



How can independent schools support a  
broad and balanced state school  
curriculum in England?

All-Party Parliamentary Group on  
Independent Education

2023

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*The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Independent Education was founded to bring together members of both Houses of Parliament, from all political parties, to discuss and debate independent schools in the UK.*

*The APPG's purpose is to provide a forum to discuss developments in the independent education sector, discuss issues facing the sector, highlight best practice, explore the wider contribution of the sector, share knowledge, and raise matters affecting the sector with government and sector leaders.*

*The APPG would like to thank all those who contributed to the APPG's enquiry and gave evidence, as well as all those working in schools – state and independent – to spread opportunity.*

## ***Message from the Chairman***

I founded the APPG for Independent Education and have been its Chairman ever since. I felt it was important that the sector, which educates over 6% of our country's children, had a voice in Parliament and thereby into Government.

Our latest inquiry looked in depth at the work independent schools do to support state schools in delivering the curriculum. Not only does this provide an opportunity to showcase some of the truly immense amount of positive work being done across the country, we also have a set of recommendations to ensure partnership working can be even more effective into the future. These will be presented to Education Ministers.

I would like to thank my fellow APPG members, MPs and Peers, all those educators who gave evidence to the inquiry, and for the continuing support of the Independent Schools Council, especially Julie Robinson and Matthew Dent.

**Andrew I Lewer MBE MP.**



## ***About the APPG***

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Independent Education was founded to discuss developments in the independent education sector, discuss issues facing the sector, highlight schools' best practice, explore the wider contribution of the sector, and share knowledge about the sector.

As with all APPGs, it brings together politicians from across the political spectrum and does not take party-political positions. It is not a formal body of the House of Commons or House of Lords, and this report does not constitute an official publication of either House.

## ***About UK independent schools***

There are more than 28,000 schools in the UK, of which approximately 2,500 are independent schools. They represent approximately 9% of schools in the UK and educate over 6% of pupils.

The Independent Schools Council is the representative body for independent schools and Associations of independent schools and has been appointed as the secretariat by the APPG. ISC currently represents 1,400 independent schools – this is approximately 56% of independent school institutions but includes more than 80% of children educated independently across the UK – the vast majority of independent schooling. ISC collects data from its members across the UK, in the form of an annual census – data from this census is quoted in this report as the most comprehensive available study of UK independent schools.

Independent schools are much smaller than popularly imagined, with the average ISC school having fewer than 400 pupils. Independent schools are diverse in terms of size and offer a range of educational specialisms, including: boarding, single sex education, arts, music, and drama specialisms, and specialist SEND provision. Independent schools contribute to the whole education sector however possible, through forming independent-state school partnerships. There is much good work here, but some capacity constraints – particularly where state schools are several times larger than nearby independent schools.

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### Executive Summary

A broad and balanced curriculum is the entitlement of all pupils – regardless of which school they attend. As many children as possible should have the chance to learn an instrument, partake in drama and art, learn to swim, learn a language, and study advanced subjects with specialist teachers. These opportunities should not be geographically restricted, nor open only to the already advantaged.

While provision of such a curriculum is the responsibility of all in education – teachers, leaders, and the Government – we have found that independent schools can play a role in spreading opportunities and, in many cases, are already doing so. Through partnerships between state and independent schools, a wider pool of students gain access to opportunities, and all partners can mutually benefit.

While partnerships can only ever be a part of the solution to providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all, it is also clear that these partnerships have several advantages:

- They rely on work between teaching professionals, not requiring external tender or delivery partners.
- They respond to local needs and capabilities, avoiding a ‘one size fits all’ approach.
- They can be self-perpetuating, in that a small partnership can foster a relationship that later extends to the provision of more opportunities and draws in more partner schools.

Independent schools have an important role to play in the spreading of opportunity across the education system, and we are pleased to have found that there is already much work from schools in this area, and goodwill and enthusiasm to do more.

The 2023 ISC Census showed 1,043 schools undertaking partnerships with their state-maintained colleagues – with more than 8,700 partnership projects between independent schools, state schools, and community groups. These include teaching A-

level subjects, support for university applications, joint lessons in arts and drama, and the sharing of sports facilities.

We have found that state and independent schools are already partnering in many ways to enhance curriculums, and that there are established structures (e.g. local partnership networks) that can support this. Equally, we have seen that curriculum partnerships are often focused on independent senior schools and state primary schools. We are reassured, however, that it is possible for senior schools to mutually partner, and for independent prep schools to offer expertise via partnership – but these can require more effort and favourable circumstances to establish.

We believe that every school can benefit from a cross-sector partnership, and that the effort to establish them has already been provided by many in both sectors. Therefore, to encourage the further spread of partnerships enhancing the curriculum, we recommend:

1. That the Department for Education **encourage the further development of independent-state school partnerships**, through efforts to encourage and broker partnerships, and seed funding to encourage the beginning of partnerships in high-priority areas (e.g., in Education Investment Areas).
2. This should include **a brokerage body to support busy school leaders** in establishing partnerships – they should not only advertise partnership opportunities but help coordinate partnerships until they become established. The body will require the **support and endorsement of the Department** and should already be a part of the education landscape. Multi-academy trusts, or educational charities, should be considered.
3. That the Department for Education **issue guidance to all schools, advising them to consider independent-state school partnerships** when they seek support to fulfil curriculum duties.
4. That the Department for Education pays particular attention partnerships between senior schools and **encourages multi-academy trusts to form whole-group partnerships** with appropriate independent schools, or groups of independent schools.
5. That schools – of all types – **consider partnerships as a first response to the need to expand the subjects they offer** – and all generously consider how they could partner with local colleagues to spread opportunity.
6. That the Department for Education **work to encourage the formation of formal Independent-State School Partnership (ISSP) groups**, and that independent schools, state schools, and other educational bodies collaborate to create ISSPs. Recognising that this approach is not appropriate in every instance, **we encourage all schools to consider measures to make their partnerships sustainable and mutually beneficial.**

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the APPG’s enquiry and gave evidence, as well as all those working in schools – state and independent – to spread opportunity.

## Educational Context

The APPG launched this enquiry in the context both of educational recovery after Covid, as well as in the context of increasingly tight school budgets. The former forcibly stopped many of the practical and in-person activities that made up pre-pandemic schooling. At the same time, it likely expanded the disadvantage gap – making it ever more important that all children have access to high-quality teaching in a wide range of subjects in order to develop their talents.<sup>1</sup> The latter is a longer-term trend that has made it harder for many schools – predominantly state schools – to prioritise expensive curriculum additions such as art, music and drama, or the provision of specialist STEM and language teachers.

Taken as a whole, these phenomena have caused concern across education that children – particularly disadvantaged children – risk missing out on a broad and balanced curriculum, which is not only their entitlement, but also key for good progression and social mobility. As these are concerns for the whole education sector, the APPG seeks through this enquiry to explore what role independent schools can play in mitigating this trend, what role they already do play, and how this can be enhanced and encouraged.



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<sup>1</sup> Rowena Bermingham & Clare Lally, “Covid-19 and the disadvantage gap,” Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), 01/09/20. <https://post.parliament.uk/covid-19-and-the-disadvantage-gap/>

In our call for evidence, we asked these questions:

- What challenges do state schools face in meeting their National Curriculum duties?
- What challenges do state schools face in providing a wide variety of arts, drama, music, and sports provision?
- How can independent schools support schools in meeting their National Curriculum duties?
- Is there scope for this work to be expanded further across the country, or into new curriculum areas?
- Are there opportunities for independent schools to support the development of resilience, confidence, and other social skills through partnerships?

We are pleased to have received engagement from across the sector on all of these subjects, and on wider questions of how independent-state school partnerships can best work and be sustained.

### *What is a broad & balanced curriculum?*

In order to ask how independent schools can support the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum, it is necessary to define what makes a curriculum broad and balanced. While there is no single agreed definition, the term has a basis in legislation. In England, section 78 of the 2002 Education Act requires that maintained schools must provide “*a balanced and broadly based curriculum which –*

- a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society and*
- b) prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.”*

This requirement is applied to academies in England by the 2010 Academies Act, and thus applies generally to all state-maintained schools in England. Independent schools have similar duties under the Independent School Standards Regulations.<sup>2</sup> It is recognised as an entitlement for all students, regardless of school or background.

This legal background has been given new prominence in the wake of Covid-19, and the resulting loss of in-school learning. This has led to a concern that pupils have missed out the wider opportunities in-person schooling provided – including subjects with a practical or creative element – and a fear that this might be compounded by a focus on core subjects (e.g., English, maths, sciences) as schools use limited time and resources to help pupils catch up.

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<sup>2</sup> The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (no. 3283), Schedule 1, paras 2 & 3. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/si/2014/3283/schedule/made>



This concern is shared by Government, political parties, and education researchers. In November 2021, the Department for Education issued non-statutory guidance *‘Teaching a broad and balanced curriculum for education recovery,’* seeking to preserve a breadth of subject teaching amid recovery efforts.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Labour has proposed a ‘ten by ten’ ambition for extra-curricular activities, and included “*sport, drama, book clubs, and debating societies ... to boost time for children to play and socialise after months away from their friends.*”<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently, these fears have been intensified by rising costs and tight resources in state education – risking a de-prioritisation of ‘non-core’ subjects, and reduction in the availability of extra-curricular activities and school trips.

Therefore, echoing these concerns, the APPG has used a definition of broad and balanced curriculum that reflects what is at risk in schools owing to Covid and the cost-of-living crisis. Our inquiry has focused on three areas where the curriculum could be broadened and balanced across schools with the assistance of independent schools:

1. Arts and creative subjects, at risk as non-core subjects.
2. STEM and languages, where extension activities and specialist teaching may be reduced.
3. Sport and extra-curricular activities that can build skills and develop character.

In each case, we have assessed the current need as identified by Government, Opposition, and/or researchers, sought evidence of independent schools’ existing contributions in these areas, and come to conclusions on how work could be developed – based on the evidence of those already involved.



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<sup>3</sup> Department for Education, *Teaching a broad and balanced curriculum for education recovery*, November 2021.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1033448/Teaching\\_a\\_broad\\_and\\_balanced\\_curriculum\\_for\\_education\\_recovery.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1033448/Teaching_a_broad_and_balanced_curriculum_for_education_recovery.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Wes Streeting, “Why I’m launching Labour’s new ambition: ten by ten,” Labour List, 20/08/21. <https://labourlist.org/2021/08/why-im-launching-labours-new-ambition-ten-by-ten/>

## *About independent-state school partnerships*

Independent schools in the UK have a long history of public benefit work and many (around half of all independent schools) are charitable institutions.<sup>5</sup> This public benefit can be provided in many ways, at the discretion of the trustees, including through partnering with state schools to share resources, expertise, and capacity.

These partnerships encompass a wide range of work and relationships – from sharing sports facilities to large-scale sponsorship of new schools, as well as careers advice, university entrance support, and shared CCF (Combined Cadet Forces) and Duke of Edinburgh award groups.

Each school undertakes its partnerships according to its own capacity, the local needs, and the existing relationships formed between schools and colleagues. Partnerships therefore differ greatly in scope and scale – for the purposes of this enquiry, we have focused only on partnerships that expand pupils’ access in the three identified areas: creative subjects, STEM and languages, and sport and character development.

There are some barriers and constraints to partnership working that have been identified by schools – and were reflected in submissions to this Review. Many focus on the relative value to partnership compared to the other demands of busy state and independent schools – exacerbated by the large investment of time and effort needed to establish consistent partnerships. This is why brokerage, guidance, and a first response attitude from school leaders (supported by the brokerage and guidance) is so important in spreading good partnership practice. If a good partnership is defined as one that serves the needs of all schools, allows for mutual giving, and provides for mutual improvement – and we think it can be so defined – then it is vital school leaders are assisted to find these opportunities for mutual enrichment.

Independent schools have signalled their continuing commitment to partnership working through a Joint Understanding (JU) with the Department for Education in 2018.<sup>6</sup> This restates schools’ independence in determining their partnership activity, and the importance of partnerships being based on capacity and local need. It also explicitly acknowledges that “*operating independently allows these schools to...pursue a broad, challenging and ambitious curriculum.*” The JU then commits schools to a wide range of potential work, including: “*curriculum support, teaching support, sharing of expertise through mentoring, minority subject assistance, joint activities, and the sharing of facilities.*” We believe that each of these – if targeted properly and responding to a need – can be used to provide more pupils with expanded opportunities, either directly or by empowering their schools and teachers to offer a wider range of subjects. Importantly, both the ISC and the Department for Education commit to encourage state and

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<sup>5</sup> Department for Education, *Answer to Written Parliamentary Question on School Business Rates*, 01/07/22. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-06-22/23324>.

<sup>6</sup> Joint Understanding between DfE and Independent Schools Council, *Department for Education*, May 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-understanding-between-dfe-and-independent-schools-council-isc/joint-understanding-between-dfe-and-independent-schools-council-isc>

independent schools to participate in partnership activities – this encouragement could be key to an expansion of independent schools’ roles in supporting a broad and balanced curriculum.

In the last year for which pre-Covid data is available (academic year 2019-20), ISC schools undertook more than 11,700 partnership activities. These were curtailed under Covid, and the latest ISC Census data (academic year 2022-23) shows more than 8,700 of these projects have been re-established.

The 2023 ISC Census records partnerships by their curriculum focus (sports, academic, drama, music, other) and found the following distribution among schools:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of schools involved</b>	<b>Number of partnerships</b>
Sport	894	2,991
Academic	730	2,268
Other	808	1,870
Drama	441	854
Music	453	810
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,043</b>	<b>8,793</b>

*Table 1<sup>7</sup>*

It is clear that there is immense interest across UK independent schools for partnership working, and our enquiry shows that this can be harnessed to support the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum to as many pupils as possible.

## **Arts, drama, music, and creative skills**

### *Identifying the need*

The necessity of a broad and balanced curriculum is most clearly seen in the creative subjects – which too easily could become add-ons to a curriculum, and then squeezed out under the pressure of budgetary constraints or necessary recovery activities.

Sir Kevan Collins – then Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation – wrote in 2015: “*We should teach the arts for their own sake – for the intrinsic value of learning creative skills and the enjoyment they bring.*”<sup>8</sup> However, as he had just explained, the report to which he had written the foreword found that “*the wider attainment gains*

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Parkes et al., *ISC Census 2023*, Independent Schools Council, May 2023. [https://www.isc.co.uk/media/9316/isc\\_census\\_2023\\_final.pdf](https://www.isc.co.uk/media/9316/isc_census_2023_final.pdf), 23, fig 32.

<sup>8</sup> Beng Huat See and Dimitra Koktsaki, *Impact of arts education on the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of school-aged children: A Review of evidence*, (Education Endowment Foundation: 2015), 3. [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Presentations/Publications/Arts\\_Education\\_Review.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Presentations/Publications/Arts_Education_Review.pdf)

*sometimes claimed for arts education are not as clear cut as we might like them to be...if the arts are to be taught as a means to boost academic achievement then teachers and schools need to evaluate carefully whether that aim is actually being delivered.”<sup>9</sup>*

Faced with this assessment – and the post-Covid need to focus on what does drive academic achievement – the danger of marginalising creative teaching is clear. The House of Lords Library assessed the number of teaching hours in state secondary schools across a series of subjects. This found that there had been a fall of almost 4,000 hours of music teaching in the three years between 2016 and 2019 (that is, before the pressures of Covid and cost-of-living), a fall of more than 1,500 hours in drama teaching, and a fall of more than 1,000 hours of art and design teaching.<sup>10</sup>



Beyond the undoubted moral and cultural case for arts education, there is an additional economic benefit to arts graduates, as a contributor to the UK’s creative industries. A House of Lords library report in 2021 stated that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) valued these creative industries at £115.9 billion in 2019 (before the effects of Covid), equating to 5.9% of the UK economy.<sup>11</sup> To support their future careers, young people should first experience high-quality opportunities while at school, and to ensure the widest possible access to the creative industries – these opportunities should be available to as many pupils as possible.

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<sup>9</sup> See and Koktsaki, *Impact of arts education*, 2.

[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Presentations/Publications/Arts Education Review.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Presentations/Publications/Arts_Education_Review.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Heather Evennett, “Arts education in secondary schools,” House of Lords Library, 02/06/21.

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/arts-education-in-secondary-schools/>

<sup>11</sup> Eren Waitzman, “Impact of government policy on the creative sector,” House of Lords Library, 28/10/21. <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/impact-of-government-policy-on-the-creative-sector/>

## *Current practice*

**St Alban's School** provided evidence to the Review of their partnership programmes – including their work on music and drama. Supported by St Alban's sixth formers, the music department runs music workshops in local primary schools that do not have specialist teachers or facilities. These sessions both allow children to explore music making, and link to other relevant subjects – such as maths and science for sound waves and acoustics. St Alban's drama partnership saw a Year 3 class from a local primary school working on the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* with support for A-Level drama students and teachers. The pupils covered the original score, complete with choreography and narration. As Covid restrictions didn't allow a large audience, the performance was filmed for sharing with parents.

**The King's School, Canterbury** provided evidence of their extensive partnership programme, including work through the **East Kent Schools Together ISSP**. The wide variety of work King's undertakes crosses across the three areas the Review is considering and makes it hard to pigeonhole them in a single area.

Of particular note to the Review, though, is their work expanding arts provision through facility sharing. As we note below, facility sharing alone is rarely enough to expand the curriculum. However, King's (and others) combine their specialist facilities with their staff expertise to offer partnerships that can expand partners' curriculum offerings. King's has supported GCSE art and photography, as well as GCSE and A-Level drama through offering facilities including kilns, a dark room, and the Malthouse Theatre. Teaching and non-teaching staff also help run projects for visiting students.

This is part of wider creative partnerships in East Kent Schools Together, including their 'Play in a Day', bringing a small number of pupils from across the partnership together to rehearse and perform a play in a single day – building enthusiasm for GCSE drama study, as well as collaborative and communication skills. We believe East Kent Schools together represents a powerful model for all schools seeking to enhance partnership working – combining multiple state and independent schools (as well as the local university) reduces any sense of dependence or patronage between schools and increases the mutual benefit that is vital for partnerships to be sustainable.

## **STEM**

### *Identifying the need*

In contrast to creative subjects, the subjects that make up STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) are clearly at the centre of curriculum and

accountability measures – they are required to achieve the EBacc (English Baccalaureate) measure of a broad education.

However, these subjects do face their own challenges – principally the lack of available specialist teachers. Each of these subjects – particularly at the highest levels – requires students to have access to specialist teachers and extension/practice opportunities in order to secure the best progression to higher education. Data from 2022 ITT (initial teacher training) recruitment shows the extent of this problem – only 54% of the target number of trainees were recruited in STEM subjects, including only 17% of the targeted physics teachers.<sup>12</sup>

In 2017, the Sutton Trust were already warning that a lack of specialist STEM teachers would affect university entrance, particularly for the disadvantaged: *“Shortages of specialist teachers also make it harder to offer able GCSE students access to all three science subjects – physics, chemistry and biology – which makes it unlikely they will study science A-levels or go on to study science at university. Only 13% of disadvantaged students took ‘triple science’ in 2013 compared to 30% of other students.”*<sup>13</sup>

This level of recruitment shortfall in STEM and MFL (amounting to more than 4,800 teachers this year alone) cannot, clearly, be resolved by independent schools alone. Nevertheless, schools can – through partnership – find ways to mitigate the effects of this shortage and provide more opportunities for expert-led STEM and languages learning.



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<sup>12</sup> Department for Education, *Initial Teacher Training Census: 2022/23*, 01/12/22. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/initial-teacher-training-census/2022-23#dataBlock-85b69273-a803-4985-8c29-8a922ab25491-tables>

<sup>13</sup> Dr Philip Kirby and Carl Cullinane, *Science Shortfall – Research Brief*, Sutton Trust: January 2017. [https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Science-shortfall\\_Press-Release.pdf](https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Science-shortfall_Press-Release.pdf); report here: [https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Science-shortfall\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Science-shortfall_FINAL.pdf)

## *Current practice*

**Oundle School** and the **Oundle, Peterborough and East Northamptonshire Learning Partnership** (OPEN partnership) also submitted to the Review, via their Deputy Head (Partnerships and Outreach), Gordon Montgomery. The OPEN partnership, a STEM partnership, is one of the largest among UK independent schools, working both with the maintained sector and universities – with more than 10,000 children and adults reached each year.

They stress the mutuality of the approach, and the OPEN partnership: *“aims to create a culture of ‘doing together’ rather than ‘doing for’, where all partners are respected for the skills that they bring whilst recognising that a large independent school like Oundle is in a position to offer considerable resource which underpins much of the activity.”*

They note that *“The areas in which our partnerships add most value tend to be those where there is a national shortage of expertise or where physical resources make a significant difference to quality of provision.”* Thus, a significant focus of their work is in STEM provision – where expert teaching is highly impactful and can be difficult to access. Sharing an approach with CfA, OPEN consider both how to enhance the STEM curriculum for current pupils and support teachers in long term development. OPEN partnership’s work includes:

- **A STEM Potential Programme** targeted at disadvantaged students with proven capability in STEM subjects. This includes academic support from Year 10 onwards, as well as support with university applications. It consists of Saturday sessions and a one-week summer school in Years 10 and 12 and is delivered in partnership with Imperial College London.
- **Physics teacher training:** recognising the significant proportion of non-specialist physics teachers, OPEN seeks to train one additional A-Level physics teacher per school, and two additional GCSE physics teachers per year for the schools in the partnership.
- **Maths mentoring:** led by senior pupils at Oundle, this provides maths extension activities for gifted mathematicians at a local primary school. Feedback shows that this has a significant positive impact on many pupils.

Reflecting on their partnership work, Oundle conclude that *“the activities undertaken have the hallmarks of local cooperatives where sharing of resources and expertise within an area is commonplace and expected – this could, and perhaps should, be the norm for cross-sector relationships.”* We would commend this approach wherever possible – for partnerships to become commonplace (without becoming unvalued). Indeed, we believe all kinds of school should consider a ‘partnerships first’ approach: forming partnerships

as a first response when they have identified gaps in their own curriculum, or strengths they could share with colleagues.

## **PE, resilience, and character**

### *Identifying the need*

Physical education is one of the most significant aspects of the curriculum – habits and interests acquired and developed at school can support fitness, health, and good mental health for a lifetime. All schools, therefore, should offer a wide range of sport and physical activity to ensure that as many children as possible can enjoy sport and form healthy habits. While PE is a compulsory aspect of the National Curriculum, there is no minimum time requirement. The Government has had an ambition for children to undertake 30 minutes of physical activity per day at school since 2019.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the National Curriculum notes that physical education is not just of benefit to children’s health and fitness, but that sport can “*build character and help to embed values such as fairness and respect.*”<sup>15</sup> This recognises that schools’ education should exceed curriculum subjects, and activities easily measured by league tables, and should form children into resilient young adults – able to navigate the world successfully and respectfully.



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<sup>14</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Education, and Department of Health and Social Care, *School Sport and Activity Action Plan*, July 2019, 8.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/848082/School\\_sport\\_and\\_activity\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/848082/School_sport_and_activity_action_plan.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Department for Education, *The national curriculum in England: Key stages 1 and 2 framework document*, September 2013, 198.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/425601/PRIMARY\\_national\\_curriculum.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425601/PRIMARY_national_curriculum.pdf)



Independent schools are renowned both for their sporting provision, and for their focus on character development, with a former Secretary of State for Education reportedly seeking to expand the attitudes of independent school pupils into state schools.<sup>16</sup>

In reality, independent schools neither judge success by the number of rugby players they have in the England team, nor seek to inculcate their pupils – or anyone else’s – with over-confidence. Instead, some schools have impressive facilities that can benefit a large number of state schools, but most can contribute in other realistic ways.

The Youth Sport Trust’s 2022 Annual Report found that *“PE has often been deprioritised in favour of other subjects, resulting in a reduction in PE hours taught over the past decade. PE time also reduces as a child progresses through secondary school.”*<sup>17</sup> The report also found cause for concern in the single statutory requirement of the PE curriculum – that children leaving primary school should be able to swim 25 metres: *“Prior to Covid-19, one in four children were unable to swim 25 metres by the end of primary school. As a result of the pandemic, lockdowns and restrictions, this is expected to increase to three in five children by the 2025-26 academic year.”*<sup>18</sup> As with other subjects where teaching hours have reduced, there is the potential for a wide range of independent schools to support a balanced sport curriculum, and support resilience and character development.

### *Current practice*

**St Alban’s School** provide partnerships focused on their sporting facilities, and they also submitted details of these to the Review. Recognising the community value of their facilities, they aim to share them as widely as possible – and curriculum enhancing partnerships are just one way of achieving this.

They focus particularly on the statutory water safety and swimming element of the National Curriculum, noting that *“this has been one area of the curriculum that has been challenging for primary schools especially post-Covid where the youngest children have not had the opportunity to have swimming lessons”*.

St Alban’s go beyond simply sharing their swimming facilities and have developed the partnership into a valuable curriculum support. Working with state school colleagues, they identify children who may not meet the 25-metre swimming target, and St Alban’s provides experienced coaches to support those pupils. Owing to the effects of Covid on swimming, this partnership has expanded with an additional coach and smaller group sizes to accommodate increased need.

The programme reaches approximately 360 local primary schools annually, with more than 2,500 pupils having benefitted since the programme began. Over that time, St

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<sup>16</sup> Rosemary Bennett, “All pupils will have chance of gaining public school swagger,” *Times*, Feb 07 2019. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/all-pupils-will-have-chance-of-gaining-public-school-swagger-xm5bpbw95d>

<sup>17</sup> Youth Sport Trust, *Annual Report 2022*, May 2022, 9.

<https://www.youthsporttrust.org/media/enwncbsg/yyst-pe-school-sport-report-2022.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p.7

Alban's has offered more than 700 hours in pool time, coaches' time, and support from the student volunteer lifeguards.

Beyond swimming, St Alban's have also developed other sports and character-building partnerships with local schools. A 'Fitness and Fun' session for local Year 4 classes builds teamwork, self-confidence, and self-knowledge – this has been reported as being particularly valuable for a class of 24 boys in a school with no male teacher, who were inspired by male teachers leading them at the event and encouraging them to do sport. St Alban's CCF (Combined Cadet Force) also have a partnership with a local secondary school, both to train cadets and adult volunteers – with the intention of setting up a Contingent in the secondary school in the future.

## Approaches to partnership working

**Monkton Combe's** evidence to the Review focused on the best structures and approaches for mutual partnerships. Significantly, they argued that questions such as "how can I help you?" and "how can we work together?" from schools did not always form the best partnerships. Instead, the independent school asking, "how can you help us?" establishes a relationship that is more balanced and symbiotic – an important basis for mutual partnership. Working with the Challenge Partners organisation has allowed them to be open about what they do and can offer – but also what they can learn, and what other schools can offer them.



Alongside this, Monkton is exploring with partner schools how pupils' wider achievements can be recognised – with aptitudes such as communication, digital fluency, and understanding data all being equally important parts of education alongside academic subjects. A framework has been designed collaboratively with other state and independent schools which allows these aptitudes to be assessed and (potentially) result in qualifications. This has directly grown from their partnership work and Challenge

Partners – and shows how relationships based on mutual support can develop new ways of supporting resilience and character education.

**Classics for All (CfA)**, a national charity that promotes the teaching of classical subjects in state primary and secondary schools submitted written evidence to the Review, dealing both with their specific work on classical education, and their conclusions from this about wider partnership practice.

Turning first to their work on classics, here, they are explicitly working to broaden the curriculum – finding that in 2010 (when they began their work) classical subjects were taught in only 25% of UK state schools but in 75% of independent schools. With this dynamic in place, partnerships between the independent and state sector are a powerful way to share practice and broaden curriculum across schools. CfA submitted numerous examples of these partnerships to the Review, including:

- The **North West Classics Network**, established in June 2019 to provide a network of experienced classics teachers to mentor and support new classics teachers from state schools, as well as facilitate additional classics teacher training places in state schools. The network now includes 12 independent schools and more than 35 state schools. The network provides support for both teachers and pupils, hosting sixth-form study days as well as moderation support for teachers and joint Oxbridge preparation. A state school teacher who has benefitted from the network writes: *“The liaison with Schools Direct teacher training programme is mutually beneficial and resulted in a successfully employed teacher. Lectures, competitions, and study days provide enrichment for our students and newsletters and email keep me connected to a regional network and alert me to resource and events.”*
- **Summer schools** hosted each August to provide intensive training for non-specialist state school teachers. Harrow School, and Dr Steven Kennedy (their head of Classics) have kindly hosted for 6 years, including a successful move to online study during Covid-19. This training has enabled at least 1 state school teacher to achieve an A-Level in Classical Greek, and others to offer Classical Greek either as an extra-curricular or exam subject in their schools.
- **Cross-sector exchanges and ‘Teach Meets’** have allowed informal and supportive sharing of teaching ideas between the state and independent sectors. Held first in person (such as at The Leys School, or Edgbaston High School for Girls in Birmingham), these became online during Covid-19 and remained an important way for teachers to mutually share expertise.

The full programme of partnership working across the country is a testament to the hard work of CfA, and the commitment of all state and independent schools involved. We say more below on the potential we believe this model has for all schools and languages.

Beyond their existing work, CfA also submitted their experience of the principles underpinning effective partnerships that expand the curriculum. In summary, these are:

- Avoid a ‘top down’ approach and ensure that work is driven by the needs of state schools.
- Acknowledge the specialist skills of both state and independent schoolteachers.

- Ensure the benefits of the partnership are evident to both independent and state schools.
- Encourage the development of sustainable provision rather than single events.
- Recognise the importance of Key Stages 2 and 3 in raising aspiration and levels of achievement.
- Target areas where there are gaps in provision, and where there is low attainment.
- Ensure that the impact of work of pupils and teachers is effectively evaluated.

These principles – derived from significant and successful partnership experience – echo other submissions to the Review. These principles are a good a guide to successful curriculum partnerships between state and independent schools, and we recommend them to schools.

## Conclusions

Our Review sought to establish how state and independent schools are already partnering to broaden curriculum experiences and provide access to specialist teaching in key curriculum areas. Then, from this, we have drawn out what works for curriculum partnership, what good work is going on, where there might be barriers to the most effective curriculum partnerships, and finally how curriculum partnerships can develop and serve a greater number of pupils in both state and independent schools.

We want to reiterate our thanks to all those who work in educational partnerships, and particularly those who submitted to this Review. We know that there is a considerable amount of partnership work undertaken between the state and independent schools – and we could only reflect a fraction of that here. For further consideration, we want to highlight the [Schools Together](#) website, which records more than 6,500 partnerships at the time of writing. In particular, this website hosts specialist reports on [music education](#) and [raising achievement](#) from practitioners in schools. In particular, the report on music education has a particular focus on how musical partnerships (and particularly simpler partnerships, such as joint choral performances) can start a relationship which leads to more and further joint working.

### *What works*

The common theme through the evidence submitted to us has been the sharing of specialisation. This has sometimes been through physical facilities or equipment, and sometimes through knowledge, experience, and teaching. In both instances, schools have identified their strengths and local needs, and found ways to help.

We believe that this is hugely important for curriculum partnerships. All schools – state or independent – seek to do the best for their pupils, with the resources available to them. Thus, where there is a gap in provision within a school, offers of specialist support through partnerships can make a difference.



When asked directly about how partnerships work best, respondents often came back to the need for mutuality in partnership working. We agree that, for a partnership to be sustainable, both partners must feel they mutually benefit from the activities. In particular, we want to highlight the submission from Gordon Montgomery at Oundle – who made the point that mutual benefit need not mean equal input, or output, from the partnership. It may mean *“recognising that a large independent school...is in a position to offer considerable resource which underpins much of the activity”*.

### *Where there are barriers*

All our respondents spoke positively about partnership working, and this Review was not an attempt to find fault. However, we believe two potential phenomena could limit the expansion of beneficial curriculum partnerships. Neither is wholly insurmountable – and the recommendations we make are aimed at mitigating these issues.

The first is the need for a positive, enduring, relationship for partnerships to form. Mutuality is so important for partnership precisely because it keeps all schools bought in to the partnership – but first acquiring this buy in can present a challenge. Issues cited included state school leaders (understandably) feeling too busy to engage with offers of partnership (which are necessarily unproven at this stage), and the potential for schools of similar age ranges and catchment areas to feel like competitors and to be reluctant to partner.

In both of these cases, we believe that third-party brokerage, and existing examples, have roles to play. There is already a large body of evidence for the value of partnerships – and evidence of the best way to structure them. If and where school leaders are too busy with

their own contexts to be able to engage with this evidence base, there should be resources from the Department for Education and others to simplify the process.

The second limitation we found was a lack of capacity or capability to assist via partnership. A large number of partnerships the Review encountered were between a senior independent school and multiple state primary schools. This is understandable – senior independent schools can be expected to be the better resourced, and state primary schools can be expected to most need specialist teachers for the subjects we reviewed. However, in questioning, it was suggested that there can be problems forming partnerships between schools of the same phase. At the same time, there were few instances of independent prep schools engaged in curriculum expansion partnerships.

With regard to senior schools partnering, we make the same recommendations as above in regard to advice and brokerage. With regard to including independent prep schools in curriculum partnership, we expect that there would be more limited capacity for them to engage – but not no capacity. There is clearly an appetite for partnerships among state primary schools – and thus we recommend that all schools consider partnerships as a first response to curriculum needs and/or possession of a specialism. Rather than waiting to be asked, or to form the right relationship, both state and independent schools should be candid about what they can offer and what they seek.

### *Further development and recommendations*

There is clearly much goodwill from independent schools – and much receptiveness from state schools – for partnerships that expand the curriculum offering. This is extremely positive, and we must be clear that all our recommendations are simply to build upon the hard work already taking place, and to ensure as many schools as possible can access the power of curriculum partnerships to enhance children’s education. In order to do this, we recommend:

1. That Department for Education **encourage the further development of independent-state school partnerships**, through efforts to encourage and broker partnerships, and seed funding to encourage the beginning of partnerships in high-priority areas (e.g., in Education Investment Areas).
2. This should include **a brokerage body to support busy school leaders** in establishing partnerships – they should not only advertise partnership opportunities but help co-ordinate partnerships until they become established. The body will require the **support and endorsement of the Department** and should already be a part of the education landscape. Multi-academy trusts, or educational charities, should be considered.
3. That the Department for Education **issue guidance to all schools, advising them to consider independent-state school partnerships** when they seek support to fulfil curriculum duties.

4. That the Department for Education pays particular attention partnerships between senior schools and **encourages multi-academy trusts to form whole-group partnerships** with appropriate independent schools, or groups of independent schools.
5. That schools – of all types – **consider partnerships as a first response to the need to expand the subjects they offer** – and all generously consider how they could partner with local colleagues to spread opportunity.
6. That the Department for Education **work to encourage the formation of formal Independent-State School Partnership (ISSP) groups**, and that independent schools, state schools, and other educational bodies collaborate to create ISSPs. Recognising that this approach is not appropriate in every instance, **we encourage all schools to consider measures to make their partnerships sustainable and mutually beneficial.**

The collective theme behind these recommendations is what we have found to work best – open engagement with schools using their specialisms to support others’ needs. If schools are supported in this by regular encouragement from the Department for Education, and from all those who offer improvement advice to schools, then we are confident that the number of beneficial partnerships will grow.

Additionally, for those schools concerned that they cannot alone make a significant difference, we encourage them to consider group partnership programmes – particularly formal ISSPs. We believe that these will allow a wider range of schools, including independent prep schools, to make efforts appropriate to their size and capacity.

Finally, we hope that this Review has encouraged heads, governors, and leaders to consider partnership working themselves. As encouragement to this, we want to repeat the principles from the submission of Classics for All:

- Avoid a ‘top down’ approach and ensure that work is driven by the needs of state schools.
- Acknowledge the specialist skills of both state and independent school teachers.
- Ensure the benefits of the partnership are evident to both independent and state schools.
- Encourage the development of sustainable provision rather than single events
- Recognise the importance of Key Stages 2 and 3 in raising aspiration and levels of achievement
- Target areas where there are gaps in provision, and where there is low attainment.
- Ensure that the impact of work of pupils and teachers is effectively evaluated.

We hope that these principles are reflected in Department for Education guidance and endorse them as the best starting advice for any school leader seeking to enhance the curriculum through partnership.

