Foundation, which will play a key role in supporting and celebrating community impact across ESW. There is much more to come from this exciting initiative during the year ahead.

The dedication of our staff, governors, and families is evident throughout the report and remains the foundation of all we achieve. Their collective effort is a constant source of motivation for me and the board. ESW's work is driven by a real sense of community and partnership, ensuring children's wellbeing and success remain central to everything we do.

As we look forward, the trust faces ongoing challenges common to education nationwide, including SEND provision, attendance, and funding pressures. Yet I am confident that with ESW's clear vision, focus on inclusion, and commitment to putting people first, these challenges will be met head-on.

# Year at a glance

**AT EDUCATION SOUTH WEST** we place great emphasis on learning opportunities outside the classroom. Here are just a few of the highlights from our 11 by 11 programme a comprehensive approach to character education:

Education South West serves **6515** pupils across **14** schools



Eleven by (age) Eleven – **all primary school age children** will experience a range of extra-curricular opportunities and experiences by the time they move onto secondary school



Our schools are judged **'Good'** or **'Outstanding'** by Ofsted



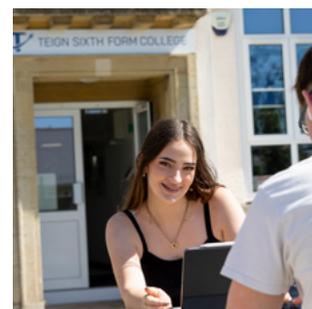
Eleven by (year) Eleven – Enrichment at secondary is also key, with **all students** experiencing a range of extra-curricular opportunities by the end of year 11

We employ **899** people across the trust



The trust has helped to train over **80** new teachers, recruited over **105** new teachers and welcomed **26** Early Career Teachers

Teachers across the trust have received **4219** shoutouts celebrating a positive about their classroom practice on the Steplab instructional coaching platform and **86%** of teachers agreed that instructional coaching has improved the quality of their teaching



The trust supports **1459** disadvantaged pupils, **1340** pupils with special educational needs and **287** pupils with English as an additional language



SATs and phonics outcomes at Education South West primary schools are **above the national average**

Education South West's 11 by 11 secondary school enrichment programme has provided **28,120** opportunities for students, including **3619** performing arts opportunities, **766** leadership opportunities and **776** community opportunities

For primary school pupils, **1783** attended school trips, **578** children went on a residential and **492** pupils took part in performing arts opportunities

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## Meet our schools

Education South West is a community of primary and secondary schools including a university technical college. We are committed to providing opportunity without bias, developing character and resilience, celebrating achievement in all its forms, and building inclusive communities where every child and adult can thrive.



**BLACKAWTON PRIMARY** is a school which looks to challenge the normal. Pupils learned from author Emma Carroll in a creative writing masterclass, prepared for a village-wide Colour Fun Run, and celebrated wildlife with outdoor learning and a thriving new pond. Their impressive recycling efforts even earned praise in the local press.



**CHRISTOW PRIMARY** has had a colourful and successful year! Pupils raised over £3,000 in a sponsored Colour Run, created a Dartmoor-themed mosaic with a local artist, and won the ESW Small Schools Football Tournament. Ofsted praised the school's high expectations and vibrant, confident learners who embrace every opportunity to grow and 100% of Year 6s at Christow achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in this year's SATs with their greater depth achievement levels also well above national average.



## Our schools



**EAST ALLINGTON PRIMARY** is buzzing with pupil-led creativity and community spirit. Pupils captured spring in a photography contest, tackled waste as Eco Warriors, and raised £188 for Devon Air Ambulance through a self-led cake sale this year, canoed, danced and drummed together. Children in years 5 and 6 experienced the buzz of modern urban life in contrast to their rural homes - learning about street art, Brunel's achievements



and visiting a Hindu temple. With values of being Active, Bold and Caring, the school nurtures confident, compassionate, and proactive learners.



**KINGSBRIDGE PRIMARY** is thriving as one of just 11 UK 'Showcase Schools' for Talk for Writing. With top-tier CPD, a new community hub, and a Primary Science Quality Mark, the school is committed to excellence. Pupils are also building cycling confidence thanks to new balance bikes funded by Tesco's Stronger Start grant. The school also received a Pearson Award for its Early Years team and a The Smallest Things Prem Aware Award this year.



**KINGSTEIGNTON SCHOOL** With exciting learning experiences aplenty, and dedicated role models who believe in the power of positive relationships, Kingsteignton School continues to support children in becoming confident, compassionate and well-rounded individuals. Furthermore, staff members have inspired the community by completing the London Marathon for a charity close to the school's heart.



## Our schools



**RYDON PRIMARY SCHOOL** is a flourishing school with exciting trips, refreshed school values, and a thriving garden. From outdoor learning at Wildside to fundraising for the NSPCC, pupils are engaged, motivated, and supported. With strong community involvement, Rydon offers a nurturing environment where every child is encouraged to reach their full potential.



### **STOKE FLEMING PRIMARY SCHOOL**

inspires confident, curious learners through exciting enrichment, making sure they are ready to set sail into the world. From public speaking and space science to birdwatching and a glowing Ofsted report for its activity club, pupils are encouraged to explore, express, and engage in a warm, supportive environment that celebrates learning and personal growth.



### **WYNSTREAM PRIMARY SCHOOL**

continues to shine with enriching, hands-on learning and creative experiences. From building robots in a STEMbotics workshop to performing at Exeter Cathedral and welcoming MP Steve Race to open their new library extension, pupils are inspired to explore, discover, and contribute positively to their community.





**COOMBESHEAD ACADEMY** is igniting creativity across the community—from contributing to a town centre mural and showcasing photography in a pop-up exhibition, to launching a new Level 2 CREATE course for aspiring artists. Staff also delivered creative workshops in local primary schools, inspiring the next generation through inclusive, hands-on arts experiences.



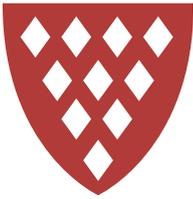
**DARTMOUTH ACADEMY** continues to grow with creative, cultural and community-driven learning. From artwork in the River of Hope Festival and a grand music studio opening, to French penpal exchanges, pupils are thriving through exciting experiences that broaden their horizons and reflect the academy's vibrant and inclusive approach to education.



**KING EDWARD VI COMMUNITY COLLEGE** continues to flourish through creativity, connection, and courageous conversations. From debating smartphones on ITV and presenting mental health art to NHS student doctors, to intergenerational art projects and powerful performances with Devon Youth Choir, KEVICC students are making meaningful contributions to their school and wider community and have also built and maintained an on site peace garden.



## Our schools



**KINGSBRIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE** is bursting with opportunity and ambition. From leadership workshops and mental health mentoring to maths inspiration at Oxford and a fascinating trip to CERN and the UN in Geneva, students are thriving both academically and personally. KCC continues to build confident, well-rounded learners with global and local impact.



**SOUTH DEVON UTC** continues to offer inspiring, career-focused education—launching a breakfast club in partnership with local charities, providing top-rated placements with Network Rail, and enhancing health sciences learning with a responsive manikin named Cynthia. Students also explored green careers through a residential trip with the Generation Green project at Slapton Ley.



**TEIGN SCHOOL** has had an inspiring year, from launching an international partnership with a Ukrainian school and leading an eco-committee to winning national awards for student leadership. They also took part in a pioneering University of Exeter programme. The farm club and Land Based Study students have revamped the quad area with donated benches and the Eco Committee's recycling bins as well as hanging baskets from the Teign School farm. Additionally, our students were nominated for a national award from the Youth Sports Trust; have worked with the UN as climate ambassadors and as Rights Ambassadors; received offers from Oxbridge as well as securing apprenticeships with national firms and engaged in conflict resolution also with the UN.



## Deepening support for Ukrainian schools

**IN LAST YEAR'S ANNUAL REPORT**, we shared how Education South West (ESW) was beginning to support Ukraine's upper secondary education reform through an international partnership facilitated by the OECD. A year on, that work has grown in reach, depth, and impact and is built on trust, mutual respect, and a shared belief in the power of education to shape a better future.

Four of our schools - Coombeshead Academy, Teign School, Kingsbridge Community College (KCC), and King Edward VI Community College (KEVICC) - are now actively partnered with Ukrainian 'Ambassador' schools. These 30 Ambassador schools, drawn from regions across Ukraine, from Lviv and Kyiv to Odesa, Dnipro and Kharkiv, are preparing to pilot the country's new upper secondary curriculum from September 2025. The reforms are bold: they aim to move away from a rigid, exam-heavy system to one that offers students more subject choice, improved careers guidance, and learning that develops key competencies.

The OECD are helping to facilitate partnerships between these Ukrainian schools and international schools from across the globe including: Sweden, Poland, Japan, Ireland, Portugal, Singapore, and England. ESW was the first trust in England to take part in the initiative, offering moral support and concrete insights into curriculum design, student options, and digital innovation.

Teign School in Kingsteignton, for example, has forged a close partnership with Zalishchyky State Gimnasia in western Ukraine. Despite the



thousands of miles and vastly different day-to-day realities, the two schools have built a shared rhythm of learning. Students have marked key international dates together, such as World Holocaust Day and European Day of Languages. Teachers have exchanged ideas on digital platforms, curriculum structures, and life beyond school.

Lucie Wagner, head of school at Teign Academy says: "It's been an incredibly rewarding experience working alongside headteacher Oleksandra Voychyshyn and her team. Our students have gained so much insight and perspective from the exchange. We hope to one day host our Ukrainian colleagues here in Devon."

This year also saw ESW take part in a national forum in Kyiv, titled '*From the Curriculum to the Classroom*'. Our CEO, Matthew Shanks, was invited as an international speaker alongside colleagues from the World Bank, Finnish Ministry of Education, and education ministries across Europe. His contribution focused on how UK schools have successfully created more flexible subject choices and tailored courses to meet student needs, which are key priorities for the Ukrainian reform model.

Matthew's visit built on his earlier trip to Lviv, where he addressed a major education conference opened by Ukraine's First Lady, Olena Zelenska. His reflections from that visit, delivered while air raid sirens forced sessions into bomb shelters, highlighted the extraordinary resilience of Ukrainian educators. "Despite everything," he noted, "there is a collective refusal to let education stop. That determination is both humbling and inspiring."

As a trust, ESW's involvement in this work reflects our values in action. All our schools hold UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools accreditation, and our commitment to global citizenship is not limited to a curriculum unit or assembly - it's something we live out in partnerships like this.

The collaboration continues to grow. We are calling on more UK schools to get involved and join this international effort. Supporting Ukraine's reforms is the right thing to do and it's a chance for our own students and staff to broaden their horizons, deepen their empathy, and contribute to a global education community rooted in solidarity and shared learning.

We thank all those across our trust who have supported this work and helped keep the spirit of internationalism alive in our classrooms.



Damaged classrooms seen during our 2024 visit

# Strengthening schools through community engagement: supporting families to raise life chances

**WE BELIEVE** that schools are more than places of learning. They are community anchors - safe, supportive spaces where families can connect, access support, and build brighter futures together. This belief, grounded in our charitable mission to advance education for all children, is now shaping the way we work across all 14 schools in the trust through the development of a new network of Community Hubs.

This initiative builds on a core ESW value: community. We see every school as a vital part of its local neighbourhood, offering education, opportunity, connection, and care. We know that children thrive when their families and communities are supported. That's why, in October 2024, we deepened our partnership with the Reach Foundation to put this vision into action - moving beyond curriculum and pedagogy into an ambitious programme of 'community anchoring'.

Community anchoring is all about creating strong local networks that support wellbeing and resilience. It means embedding services, support and partnerships within our school communities that respond to local need. Working closely with charities, councils, parents, and civic partners, our Community Hubs are helping to rebuild some of the wraparound services that once supported families through multi-agency work.

## Piloting the model: Kingsbridge Primary School

Our first Community Hub launched at Kingsbridge Primary School in March 2025. When a former children's centre space at the school became available, we saw an opportunity to do something different. Working with two local charities - MotherBorn, which supports new parents with early parenting and breastfeeding, and The Fidget Project, which offers therapeutic support for children with emerging SEND needs - we began to reimagine what the space could offer.



Seed funding from the Reach Foundation allowed these projects to get off the ground. What emerged was a powerful new model: services delivered from the heart of the school, embedded in the daily life of the local community. The After School Club, already a vital support for working families, became part of a wider offer that helps families feel connected and supported from the earliest stages of parenthood.

Kingsbridge is also now a base for the newly formed Family Hubs network, further extending the support available.



The success of this pilot is now guiding our plans for other schools.

## Growing the network

Over the past 12 months, the Community Hub model has begun to grow. In Dartmouth, we are repurposing another former children's centre to support families at Dartmouth Academy, our all-through 3-16 school.

In Newton Abbot, ESW has secured funding to host Citizens Advice sessions in our schools to offer help with housing, benefits, and other complex issues affecting vulnerable families. Breakfast clubs have been set up in partnership with local food banks to ensure every child starts the day ready to learn.

Across both Teignbridge and the South Hams, our new relationship with Citizens Advice now includes two dedicated caseworkers who work directly with our pastoral teams. These caseworkers deliver weekly outreach sessions, open to all families linked to our schools and the wider community. Funded by grant bids, this work is already making a difference

## Local and Global Community

and we're actively seeking ways to extend and secure it for the future.

Our schools are also working with local Rotary Clubs, with particularly close ties developing in Newton Abbot. Rotary members have offered financial support, mentoring, and practical help; from funding enrichment trips and Duke of Edinburgh kit to helping build a herb garden with medicinal plants at Coombeshead Academy. Four of our schools - Teign School, Kingsbridge Primary, Rydon and Christow - took part in this year's Rotary Young Apprentice programme, raising funds through events like plant sales and fun runs while learning valuable enterprise and leadership skills.

**“This is about rebuilding the wraparound services children and families need.”**

Robert Coles, Deputy CEO, Education South West

### Local partnerships for lasting impact

At South Devon UTC, a new breakfast club launched in October 2024 in partnership with the local food bank and supported by donations from supermarkets. The club has grown steadily and now serves both students and the adjacent community fridge - a small but powerful example of how schools can play a central role in reducing food insecurity.

At Wynstream Primary School, a community garden project is being developed with local charity New Roots. Children and parents are working side by side to restore the school's raised



beds, and partnerships with Exeter Housing are helping to widen the project's reach to local residents. The goal is to create a truly intergenerational space that brings people together and builds pride in the local environment.

Looking ahead, we're excited to be working with the Rotary Club to bring the South West Festival of Youth to Teign School in March 2026, which promises to be a celebration of the ideas, talents and contributions of young people in our region.

### Next steps: a Community Hub in every school

Our aim is clear: to develop a Community Hub in every ESW school. It's now a central part of our school improvement planning for 2025-26. While each hub will reflect the unique needs of its community, all will be designed to strengthen local networks and ensure every family has the support they need.

This work relies on partnerships with local authorities, charities, businesses, volunteers, and families. It depends on schools being open to new ways of working, and on civic and political leaders championing the vital role that schools play in community life.

## What is a Community Hub?

- A Community Hub is a welcoming, school-based space offering:
- Wraparound family support
- Help with housing and benefits
- Parenting support and SEND services
- Enrichment activities and food provision
- Connection to local services and charities
- Goal: Strengthen life chances for children by supporting the whole family.

If you'd like to get involved in the **Community Hub programme**, whether as a volunteer, a local partner, or a supporter, we'd love to hear from you. Together, we can make every school the heart of a stronger, more connected community.

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## Growing teachers for a sustainable tomorrow

**WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE** for a world shaped by climate change, rapid innovation and shifting global priorities? Increasingly, the answer lies in how we train and support the teachers who guide them. At the South West Institute for Teaching (SWIFT), that means going beyond traditional teacher development to place climate literacy, subject expertise and leadership at the heart of education in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

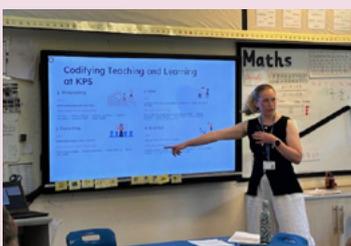


Led by Education South West (ESW) and Colyton Grammar School, SWIFT brings together more than 300 schools and trusts through a

powerful, collaborative network. As one of the region's two Department for Education Teaching School Hubs, it delivers high-quality training for early career teachers, develops the next generation of leaders, and now trains new entrants to the profession through its own Initial Teacher Training programme.

In 2024–25, SWIFT supported 817 early career teachers (ECTs) through its Appropriate Body Service and worked with 1,105 ECTs and mentors via the Early Career Framework. These programmes ensure that teachers at the very beginning of their careers are not only meeting statutory requirements, but are also well-supported to stay in the profession and thrive. From September 2025, the Early Career Framework will be replaced nationally by the reformed Early Career Teacher Programme. SWIFT will deliver this new model in exclusive partnership with the National Institute of Teaching, further enhancing the support available to new teachers across our region.

SWIFT also plays a key role in developing leadership at all levels. In 2024–25, it delivered 10 National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) to 422 participants across the South West in partnership with OneCornwall and other local hubs. While national uptake of NPQs has dropped due to funding changes, the strong take-up locally reflects the value placed by schools on professional development. In our latest satisfaction survey, 100% of school and trust leaders said they were satisfied with their experience of SWIFT provision.



This year also marked the successful launch of SWIFT Teacher Training, developed and delivered by Education South West after achieving government accreditation. With



83 trainees across five campuses, and recruitment quickly hitting target for 2025-26, the programme is helping rural and coastal schools grow their own talent. Feedback shows that the local delivery model is particularly valuable to those who may otherwise struggle to access teacher training. Recruitment into shortage subjects such as physics, computing and modern foreign languages has been especially strong.

A major highlight of the year was the SWIFT Climate Change, Sustainability and Regeneration Conference, held in partnership with the University of Plymouth. The event brought together trainee teachers, classroom staff and national climate experts including the Met Office, Surfers Against Sewage and Devon Wildlife Trust. Through keynote sessions, hands-on workshops and peer learning, the conference empowered teachers to embed sustainability and environmental understanding across the curriculum.

**Martin Smith, Executive Director, SWIFT, Education South West, said at the launch of the conference:**

"Education is key to preparing young people for a changing world. Through SWIFT, we are building a network of teachers and leaders who are confident, capable and committed to delivering a better future for our children, our schools and our communities."

From climate-ready classrooms to high-quality leadership, SWIFT is helping to shape education that is fit for the future, right here in the South West.

# The Evidence Advantage: How Education South West is quietly leading a research revolution in schools



**WHEN PEOPLE THINK OF CUTTING-EDGE** educational research, they don't often picture Devon. But behind the scenes, Education South West is at the forefront of a national movement to make classrooms more effective by grounding teaching in evidence and not just instinct.

Through Devon Research School, we've led work across the South West, and beyond, to help schools turn research into real-world practice. Backed by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), our aim is clear: to break the link between

family income and educational achievement by making sure every child benefits from the best of what we know works in education.

Beyond training, our team has shaped the future of teacher development by working with the South West Institute for Teaching (SWIFT) and Marjon University on initial teacher training, led research with Exeter University, and supported major EEF regional partnerships in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

*"When schools use the best available evidence, teaching improves and lives change. Our role is to understand that research, apply it with integrity, and share it widely so every student, in every setting, can benefit."*

**Jon Eaton, Director of Devon Research School and Research Lead, Education South West**

Inside ESW, our Research School work is closely tied to trust priorities – especially reading and literacy. This year, we've refreshed professional development, supported curriculum leaders to embed reading across subjects, and are now developing the next phase of our strategy: improving reading fluency, the key to unlocking access to every part of the curriculum. From Cumbria to Cardiff, and in every ESW school, Devon Research School is helping to ensure that what happens in classrooms isn't left to chance.

**In the last year alone, we've trained and supported hundreds of school leaders and teachers through major programmes including:**



**Improving Oral Language:** a multi-day programme for 20 Dorset primaries, with leadership training to boot.



**Cognitive Science Mini-Series:** practical insights into retrieval practice, interleaving, and how students learn best.



**Addressing Disadvantage through Social and Academic Inclusion:** a new evidence-based programme that started in the summer 2025.



**Pupil Premium Network:** 51 Devon leaders deep-diving into what really shifts the dial for disadvantaged students.



**Improving Writing in Secondary:** high-impact literacy strategies for 21 secondary leaders.



**Supporting English Hubs:** events reaching over 100 school leaders across the region.



**Scaling Up:** providing training to 108 schools in Cumbria through a national implementation project.

# No strings, just standards: why school improvement must be shared

**IN A SECTOR OFTEN SHAPED** by formal structures and competitive performance measures, the most powerful improvements sometimes begin with something far simpler: a phone call, a conversation, and a willingness to share.

That's how the partnership between Saint Cuthbert Mayne School and Education South West began in 2021. The newly appointed interim headteacher reached out for support. His school - a local faith-designated secondary - was facing deep-rooted challenges: academic outcomes were among the lowest in the country, expectations had drifted, and a sense of belief in what the school could be was slipping away.

Due to its unique joint church designation, the school was not eligible to join a trust like ESW, but from the outset, this was never about formal structures or expansion. There was no discussion of conversion - only a shared commitment to improvement.

What followed was a four-year collaboration rooted in the belief that no school is an island and no child should be left behind because of where they happen to go to school.

Colleagues across our trust offered leadership coaching and mentoring, curriculum planning expertise, and support around inclusion, behaviour and teacher development. We shared what had worked in our contexts and listened just as hard to what the school needed in theirs.



This wasn't a one-way relationship. Our teams learned a great deal too about courage, resilience, and the power of staying true to your ethos even when under pressure to conform. We listened as much as we guided and supported rather than steered. While we brought experience from across our trust, we also deepened our own understanding of how improvement happens in different environments.

The question was always: how can we help you improve your school, for your community, in your context?

### A culture shift with staying power

By 2025, the school had been graded 'Good' in all areas by Ofsted, with inspectors highlighting elements of practice as "exemplary". Still, the most meaningful changes weren't in the headlines. They were in the culture: clearer expectations, stronger relationships, higher ambition and a refusal to give up on any child.

Suspension rates had dropped, attendance had improved, inclusion had been rebuilt, staff had grown in confidence, and students had begun to believe in their own potential again.

Importantly, the school did not chase metrics at the expense of its values. It did not exclude students to secure results, nor narrow the curriculum to manipulate outcomes. Instead, it worked out what excellence looked like for all its students and committed to achieving it, no matter how complex the journey.

### System leadership with purpose

This work raises a broader point: the school system must not be a marketplace where schools compete in isolation. It must be a community where those with strength and capacity feel a duty to share it.

If we want improvement to stick, we need to move beyond thinking of it as something delivered by external consultants or driven only by inspections. We need to treat it as a long-term investment in people and culture and that often means peer-to-peer collaboration, mutual trust, and relationships built over time.

**No strings, just standards and a belief that better is always possible together.**

## Taking a stand on vaping: representing schools nationwide

**WHEN THE GOVERNMENT'S** Tobacco and Vapes Bill was being debated earlier this year, Education South West (ESW) was proud to represent the voice of schools across the country. On 30 January, our CEO, Matthew Shanks, was invited to give evidence to the Tobacco and Vapes Public Bill Committee in Westminster speaking on behalf of the entire education sector about the real and growing impact of vaping on children and young people.

This work reflects our deep belief that schools must play a leading role in tackling the health and societal issues affecting young people today. Vaping is now a bigger issue than smoking in many schools. Discreet and easy to conceal, vapes often appeal to children who would never have considered smoking. Some are drawn in by misleading marketing such as sweetshop-style flavours, colourful packaging, and the illusion that vaping is harmless. Others are unknowingly exposed to serious risks, such as drug-laced vapes containing THC or Spice.

Schools across the country are seeing the impact daily: students missing lessons to vape, rising behavioural issues, and, in some cases, permanent exclusions. Hospitalisations are no longer rare. Shockingly, across the UK, even pupils in primary school have reportedly been found vaping.

Many parents are understandably unsure how to respond, with some feeling pressured into buying vapes to prevent their children from turning to unsafe alternatives.

We welcomed the government's ban on disposable vapes from 1 June and fully support the Bill's proposals to remove child-appealing flavours and packaging. But we believe the measures must go further. In Parliament, Matthew called for stricter regulation of vape shop locations, national education campaigns, vape-free zones around schools, and proper investment in detection tools for school staff. Schools cannot tackle this alone. We need coordinated action across health,

### What schools across the country are seeing

- Students missing lessons to vape - sometimes multiple times a day
- Growing use of THC or Spice-laced vapes, leading to hospitalisations
- Vaping among primary-aged children
- Colourful packaging and sweet flavours that confuse parents and attract children
- Parents buying vapes to avoid children turning to riskier black-market versions
- Increasing need for exclusions due to vaping-related behaviour

education, law enforcement, and government because the health and wellbeing of our young people is a shared responsibility.

We are proud to lead by example by engaging with national policymakers, supporting families with clear information, and working with our communities to push for long-term change. We may be a regional trust, but our commitment extends far beyond our own schools in the South West. This is about making sure all young people, wherever they live, are better protected from a product that is being marketed directly at them.

We'll continue to raise our voice and stand alongside schools, parents, and policymakers because the challenges facing our children require national solutions, and education must be at the heart of them.

*"This isn't just a school issue - it's a national health issue. Schools can't solve it alone."*

**Matthew Shanks, CEO, Education South West**

## How student voice drives real change across our schools

### “We asked, they answered – and then they led.”

**WHEN GOVERNORS VISITED** one of our primary schools earlier this year, they didn't start in the headteacher's office. They started on the playground sitting with children in the sunshine, asking about their learning, their favourite lessons, and what they would change if they were in charge for a day. One Year 5 pupil didn't miss a beat: “We need more quiet spaces. Some of us don't like noisy games.”

Just a few weeks later, that same school had a new calm zone in place co-designed by pupils, with pupil leaders on hand to help it run smoothly. It's a small example, but it captures something powerful: children know what they need and when we listen properly, they help us shape better schools.

From primary through to post-16, students at Education South West are helping to lead, influence and improve our schools in ways that matter. Their voices are heard through surveys, school councils, leadership roles, and direct conversations with staff, governors, and even MPs, and crucially, what they say leads to action.

In our primary schools, pupils regularly take part in surveys about their learning, wellbeing and wider experience of school life. Leaders and governors review the results carefully asking whether previous actions have worked, and what needs to happen next.

When governors visit schools each term, they speak directly with pupils. These conversations help triangulate what they hear from school and trust leaders, grounding discussions in the real experiences of our children. Similarly, when leaders visit classrooms to review teaching, they ask pupils what helps them learn, what makes a good lesson, and where they need more support. This feedback helps identify where teaching and the curriculum can be further strengthened.

For pupils with additional needs, their views are vital in shaping their support plans and assessing progress. It ensures that SEND support is not done to children but with them to build confidence and clarity about what works.

There are many formal opportunities for leadership in our primary schools — from School Councillors and Rights Respecting Ambassadors to digital leaders, play leaders, house captains and wildlife champions. These roles give children real responsibility and a genuine say in school life.

Children also have their voices heard in their communities. They write to MPs, help shape local plans with town councils, take part in national science projects like the RSPB Big Bird Watch, and welcome experts and visitors to their schools, including their own local MP.



## Building a leadership pipeline from primary to secondary schools

In February 2025, our commitment to student voice took a big leap forward with the trust's first ever Student Leadership Conference, held at King Edward VI Community College (KEVICC) in Totnes. Eight students from each of our secondary schools - KEVICC, Dartmouth Academy, Kingsbridge Community College, Teign School, South Devon UTC and Coombeshead Academy - came together to share how they've made a difference in their schools.

The day opened with a welcome from our CEO Matthew Shanks, who spoke about the importance of student leadership in shaping the future of education. South Devon MP Caroline Voaden followed with an inspiring talk about her own leadership journey and the value of youth voice in public life.

Mixed-school groups tackled big questions: What makes a good leader? How can we have more impact? What advice would we give younger pupils starting out on their leadership journey? Students left energised, connected, and with new ideas to take back to their schools.

A key legacy of the February event has been the development of two new Primary Leadership Conferences - one held at Kingsteignton and one at KEVICC in July. These were designed and led by secondary students, passing on their leadership experience to the next generation.



Speakers included Matthew Shanks and local MPs Martin Wrigley and Caroline Voaden (via video), with secondary pupils running workshops and discussions for their younger peers. It marked the beginning of a new ESW tradition - one where leadership is modelled, shared and lived by students across the trust.

Beyond these major events, pupil leadership is thriving across all our secondary schools. Students take on roles as prefects, house leaders, subject ambassadors and mental health champions. They attend weekly and fortnightly forums on wellbeing, bullying, behaviour and more. They represent their peers through form groups and school councils, and through surveys and feedback channels, they help shape decisions around everything from curriculum design to school facilities.

When we listen to our students, they don't just feel heard, they rise to the challenge. They help solve problems, build community, and create better schools for everyone.



*"Student leadership is at the heart of our school culture. We want every child in our trust to know that their voice matters - not just in their school, but in the world they're growing up in. Our job is to listen, empower, and help them lead."*

**Matthew Shanks, CEO of Education South West**



**Current Rights Respecting Schools status across the trust**



**Gold**

- Stoke Fleming
- East Allington
- Blackawton



**Silver**

- Kingsteignton
- Rydon
- Coombeshead
- Teign
- Kingsbridge Community College



**Bronze**

- Christow
- Wynstream
- Dartmouth
- Kingsbridge Primary
- KEVICC - (hoping to achieve Silver this academic year)
- South Devon UTC – Working towards Bronze

# Putting people first: rights, wellbeing and the whole child

**CHILDREN THRIVE WHEN THEY FEEL HEARD**, respected and supported – and the same is true for the adults who teach and care for them. Across our trust, the Rights Respecting Schools and Well Schools movements are helping to create environments where everyone can flourish.

A Rights Respecting School places the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) at the heart of school life. Children’s rights are actively taught, respected and experienced in the day-to-day life of the school. Pupil-led steering groups meet regularly, and young people are given genuine opportunities to help shape decisions and lead change.

Across the trust, schools are progressing through the Rights Respecting Schools accreditation process. Stoke Fleming, East Allington and Blackawton have achieved Gold status, with Kingsteignton, Rydon, Coombeshead, Teign and KCC holding Silver. KEVICC is hoping to move from Bronze to Silver this academic year, while Christow, Dartmouth, Wynstream and Kingsbridge Primary have already reached Bronze. South Devon UTC is working towards its first award. With several reaccreditations due in the coming months, our commitment to children’s rights remains a central part of our work.

Alongside this, our schools are developing as Well Schools – placing as much emphasis on wellbeing as on academic performance. A Well School still has high expectations, but it understands that children and young people are more effective learners when they are happy and healthy – and that staff are better educators when they are genuinely supported. Well Schools look after the mental and physical health of their pupils and staff to create a culture where everyone can reach their potential.

The link between wellbeing and achievement is clear. The evidence shows that improved physical, social

and emotional health leads to better educational outcomes, particularly for those facing the greatest inequalities. Over time, this work contributes to increased progress and attainment, improved attendance, greater self-efficacy, and reduced exclusions. It also helps to improve job satisfaction and staff retention – a vital consideration as schools face increasing demands with fewer resources.

We know that unhealthy, unhappy children don’t learn. At the same time, schools are being asked to do more with less, while also responding to a growing mental and physical health crisis. Our education system must adapt and think differently to meet the needs of pupils and provide the support our educators require.

That’s why we’ve invested in wellbeing across the trust – from training Senior Mental Health Leads and Mental Health First Aiders, to launching a confidential wellbeing email helpline and expanding our digital wellbeing library.



These are not one-off initiatives. ESW is making a long-term commitment to building schools where everyone feels safe, valued and able to succeed because the evidence is clear: happier teachers and happier children make for better learning environments.

## Laying early foundations for lifelong impact

**BY THE TIME A CHILD STARTS SCHOOL** the gap between those who are ready to learn and those already at a disadvantage can be wide and hard to close. That's why what happens before Reception class, and in those crucial early years of school, matters so much.

Across Education South West, we are reshaping our approach to the early years foundation stage (EYFS) to give every child the strongest possible start. From phonics and vocabulary to social confidence and emotional development, we are working to make sure children build the right foundations for learning.

Our EYFS curriculum has been carefully refined across the trust to focus on the critical knowledge and skills children need from nursery through to Year 1. This means ensuring that what is taught builds step by step, in a clear and logical progression, giving children both confidence and security as they move between phases.

We're paying particular attention to transition by strengthening continuity between nursery and Reception, and from Reception into Key Stage 1. In some of our schools, where Reception and Year 1 are taught together, we're learning how purposeful play can continue to support deep learning even as children begin to access more formal elements of the curriculum.

*"Daily formative assessment through observation, conversation and careful listening means we can spot small gaps early and respond quickly with the right support."*

**Robert Coles,  
Deputy CEO,  
Education  
South West**

### Language, play and purpose

High-quality spoken language is one of the best predictors of later academic success. So across our schools, children are immersed in rhymes, storytelling, and meaningful conversation from the very beginning. Vocabulary is deliberately taught, modelled, and revisited to give children the tools they need to understand and express themselves with growing confidence.

We also ensure that early reading, writing and maths are rooted in strong foundations. Functional skills are introduced early - even in nursery - and we make sure children have the chance to practise and apply what they've learned through structured play and purposeful activity.

### Safe, nurturing, predictable

Young children need to feel safe and supported to thrive. That's why we place strong emphasis on emotional wellbeing, relationships and routines. In every classroom, clear boundaries and behaviour expectations help create calm, predictable environments where children can focus and flourish.

Our approach is rooted in understanding where each child is developmentally, not just where they are meant to be on paper. Daily formative assessment through observation, conversation and careful listening means we can spot small gaps early and respond quickly with the right support.

### Partnering with families

We know that families are our most important partners. That's why we work closely with parents and carers through regular communication, progress updates and curriculum sharing. By bringing families into the learning journey, we can build greater consistency between home and school - supporting routines, confidence and school readiness together.

### Investing in expertise

None of this is possible without great people. We continue to invest in the training, coaching and support of all early years practitioners across the trust. Through our ESW Early Years Network, we're sharing what works across schools and helping raise the bar for early years practice beyond our own communities.

That commitment is being recognised nationally. Kingsbridge Primary School has already received a Pearson Bronze Teaching Award for Best Early Years



Team, and is the first of our schools to achieve the Prem Aware Award, with others set to follow in the coming year. When we get it right for children at the beginning of their education, we set them up for success far beyond the classroom.

# Inclusion in action: how we meet every child where they are

## What is Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP)?

Adaptive teaching strategies that support all learners in mainstream classrooms

### Examples:

Differentiated instruction, accessible resources, flexible groupings

### Benefits:

Reduces need for withdrawal, improves engagement, boosts confidence

**FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS** or disabilities (SEND), the difference between attending school and truly belonging can be life-changing. That's why inclusion is woven into everything we do.

Our mission is to educate all children to lead great lives. To fulfil that mission, we must meet each child's individual needs with skill, care, and ambition. Creating supportive, accessible environments where all children can thrive - academically, socially and emotionally - is one of our highest priorities. In the last academic year we made bold, trust-wide strides to make sure that inclusion was not just present, but purposeful.

## Clear strategy, strong culture

Our trust-wide SEND and inclusive teaching strategy brings clarity and consistency to how we support pupils with additional needs. It rests on a firm belief: that high-quality teaching, led by well-supported staff and underpinned by strong partnerships with families, creates the conditions in which all learners can flourish.

SEND is not the responsibility of a single department or individual - it is a shared endeavour. That's reflected in the strong network of SEND coordinators (SENDCos) across our schools and the commitment to collaboration that underpins our partnership with the Special Partnership Trust. Staff know they are supported, and best practice is actively shared.

Through a focus on ordinarily available inclusive practice (OAIP), we are embedding inclusive approaches in all classrooms every day. These adaptive, thoughtful teaching strategies enable pupils to succeed without needing to be 'taken out' of the mainstream experience. Training in inclusive practice has reached every part of the trust, and instructional coaching now supports teachers to implement OAIP confidently and consistently.

## Partnership with families

A child's success at school is shaped not just by what happens in the classroom but by the strength of the partnership between home and school. This year, we've enhanced the ways we listen to and work alongside parents and carers.

Through workshops, listening campaigns, and co-created support plans, we are helping families feel more confident in understanding the SEND journey and in seeing their children's needs not as barriers to be overcome, but strengths to be recognised and supported.



**"Inclusion is not the responsibility of one department - it's a shared endeavour across our trust."**

Technology is playing a part, too. We have introduced Edukey across our schools to standardise and strengthen SEND planning. All staff have been trained to use the platform, which makes it easier to create, access and review support plans. Crucially, we're working towards giving families more direct input into those plans to make the planning process truly collaborative.

## Inclusive and Ambitious Education

### Creating the right conditions

Inclusion cannot thrive without the right systems and culture. That's why we are also reforming our behaviour policy to better support all learners, especially those with SEND.

The first phase of our new trust-wide behaviour policy is now in place. It is rooted in relational practice and psychological safety, prioritising connection, understanding, and support. By creating predictable, respectful environments, we aim to reduce suspensions and increase attendance for pupils with SEND.

We're also supporting pupils' emotional wellbeing more explicitly. Through the development of a trust-wide curriculum for social and emotional regulation, we are helping children learn how to understand and manage their emotions - a vital skill for learning and for life.

### Meeting needs closer to home

In South Devon, we are preparing to open a new 40-place area resource base (ARB), which will provide dedicated support for pupils with education, health and care plans (EHCPs). The ARB will serve not only those who attend it directly but also provide outreach support for other schools in the area, reducing the need for distant or independent placements and allowing more children to have their needs met within their community.

This is a major step forward and a clear example of how we are turning strategy into action, with long-term impact.

### Progress now, ambition for the future

What we're building is already having an impact. Last academic year, teachers across our schools began using inclusive practices with greater confidence. Edukey has improved how we share and review plans. Parents are more informed and involved. And we've secured funding and a location for the ARB, with plans well underway for its opening.

But our ambitions are long term. By 2026, we want to see OAIP embedded in every classroom, trust-wide consistency in emotional and behavioural support, and full parental co-production of SEND plans. By 2027, we are aiming higher: for ESW to be recognised as a national centre of excellence in SEND.

"By expanding local specialist provision, we reduce the need for children to travel far from home to get the support they deserve."

**Jayne Keller, Director of Education,  
Education South West**

That means not just strong academic outcomes and above-average attendance for pupils with SEND, but a culture across every school in which children with SEND feel safe, seen, supported and successful.

### A shared pride

We know that none of this happens without extraordinary effort from staff, strong support from families, and genuine collaboration with local partners, councillors and MPs. Together our work is changing lives.

To parents and carers: thank you for trusting us and for working alongside us. To colleagues and partners: thank you for helping us raise the bar. And to our wider community: we hope this gives you a glimpse into the kind of trust we are, and the kind of future we are building - one where every child, whatever their starting point, has what they need to lead a great life.



## Rethinking fairness: a new lens on school equity

**WHAT IF THE DATA WE RELY ON** to measure school success is missing the most important stories? That's the challenge Education South West has set out to answer—working in partnership with Professor Lee Elliot Major OBE, Britain's first Professor of Social Mobility at the University of Exeter, to develop and pilot a new Equity Scorecard that puts fairness and inclusion at the heart of school improvement.

This isn't just a tool for our trust, it's a region-wide initiative designed to lead national thinking on how schools can understand, measure and address educational inequality more intelligently and compassionately.

For too long, the accountability system has been dominated by narrow attainment measures that reward performance in ways that often disadvantage schools serving the most vulnerable communities. The Equity Scorecard challenges that model. It offers a more nuanced and balanced framework, built around three key areas:

- **Disadvantaged Outcomes** – how well pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are progressing
- **Inclusive Practice** – whether school systems truly support belonging and reduce exclusion
- **Community Engagement** – the strength of relationships between schools, families and the wider community

What makes this approach different is its focus on context and lived experience. It blends traditional performance data with staff, student and parent surveys, self-assessment tools, and directional indicators based on school trajectories. Using a simple traffic-light system—green for improvement, amber for stability, and red for areas requiring attention—it helps leaders and governors reflect honestly, ask the right questions, and make confident, evidence-informed decisions.

Already, pilot schools are using the scorecard to map pupil vulnerability, challenge unconscious bias, revisit behaviour policies and build more

*"It's about recognising that equity requires more than good intentions. It needs the right tools, the right questions, and the professional freedom to act on what we find."*

**Suzannah Wharf, Director of Education, Education South West**

inclusive classroom cultures. In several cases, it's led to changes in the way teachers and leaders approach parental partnerships—moving from one-way communication to meaningful, two-way engagement that better supports children's learning and wellbeing.

Crucially, this isn't about blame. It's not about excusing low outcomes or lowering expectations. It's about recognising that equity requires more than good intentions. It needs the right tools, the right questions, and the professional freedom to act on what we find.

At ESW, we are proud to be at the forefront of this work. The pilot, supported by the South West Social Mobility Commission, is already shaping wider discussions around national accountability reform. A primary school version is in development, and interest from other trusts and local authorities is growing.

It's early days, but the signs are promising. As more schools and trusts join us in this work, we're building a movement for change and one that redefines what progress really looks like in education.

If we want to close the gap, we have to change the lens.

## Seeing behaviour as communication

**AT A RECENT TES CONFERENCE** on behaviour, Education South West's CEO, Matthew Shanks, took part in a panel discussion that highlighted just how complex, and often divisive, the topic can be. At ESW, behaviour is not seen in isolation or as a checklist of rules to enforce. It is understood as a form of communication, shaped by a young person's experiences, needs, and their stage of development.

High expectations sit at the heart of our approach, but they are balanced with a deep understanding that children are still learning how to navigate the world. The role of adults in our schools is to guide, support and model the behaviours we expect to see. Calm, respectful staff help create calm, respectful schools.



Our trust-wide framework is based on three clear principles: **ready, respectful, safe**. In essence these are the only rules, and everyone follows them including the adults - ready to learn in a mutually respectful environment in which we keep ourselves and each other safe. This simple language helps everyone in our school communities understand what's expected, but we do not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Each school adapts the framework to its own context, supported by regular coaching and collaboration.



We believe that good behaviour starts with a strong curriculum and strong relationships. Our schools focus on providing a rich, engaging education that helps children

discover their talents and grow into thoughtful, confident citizens. They also take time to get to know each child as an individual. Every pupil is more than a set of results.

**“Behaviour’s always one of those gnarly topics that can cause huge amounts of passion and annoyance.”**

Matthew Shanks, CEO, Education South West

Our exclusion and suspension rates remain below the national average. This is not because we avoid taking tough decisions, but because we act early. Each school identifies a group of students at the start of every half term for early engagement, meeting with families in the first week. This proactive, human approach makes a significant difference.

We are data-rich, but we use data with care. Our central team supports schools with meaningful insights helping to spot patterns and focus support where it's most needed, particularly for our most vulnerable children. As ever, the story behind the numbers matters more than the numbers alone.

Headline figures rarely tell the whole story. Across our trust, we work with schools in very different contexts - some welcoming large numbers of students mid-year, others serving communities facing significant social or economic challenges. While national measures and accountability data can provide useful benchmarks, they often miss the nuance and complexity of our schools' work. That's why we treat numbers as a starting point, not a verdict. Data helps us ask better questions, not jump to easy conclusions. For us, true accountability lies in doing right by each child, every day, even when that can't be captured in a spreadsheet.



The trust is committed to high standards and deeply held values. We recognise that children will sometimes get things wrong. Our job is to respond with professionalism, empathy, and consistency. We never lose sight of the fact that we are helping young people grow, learn and discover who they are.



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