

Governors' Update

March 2023: Keeping Education At The Forefront

Durell Barnes, Head of Governance, RSAcademics

Since the last issue...

Inspired by some feedback we had on our last issue, we have realised in our contacts with schools that many Chairs of Boards would welcome opportunities to network with their peers in other schools and share approaches and experiences.

To that end, we held our first **Chairs of Governors Round Table** at Westminster School on 22nd February. A very fluid agenda allowed people to have discussions under 'Chatham House rules' over lunch in small groups.

Having run some similar events a few years ago, we have decided to make this a regular occurrence from now on and we hope this will be the first of many such sessions if the demand exists. Please contact my colleague Lucy Walsh-Waring at lucywalsh-wareing@RSAcademics.com if you are interested in finding out more about future lunches, attending one or have suggestions for what topics we might cover.

In this issue...

In the last "Governors' Update" we focused on the revised approach to inspection proposed by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and its impact on governance. ISI's response to the consultation on this has been published and governors will want to hear school executives' views on that and agree **the implications for governors of the increased focus on wellbeing and pupil voice**. This is as much a strategic as a management issue and I refer to it briefly later. However, I have resisted the temptation to dwell further on this, as there are so many other strategic matters for governors to bear in mind for the rest of this year and which they may wish to include in the agenda for any "strategy away days".

All governing bodies should be considering how to address the potential impact of what have been variously described as 'headwinds' and 'a perfect storm': **the political and economic challenges ahead which combine to create existential threats to the**

sector as a whole and to individual schools in particular. Much guidance is available about these and some useful signposts are included in this update.

This does not mean that all plans and projects for development in the school should be put on hold and some which should not are highlighted later. In troubled times it is all the more important to **keep pupils’ education at the forefront of governors’ thinking about strategy and the monitoring and oversight of the executive**. Your school needs to be true to its values, deliver what it promises and be clear about what is distinctive. Many schools’ plans include **new approaches to the curriculum and assessment**, for example. These are areas which governors tend only to monitor and oversee, but some of the changes being proposed in these areas will impact hugely on the nature of their schools and their outputs and so well informed scrutiny from Governors will be needed where this arises. This forms the largest section below.

As usual I hope there is something here for all readers. It is clear that all schools are at a different stage in their development, as are all leadership teams and governing boards. So, while some challenges are common to all, others impinge more or less, depending on the setting.

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Moving on from inspection: safeguarding and wellbeing

Safeguarding

Last term saw the publication of the final report of the Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The report itself is available inter alia via the ISI website at https://www.isi.net/isi_annual_report_final_version.pdf.

Farrer and Co have produced a very accessible and thought provoking summary with helpful extracts which can be accessed here <https://sites-farrer.vuture.net/39/2276/uploads/iicsa-final-report---oct-2022-23.11.22.pdf>.

It includes the following essential reminders:

- “We would suggest that a useful action for all organisations to do, arising from IICSA, is to consider the ways in which Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) occurred as well as the themes identified and consider these in the context of their own settings to assess whether any of the barriers or structural issues identified by IICSA might still apply today within the setting and therefore pose risks to children. This can be done through safeguarding audits and reviews.
- “Whilst statutory inspectorates play a very important role in the system of ensuring that institutions are safe and meet required standards, we suggest that senior leaders and boards of governors and trustees play a vital role and are obligated to ensure that the particular setting is safe for everyone. This can be done through the use of audits and lessons learned reviews, which we know many of our clients have found invaluable.
- “An organisation that sends out clear and consistent messaging about the prioritisation of safeguarding children from the earliest stages of recruitment will help set a culture of safeguarding and should help minimise the potential risk of those unsuitable to work with children from applying or succeeding in joining the workforce. The principles of safer recruitment include appropriate messaging about safeguarding in job adverts, and a proper system of application and interviews. Gaps in CVs should always be explored, and references should always be taken and followed up.”

The Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS) recommends that governors should be aware, in particular, of four of the twenty recommendations which have been made:

- The creation of Child Protection (CP) Authorities for England and for Wales which should improve practice in this field, advise Government about CP and have rights of inspection of institutions and setting as they think appropriate;

- Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse in certain circumstances, which would include people who work in regulated activity (such as in schools) being expected to report if they have been told about, have observed, or suspect CSA. Most independent school staff contracts would already require this;
- The removal of the three-year limitation period for claims for personal injury claims brought by victims and survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA);
- The introduction of a two-tiered redress scheme for victims and survivors of CSA, including that perpetrated by other children, applying both to state and independent institutions, making payments (funded by central and local government with independent institutions asked to contribute) through a first tier (fixed flat-rate recognition payment) and a second tier (for those who wish to provide more details and evidence).

Farrer & Co give details of the other recommendations and advise schools to review these, to audit records (especially with a view to quality of record keeping) and policies and to use this to inform appropriate training for the whole staff (including on low level concerns and on-line safety).

Wellbeing

The data on poor mental health in schools makes for sobering reading. This does not just relate to pupils. Education Support’s Teacher Wellbeing Index reported last term that:

- 59% of staff have considered leaving the sector in the past academic year due to pressures on their mental health and wellbeing;
- 55% of staff have actively sought to change or leave their current jobs;
- 68% of staff cited volume of workload as the main reason for thinking about leaving their jobs;
- 47% of all staff always go into work when unwell; and
- 78% of all staff experienced mental health symptoms due to their work.

The problem is also increasing at senior leadership level, as reported *in Schools Week’s* article in December, ‘Third of Headteachers looking to leave education sector’, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/third-of-headteachers-actively-looking-to-leave-education-sector>.

There is a growing understanding of the need for schools to be proactive rather than reactive in this area and an article in *Independent School Management* magazine in December, highlighting a research project into the factors influencing poor mental wellbeing among school staff, gave this initial insight:

“Resilience is often seen solely as being down to the individual; here we’re looking at how both personal and environmental factors play a role.

“The message from our initial study is that while it is important for teachers to do what they can to protect themselves from the demands of the job, to really ‘be

resilient' they need to work within a 'resilient school' which also acts to protect the teachers within it."

*Dr Steph Ainsworth, Senior Lecturer
Manchester Met's Education and Social Research Institute*

You can read the article here: <https://www.schoolmanagementplus.com/wellbeing-students-staff/teacher-wellbeing-major-research-project-to-promote-resilience/>.

We have previously considered **mental health issues amongst pupils in our schools**, reported by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) as being subject to a 50% increase between 2017 and 2022. ASCL continues to work with the wonderful Anna Freud Centre where extensive guidance and resources can be found (<https://www.annafreud.org/>).

In the context of the new emphasis on wellbeing, governors will want to satisfy themselves that they have proper data on this area, are **hearing the voice of the pupils and staff**, and they will want to determine how they will address both pupil and staff wellbeing, including that of senior leaders, in the future. I addressed these issues in an article for the last edition of *Governors' Insight magazine* which you can read here: <https://iexcellence.co.uk/editions/ii-spring-2023/index.html?page=8>.

The menopause and its impact on people in the workplace have been the subject of much press attention (including some helpful articles, for example here <https://www.schoolmanagementplus.com/wellbeing-students-staff/33-per-cent-of-our-teaching-staff-could-be-menopausal/>) and a report has been published by the Women and Equality Committee of the House of commons which can be accessed here <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/summary.html>. The summary includes these two statements which should be borne in mind by all employers (including governors in their monitoring capacity).

- *"51% of the population will experience menopause. It is a normal, natural, and inevitable part of ageing. Yet for too long, too many people experiencing menopause have struggled with societal stigma, inadequate diagnosis and treatment, workplace detriment and discrimination. This is not normal, nor should we see it as inevitable."*
- *"Menopause has been ignored and hidden away for too long. There is nothing shameful about women's health, or about getting older. Supporting those experiencing menopause makes sense for individuals, for the economy and for society."*

Governors will want to satisfy themselves that schools have effective policies in place and that they are being implemented. Advice and guidance is still being developed in this area, but exists on teaching union websites, e.g. that of the National Education Union (NEU), here: <https://neu.org.uk/menopause-toolkit>.

Schools have been developing approaches to issues around **transgender pupils** and we await clarity of guidance from the government. DfE confirmed in November that a delayed public consultation would be undertaken early this year and we await further information. The Boarding Schools Association (BSA) and Independent Schools Bursars

Association (ISBA) have published preliminary guidance entitled '*What the Independent School Standards say about provision by English schools for transgender pupils*' which can be accessed here

https://mcusercontent.com/4446ecf5894fe2b5c26afdb0d/files/b4330bd9-c610-f4f0-81b1-152eff6762ae/BSA_and_ISBA_What_the_Independent_School_Standards_say_about_provision_by_schools_for_transgender_pupils.pdf

It is a complicated document but provides very useful guidance on definitions, including legal definitions, the current legislative framework and addresses specific issues including Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), sport, changing rooms and toilets, boarding accommodation as well as key areas of risk assessment and wellbeing. Governors will want to ask DSLs how school policies are taking account of the guidance.

The context for strategic planning

Boards will take some comfort from positive news about the sector arising from last year's ISC Census (<https://www.isc.co.uk/research/annual-census/>), but will be aware of and should be actively planning in the context of the economic, political and societal pressures which confront our schools.

ISC Census

In many ways, the independent school sector is vibrant with a record number of pupils, and an increasingly diverse population - over a third from ethnic minority backgrounds, 17.6% of all pupils have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), 5.7% come from overseas and there are nearly 70,000 boarders. Fee increases have been lower than in recent years and fee assistance is up, with over a third of pupils being in receipt of some type of fee assistance.

Pressures on the sector

These pressures are primarily economic, because of the impact of the war in Ukraine, the cost of living crisis and various other post-Covid pressures. These are accompanied by the potential looming impact of the imposition of VAT on school fees, proposed removal of charitable reliefs and an increase in the cost to schools of the Teacher Pension Scheme (TPS). The economic challenges have a political dimension also, as they arise in part from the policy of the Opposition, who currently look likely to form the next government. This has had what might be termed a side effect, in that it has reopened debates about public perceptions of the sector, what public benefit means, the function of bursaries and the role of partnerships. Such issues are themselves complicated by publicity surrounding independent schools in the wake of IICSA and Everyone's Invited.

Schools not actively planning for difficult scenarios are storing up trouble for the future. The question of affordability must be at the forefront of financial decision making, schools will want to maximise non-educational income streams, workforce planning needs to be in place and capital expenditure plans re-considered in the light of the new context. Answers are not readily to hand but guidance and training are available from both AGBIS and ISBA and all the Associations of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) have contributed to a practical guide on how to confront current threats entitled *Political and Financial Threats Practical guidance for schools*. It has been circulated to all schools and governors who have not received a copy can request one from the Clerk or ask to receive the monthly ISC Report: February's covered this and much other ground; and you can sign up for the Daily News Summary at <https://www.isc.co.uk/media-enquiries/isc-daily-news-summary/>.

It is important not to have a defensive viewpoint in the debate about the place of independent schools. ISC draws attention to the new report by Oxford Economics <https://www.isc.co.uk/research/independent-schools-economic-impact-report/> which provides data to demonstrate the beneficial economic impact of independent schools which in 2021 contributed £16.5 billion to the national economy, supported about 328,000 jobs, supported over £5 billion in tax revenues (and of course saved the taxpayer nearly £4 billion by providing places for pupils who would otherwise be in state funded schools). You can see how your own school contributes by using the ISC

local economic impact tool, which the Bursar should be able to share with you. ISC advises sensitive but proactive communication with MPs and local politicians about how important schools are to their local economies and in what other ways they contribute to their communities. Governors will want to discuss with school leadership teams where they stand on such communication bearing in mind their own local context.

This does not mean that strategic planning must all be about survival alone and many schools are seizing important opportunities to build on gains made during the pandemic, to diversify and to consider how their school might adapt in the light of new thinking about the curriculum and assessment.

Strategic opportunities

Don't lose sight of gains made during the pandemic

There are many practices introduced during lockdowns which have become integral parts of school life. Some are overarching, including the advent of a more developed focus on staff and pupil wellbeing in schools, more efficient and sensitive communication, more effective meetings. Some are practical, like greater use of digital management systems to improve oversight of academic progress and pastoral care. Some have broadened horizons, like the ability to connect with other learning institutions for teacher training, for pupils to practise foreign languages and understand other parts of the world, new online partnerships have been created within the UK and globally. Some have allowed for improved mutual understanding and respect for the roles of teachers and parents. Others have been more nuanced as pupils have become more accustomed to taking responsibility for their own mental wellbeing and physical fitness or understood that leadership is not only about being a school prefect or monitor, captain of a team or leader of an orchestra.

It is instructive for governors to ascertain how far school leaders feel that **EdTech initiatives introduced during the pandemic** have been usefully maintained thereafter. You may feel that your own meetings and contacts with some aspects of school life have improved, for example.

One area where some schools wonder if they have maintained momentum is that of teaching. And of course, learning and assessment. In the general delight about the return to school, some innovations in these aspects of the life of the school were jettisoned. Understandably, teachers wanted the face-to-face contact (although social distance requirements did involve a return to serried rows and some old fashioned approaches to learning). And, for many, the return of personalised handwritten comments on paper assignments felt like the return of an important relationship.

It is now timely to ask school leaders what they have retained in this area, what they are no longer doing (and why). A recent article in TES addressed some of these issues, entitled *How schools can build on EdTech gains during Covid* it can be accessed here <https://www.tes.com/magazine/leadership/strategy/how-schools-can-build-edtech-gains-during-covid>.

Expenditure on IT infrastructure, hardware, staffing and training are such that schools need an ongoing IT strategy and many boards are seeking to recruit governors who can make a contribution in this area. For those of us who are less experienced, the TES has published some useful articles which can assist with familiarisation with the issues, including one on **how to implement and more importantly how to monitor IT and digital strategy** entitled *EdTech in schools: 6 steps to success* (<https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/edtech-schools-6-steps-success>) and another on the thinking behind spending in this area entitled *Four reasons not to slash your EdTech spending* (<https://www.tes.com/magazine/leadership/finance/4-reasons-not-slash-your-edtech-spending>).

The Chartered College of Teaching (CCT) has also been publishing research in this area. For example a recent article in their *Impact* magazine looked at the value of promoting

evidence based practice in educational technology for teachers and summarised the value succinctly in the paragraph below.

“Over the past few years, there has been a surge of EdTech aiming to reinvent teaching and learning in the post-pandemic classroom. Although the use of technology in the classroom is not new, the sudden demand during the pandemic and thereafter has increased the development and usage of EdTech. Its unprecedented rise has raised profound questions for teachers. For example, what should guide technology integration in everyday learning? How can teachers navigate through the ‘paradox of choices’ and make informed decisions so that the power of technology can be leveraged in education? More importantly, how to ensure EdTech delivers its intended benefits over time and remains sustainable? In this article, we suggest that evidence-based practice and multi-sectorial collaboration are crucial to addressing these questions.”

Another article in *Impact* on what constitutes digital literacy (*Effective digital practice: developing digital fluence through student-led interaction*) illustrates how EdTech has transformed the usual dynamic of the classroom.

“The advancement of effective digital practice is beyond students just ‘googling’ the answer. Teachers need to be given effective CPD (continuing professional development) to ensure that students communicate, innovate and critically analyse information when using digital devices in the classroom. This paper presents original action research into developing digital fluency through student-led instruction, undertaken during 2021–2022. In addition, it details the correlating CPD to advance digital practice within the classroom, as well as online and blended learning.”

In such crucial areas schools cannot ‘go it alone’ and governors will want to know the evidence on which expensive EdTech spending is based. CCT is a growing body with over 50,000 members, providing evidence based research, training and networking for teachers and leaders at a low cost, individual membership is around £50 per annum. School leaders can now get a taste of the most popular open access articles in *Impact* (the range is clear in the titles—*Skilful questioning: the beating heart of pedagogy, What is the best way to motivate students in your subject, Cognitive load theory and its application in the classroom, Applying the science of learning in the classroom, and Taking curriculum seriously*) at <https://chartered.college/our-downloads/>

Material change and diversification

Many schools are facing decisions about their future which involve material or significant change and diversification in one form or another.

Increasingly schools are becoming members of small local groups or even larger, national or global groups. AGBIS and ISBA provide guidance on the factors and processes in such decisions.

Some schools seek to broaden their range of activities by increasing capacity, changing age range, adding (or ceasing) boarding provision, becoming co-educational or establishing an international college on the home site. The Department for Education (DfE) has recently updated guidance on material changes which is when a fundamental change is made to school size, function or proprietorship. There are no new requirements, but everything schools considering such changes need to know can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-schools-making-a-material-change>. It is important to check that DfE has correct records about a school's capacity (numbers) and proprietorship.

Opportunities overseas have increased considerably in very recent years. In an article in *School Management Plus*, Shaun Fenton (Head of Reigate Grammar School) has put this in context. It's worth reading the article (*The real reasons schools open international outposts*) for an unusual perspective on the issue of opening branches, offshoots or standalone establishments abroad and also to see the context in which he makes the statement 'ethos beats strategy for breakfast'. He makes the point that overseas expansion is not the sole preserve of boarding schools and looks carefully at how overseas partnerships add value to the home school, how global involvement drives innovation and improvement, the exciting opportunities they facilitate in terms of student partnership, travel and networking, staff professional and career development, recruitment for the school and expansion in terms of alumni networking and relationships. You can view the article here <https://www.schoolmanagementplus.com/alumni-relations/the-real-reasons-uk-schools-open-international->

Curriculum and assessment

It is unusual for guidance for governors like this to stray into the area of curriculum and assessment, usually and rightly the province of the executive. However, school leaders have needed to give much more context in recent years when reporting pupils' academic achievements as familiar outputs like A levels, the International Baccalaureate Diploma, BTecs, GCSEs and Common Entrance have been adapted to the circumstances arriving from the pandemic.

Those who govern senior schools will know that fewer students from the independent sector are securing **places at Oxford and Cambridge**, and in fact fewer seek them as the opportunities afforded by other leading UK, EU and US universities become more attractive. Increasingly, young people are seeing the advantages of apprenticeship routes into professions, and degree apprenticeships are becoming more popular. You can read more about these at <https://www.ucas.com/apprenticeships/what-you-need-know-about-apprenticeships/degree-apprenticeships-0>.

Those who govern prep schools may be aware of **the modernisation of Common Entrance and related qualifications** from the Independent Schools Examinations Board (ISEB), the development of the Pre-Senior Baccalaureate and changes in the awarding processes for senior school scholarships.

All schools with pupils aged over 11 are required to provide **careers guidance** and as many governors are currently working in particular fields and employing young people to start their working lives in them, they are likely to have a lively interest in (and an ability to contribute to) school programmes in this area.

Many schools are seeking to prioritise in their curriculum what have been termed **'employability skills'** or perhaps more accurately, attributes, recently and well defined as creativity, problem solving, critical thinking, leadership, communication, collaboration, information management, adaptability, curiosity and reflection in this post on LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/10-most-beneficial-lifelong-learning-skills-have-why-lets-school/>.

Whether skills or knowledge should pre-dominate in the curriculum is an old and quite sterile debate. Nonetheless, there are interesting developments in this area which some schools are beginning to reflect upon as they seek to provide the most relevant education to prepare young people for working life in the coming century. Some of the thinking was encapsulated in the Times Education Commission whose report, published in May 2022, can be found here <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/times-education-commission-report-welcomed-by-tony-blair-john-major-qwc3b7ktx>. Their recommendations include the introduction of a British Baccalaureate which could embrace academic, vocational or combined pathways, a recognised and certificated programme of electives, the introduction of career academies which would focus on creativity and entrepreneurship, significant boosts to early years funding, the deployment of undergraduate tutors to bridge the skills gap in schools, greater use of technology, wellbeing at the heart of education, enhancing the status of the teaching profession, improved training on inclusion for teachers, new university campuses and a 15 year plan for education. This goes very much further than any single initiative like the extension of mathematics teaching to the end of compulsory school age.

It has been further explored extensively, for example at a conference organised by the Heads' Conference (HMC) and the Edge Foundation which describes itself as 'the independent foundation working to inspire the education system to give all young people across the UK the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to flourish in their future life and work.' <https://www.edge.co.uk/about-edge/> The conference linked curriculum and assessment and drew on global perspectives. One of the speakers was the CEO of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), Andy Haldane, who places the educational aspects of their vision *Design for Life* in the context of a changing world, asking the questions:

"What if...

- **all children**, from their early years, were given chances to nurture their creativity and build a greater connection to the natural world?
- **all entrepreneurs** were given the support and connections they needed for their innovations to flourish and shape better futures?
- **all business leaders** were supported to transform their organisations to do more good?"

On the assessment front, the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) has indicated that it has plans to move to on-line assessment in the coming years as the Director General, Olli-Pekka Heinonen, told *The Times* during the IBO conference in October 2022:

“The paper assessments will be there for the interim period, but I also see that there is a time when we will move to a digital environment - having both, I don’t think that that period will be continuing for ever. There will be a moment when there’s a shift.”

English examination boards including AQA and Pearson have indicated that they will go the same way with Cambridge International and OCR already trialling these (overseas). The CEO of OCR, Jill Duffy, told *The Independent*:

“Digital assessment is not a hypothetical future, it’s happening right now. We will use insights from these trials to make our digital mocks a user-friendly option for all schools and colleges.”

Groups like Re-thinking Assessment are committed to providing ‘workable solutions, practical ideas and approaches to make assessment fairer, broader and more equitable’. They are working with school associations and schools and colleges across the sector not only to change the way in which exams are taken (qualifications are gained) but also to personalise assessment through learner profiles which would tell universities and employers what they need to know if young people are to thrive and contribute to them. They too pose ‘what if’ questions:

“What if:

- *The assessment system recognised the full range of every young person’s strengths;*
- *Every child compiled their own digital learning profile and took it with them after they left school;*
- *Assessment supported the pathways of all students whether going to university, college or employment;*
- *Schools were judged on the quality and range of their offer not just a narrow set of exam results?”*

Lest it be thought that this thinking is all going on in a blue-sky environment detached from the world of policy makers, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Schools, Learning and Assessment has launched an inquiry into assessment reform, looking in particular at:

- The effect of assessment on curriculum, with particular attention to breadth and balance;
- The relationship between knowledge and skill;
- The extent to which assessment supports students’ learning;
- The extent to which the assessment and qualification systems provide a “climbing frame” which enables all students to make progress through the system.’

Many are asking what the function of the independent sector is, and it may be that it can make a significant contribution, untrammelled by government Diktat, in experimenting in these important areas and showing what can be done. Some individual schools will want to contribute. This is territory for school executives (the experts), not the governors. But boards should understand when any ideas in this space are brought to them that there is a growing desire for change and that both schools which ignore it and those which embrace it will need to think carefully through the implications of their stance for their current and future pupils, parents and staff. Governors should be ready to engage in these debates as and when (or if) school leaders initiate them.

And finally...

I hope it is evident that amidst the considerable challenges facing schools there are exciting developments taking place in forward-thinking and innovative schools and much for governors to be excited about. What helps make governance rewarding is keeping education at the forefront of our thinking and ensuring that our schools will help young people thrive as adults.

Many of the issues raised here are considered in the latest edition of *The State of Independence* edited by Jane Lunnon and David James, once again a hugely useful volume for governors. It's worth sharing the chapters among relevant board members. They cover: the pastoral challenge; the academic challenge; the junior challenge; the financial challenge; the access challenge; the diversity challenge; the gender challenge; the innovation challenge; the international challenge—all in thought provoking essays by 55 educational experts (including our very own Russell Speirs). You can order the book here <https://www.routledge.com/The-State-of-Independence-Key-Challenges-Facing-Private-Schools-Today/James-Lunnon/p/book/9781032342092>.

Another interesting read for governors is the latest research piece by RSAcademics *Upwards and Onwards* based on the views of 75 Principals of international schools across the world. It reflects current practice and offers guidance to Principals on how they might best 'manage upwards' in an international context, but it has lessons for heads and governors anywhere on how to create productive and happy relationships between school leaders and their boards. To find out more, go to <https://www.rsacademics.com/upwards-and-onwards/>.

If you have any comments on this Update or would like to raise any queries, please contact

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About the author

Durell joined RSAcademics in 2016, and throughout his career he has worked with school leadership teams to support them with all aspects of governance and compliance. He was formerly Deputy Director and Head of Communications at the Independent Schools Inspectorate and before that taught in HMC schools, latterly as a Deputy Head.



At ISI, Durell was responsible for liaising with Ofsted, the DfE, ISC, school associations, schools, parents and other interested parties on matters relating to safeguarding and quality assurance. He was closely involved in the development and implementation of the revised frameworks for inspection introduced successively in 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2015-6.

A Governor of both maintained and independent schools, Durell has hands-on experience of the challenges faced by busy and highly committed Governors endeavouring to exercise their responsibilities within time constraints.

In September 2018, Durell was appointed Chairman of the Independent Schools Examinations Board (ISEB), alongside his role at RSAcademics.

About RSAcademics

We enable schools worldwide to thrive by finding and developing leaders, guiding decisionmakers, making connections and shaping debate. We are known for the calibre and spirit of our people. We exist entirely to help schools.

We support schools in five main areas.

Strategy, marketing & research

- Market studies, competitor analysis, brand positioning studies, demographic mapping
- Perception and attitude research among stakeholders using various methodologies, including our flagship “SchoolPulse” suite of online, benchmarked surveys
- Advising on strategic planning and assessing specific business initiatives and opportunities, working with Boards and Senior Teams as facilitator and guide
- To improve student recruitment and retention, we conduct transformational marketing and admissions audits and put together effective marketing plans

Equality, diversity & inclusion

- Working with our expert and experienced partners at All-in Education, we support schools as they seek to embrace and promote diversity and inclusion. We provide stakeholder research, while our partners provide the training and consultancy

Operational improvement

- Usually wide-ranging reviews of a school’s operation, from financial management through to governance and leadership structures, almost always with a major focus on the educational provision itself

Leadership and governance

- The executive search and selection of Heads and CEOs/Principals and other senior hires, including Deputies, Business Directors, Finance Directors and Marketing, Admissions and Fundraising staff. We also help to recruit new Governors and Chairs of Governors
- Reviews of governance and training for governing boards
- Leadership development, appraisals and reviews of Heads and other senior staff, working in partnership with Charlie Warshawski and his team at Love Your Coaching.

Philanthropy

- A full suite of services, ranging from those aimed at ‘start-up’ Development Offices, through to more advanced and specialised support

We also publish influential reports, including several relating to school leadership in the COVID-19 Pandemic, the ground-breaking “Ten Trends” series, “The Art of Headship” and “The Art of International School Headship” and much more (please visit [Insights & Ideas](#) on our website).

The company was set up in 2001 by Russell Speirs who remains the CEO. Since then, it has grown steadily: last year we worked with almost 300 different school clients and counted over 80 employees and associates.

Our values and goals have remained the same since we started.

- To provide work of the highest quality – we are rigorous, imaginative and hard-working
- For our clients to enjoy working with us because of our integrity, warmth and professionalism
- To help our clients to thrive – always putting them first and acting in their best interest
- To use our time and money voluntarily to support children’s education and development

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