

# News & Views

# 88 · SPRING 2024

## ‘We have difficult days ahead but...’



### Revd Anthony Buckley

Revd Anthony Buckley is a former School Chaplain at Alleyn's and is currently Vicar of St Michael at the North Gate Church, Oxford, and also Chaplain at Hertford College, Oxford. His TISCA email is: chaplain@tisca.org.uk

TISCA is delighted to announce that Revd Anthony Buckley is our new part-time member of the team. Anthony will be looking after school chaplains linked to TISCA. Here he shares a few thoughts as he begins this new role.

“We have some difficult days ahead,” said Martin Luther King, in what turned out to be his final speech.

School Chaplaincy has always been a challenge. As in all mission, we operate in a context which may not be entirely favourable. Our society is at present at odds















The TISCA 'three As' Team! Anthony, Alastair and Alix (in 'TISCA HQ' in Redditch)

# Coming up in this edition

- Chaplains
- Heads
- Parents
- Staff
- Governors
- Pupils
- Supporters

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## TISCA Communications

-  [www.tisca.org.uk](http://www.tisca.org.uk) Updated regularly and includes job vacancies (let us have these), events, news...
-  **07702 950730** TISCA phone number
-  [gensec@tisca.org.uk](mailto:gensec@tisca.org.uk)  
We send out regular updates, resources, forms, etc. — let us have your email address if you are happy to be kept in contact this way
-  [eepurl.com/gZPPBL](http://eepurl.com/gZPPBL)  
e-TNV monthly newsletter signup using this url
-  **Chaplains' WhatsApp group**  
Now has nearly 60 members: sharing news, prayer requests, events, speakers, resources and a weekly 'thought'. If you'd like to join, please contact Alastair or Alix.
-  **Heads' WhatsApp group**  
Has over 30 members. Details from Alastair or Alix
-  **Governors' WhatsApp group**  
Over 20 members and looking to grow. Details from Alastair or Alix
-  **Senior Leaders' WhatsApp group**  
New and for HODs, Deputies, Year heads, etc.
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-  **TISCA The Independent Schools Christian Alliance**  
Follow us on LinkedIn
-  **Comments and feedback** on publications, events, our platforms welcomed



*TISCA Trustees (photo taken at the Annual Conference, 2022)*

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- **Revd Jim Houghton**, Chaplain and Head of Spanish, Eltham College
- **Revd Andy Hutchinson**, Head of Chaplaincy, Monkton Combe School
- **Mrs Frankie Knight** (Chair, General Purposes Committee)
- **Mr Ray Maher**, Bursar, King Edward VI School, Southampton (not in photo)
- **Revd Alice Monaghan**, Associate Chaplain, Dean Close School, Cheltenham
- **Mrs Lizzy Nesbitt**, Head, Emmanuel School, Oxford
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- **Mrs Emma Taylor**, Warden, The Dean Close Foundation, Cheltenham
- **Mrs Joanna Wright**, Head, King Edward's School, Witley

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- Revd Hugh Palmer
- Nick Pollard
- Sir Gary Streeter MP

### Previous General Secretaries

Ken Barnes (1995–1998), Revd Michael Hepworth (1998–2002), Mark Greenstock (2002–2006), Hugh Bradby (2006–2019)

## ‘We have difficult days ahead but...’

continued

with Christian teaching in many areas. The Church of England, of which many of us are part, is in danger of coming apart. There is also the pressure and occasional intensity of school life.

But King would not have us despair. He continues, “But I am not fearing any man.... Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” We note the two connected themes as he draws to the end of his address. If we have our eyes on the glory of God, then there is no need to be afraid.

We are likely to have several fears, internal and external, personal and public, but as we look to Christ, so many can begin to fade, and it is then easier to see the joyful side of chaplaincy life. The appreciation of pupils, parents and staff; the reminder that the work we are

about will, by the grace of God, touch lives for ever. The camaraderie and community. Chaplaincy is a great role to be in, and there is so much for which to be thankful.

It is a great honour to begin this role of “Chaplain to the Chaplains” and I look forward to meeting and chatting to many. Please do let me know if a coffee, call or a pray (or all three) would ever be of interest. You will soon discover that I often quote Luther King, Elvis, C S Lewis and J R R Tolkien – Let’s leave the last quotation to him:

*“There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach.”*

May our eyes indeed see the glory of the coming of the Lord, and may we be strengthened and encouraged for all that lies ahead.

## TISCA news

### Chaplains

- **Revd Elizabeth York** (Loughborough Schools) has moved into university chaplaincy
- **Mrs Marie Hobbs** has taken up a new post as Chaplain at Rendcomb College, Gloucestershire
- **Revd Ryan Venn-Dunn** has taken up post as Chaplain at Mill Hill
- **Revd Becky Taylor** has taken up post as Chaplain at Berkhamsted
- **Revd Sam Erlandson** has taken up post as Chaplain at St David’s College
- **Revd Ian Gulland** is now Chaplain at Dean Close and **Revd Alice Monaghan** is Associate Chaplain
- **Revd Tandy Ruoff** has taken up post as Chaplain at West Buckland
- **Jonny Goodchild** has taken up the post of Chaplain at KES, Southampton



Alix and Alastair visit Kingham Hill School and meet Head, Pete Last, and Deputy Head, Magnus Eyles ; Alix with Hannah Hidden (Chaplain) and Peter Harris (Head) at Birkdale School

### Heads

- **Nic Anderson** has been appointed Head at Wolverhampton Grammar
- **Thomas Garnier (Head at Pangbourne)** steps down at the end of this year after 18 years in post
- **Andy Pilkington** is the new Head at Castle Court Prep
- **Sam Godsen** moves on as Head at Dolphin School after the end of this year
- **Richard Naylor** is the new Principal at Hebron School, India

### Schools

- We are delighted to welcome into new (or renewed) membership **West Buckland School and Francis Holland Regents Park**
- **Norman Patterson (Bursar at Luckley House)** has retired but remains as a TISCA trustee and Treasurer

### TISCA

- As noted elsewhere, we are delighted to announce **Revd Anthony Buckley’s** appointment as part-time TISCA Chaplain and note that **Revd Alex Aldous** takes up the Interim Chair role

# TISCA

## regional and online meetings in the Autumn Term 2023

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters

### Alix Stockwell and Alastair Reid



Martin Davy at Bradfield

Our Regional Meeting programme kicked off with Bradfield College and their speaker was **Martin Davy**.

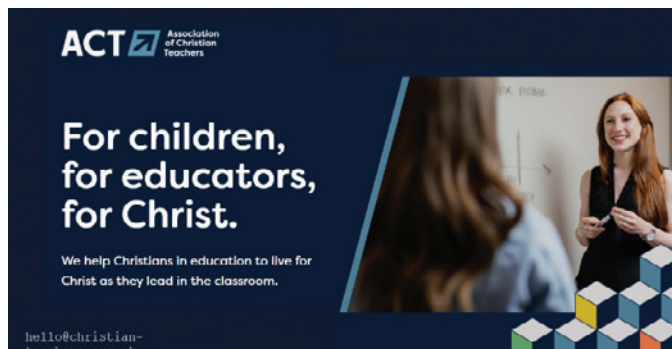
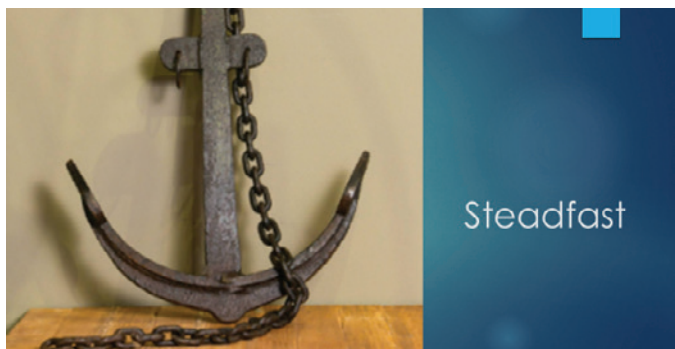
He is the vicar of Theale and the ODEF co-ordinator for Berkshire and he talked about the model they have with Bradfield to employ an Assistant Chaplain based part-time at Bradfield and the other half in parish as the Community Chaplain. This arrangement, for three years initially between parish and independent school, is unique (they think) within the Church of England and they'd welcome conversations about how this is worked out practically in terms of funding, times, allocation of resources etc. Do contact Bradfield's Chaplain Rev Dr Peter Hansell on phansell@bradfieldcollege.org.uk.



Delegates in discussion at the Birkdale regional meeting

Our 'north' regional meeting in November 2023 in Sheffield at Birkdale School, one of our Foundation members, saw 12 staff and governors gather from schools in Sheffield through to York. **Lizzie Harewood**, EO of ACT (Association of Christian Teachers), gave an excellent presentation on remaining steadfast in the storms of change around us.

She focused us on 1 Thessalonians 1 (and especially v.3: 'remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ' ESV). Lizzie cautioned us over **three obstacles** to remaining steadfast in our faith: the inner struggles within our hearts (like with



Illustrations from the ACT led regional meeting

toothpaste squeezed out of a tube, it can be difficult to hold in what's not helpful); our innate desire for control (are we willing to delegate well in our schools?); and, succumbing to alternative narratives (the cultural pressure today to look within ourselves and to trust our feelings). She then went on to encourage us with **three keys to sustaining steadfastness**: firstly, being anchored in Jesus's love and His steadfast presence (like an anchor holds a ship steady); secondly, by remembering that steadfastness isn't normally showcased in comfort (as Corrie Ten Boom wrote, the strength of a ship's anchor is only seen in the power of a storm); and, thirdly, stay connected to the sources that provide stability (such as regular quiet times, meeting with other Christians, praying as we walk round our schools and joining in with home groups as much as we can where 'the ministry of showing up' is a great encouragement in itself).

Our Autumn Term evening online meeting was led by **Phil Knox**, evangelist and missiologist (and world record five-a-side footballer) with the Evangelical Alliance (EA).

Some 25 gathered from across the UK (and India) and listened to Phil as he referred to some of the findings in his book, 'The best of friends'. Phil reminded us that God in Genesis said *'It is not good for man to be alone'* (Gen. 2:18) and that **friendship is 'outrageously good for us'**. In a lonely world, friendship has never been needed more – and it's in schools (second only to the workplace) where friends are often forged for life. We were encouraged to consider **three principles**: firstly, pursue a depth of friendship with a few (and model ourselves on Jesus who had three 'great' friends, twelve 'good' friends); secondly, to consider having some friends who are different from us – and so break down cultural, age and political divides; and, thirdly, we should involve God more in who we spend time with. Connections with others are amazing but let's not neglect the Great Connector!

**A TISCA evening with...**  
**Phil Knox**  
 (Evangelical Alliance / Author - The Best of Friends)

**Wed 22 Nov**  
**19.45-21.00**

**TISCA** | The Independent Schools Christian Alliance



# Senior Prefects' Leadership Training Day

## 28th September 2023

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



**Alastair Reid**  
TISCA General Secretary

We were hosted by Malvern College for the first time for our annual training day for school prefects. This proved to be an excellent venue with plenty of space in the Gryphon Room, lots of outdoor areas for the team building exercises and wonderful fare from the catering team.

Over 50 pupils attended in person from six schools – Bloxham, Broadway Academy, Dean Close, Kingham Hill, Malvern College and Oswestry School – with two joining online (Monkton Combe in Bath and Hebron School in India). David Ibbotson, Malvern's Chaplain, challenged us to consider the practicalities of servant leadership, whilst Malvern's Head, Keith Metcalfe, had us considering conflict resolution. James Mears, a teacher at Dean Close and a leader of 'Salmon Swimming', outlined the 'five voices' of leadership. Assistant Chaplain, Adam Wharton, set up six team building tasks on the nearby cricket outfield.

It was a vibrant day with everyone mixed up across the schools into six teams. From the pupil feedback we received the following comments:

- Very educational and informative; helps you find your true leadership style, and has numerous discussions on various matters allowing you to have different methods to deal with predicaments with less difficulty.
- An interesting and in depth day covering almost everything you need to know to be a good leader
- It was a lovely opportunity to meet other students of our age who are in similar roles - a chance to discuss and reflect on the duties we have been appointed to as well as how to be efficient and best ways to make the most of our potential – the day helped to highlight some qualities we should all be keeping in mind

We are very grateful to Malvern for hosting the day.



Sorting out the qualities of a good leader



Keith Metcalfe joining in with discussion



Team building task

# TISCA Governors' Gathering

## What should Governors know about inspection?

Heads   Governors   Supporters



**Alastair Reid**  
TISCA General Secretary

TISCA held its first Governors' Gathering in October 2023 and we were wonderfully hosted by Thomas Garnier (Head) and Neil Jeffers (Chaplain) at Pangbourne College. Some 22 Governors gathered and, in the event, we could have filled more spaces thus challenging us to consider arranging more such meetings.

**Claire Osborn**, a Reporting Inspector with ISI, brought us up-to-date with the changes **to the new framework for inspections**. At the heart of the new framework lies the wellbeing of pupils: how can we as Governors (and staff, of course), actively promote pupil wellbeing? Claire challenged us to ask key questions when we visit our schools (such as 'what do I notice?', 'why does it matter?', 'does the evidence fit?' and 'what more do I need to know?'). We need to consider if school might be a negative experience for a few children and, if so, what might we do to help. As Claire reminded us, Jesus was very good at working with those on the margins of society.

Claire also encouraged us to consider carefully the **strengths and weaknesses of our schools**: it's not enough to know the policies and complete the paperwork; we might, for example, want to meet with the SENDCo, to undertake 'learning walks' and to assess the risk factors around our sites, aims expressed on noticeboards and in social media. We need to ask, 'how is my school teaching RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) and how is this being worked out beyond the classroom?' Above all, and especially relevant for schools with a faith perspective, 'do the values

*expounded by my school allow every pupil to flourish?*  
How might a Muslim pupil experience, for example, experience life in a school with a clear Christian ethos?



*Claire Osborn, ISI reporting inspector and Group Education Principal of the Oak-Tree Group of Schools*

Our next presentation was from **Norman Patterson**, a TISCA Trustee and Bursar at Luckley House School. Norman is also actively engaged in ISI inspections as a Team Inspector. He gave us timely advice about the **key relationship between Governors, and the Chair in particular, and members of the Senior Team**, especially the Head and the Bursar. These were Norman's key points:

- **Division of roles:** the governors' role is strategic and have oversight in a non-executive way ('eyes on and hands off' as AGBIS would advise)
- **Private Time in Governors' meetings:** keep this to a minimum as it can cause senior leaders great anxiety – and it's vital to 'feedback' quickly to Heads and Bursars

- **Faith and action:** it's vital that authentic relationships are built, and especially between the Chair and the Head. Go off site occasionally, enjoy a meal together and learn something about the Head's family and interests. Eugene Peterson's book, 'The Jesus Way', was recommended. *Jesus called them together and said: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...**Not so with you**"* (Matthew 20:25-26, my emphasis) Above all, we must be good listeners.

Norman concluded by reminding us that the Christian ethos of the school must be nurtured primarily by the Head (and thus this is a key consideration in new appointments), that we work in schools and not churches and so can't expect all in the school community to share our faith, and that we face some current threats: VAT, the loss of business rate relief and opportunities or threats through acquisitions and mergers. Above all we must, '*...do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus...*' (Col.3:17)



Norman Patterson, an ISI inspector, Bursar of Luckley House and TISCA trustee

Our concluding presentation and pre-dinner devotion, was offered by **Thomas Garnier**, the long-standing Head at Pangbourne College. Thomas referred us to Exodus 18:13-24. This is where Moses is visited by his father-in-law, Jethro, who brings to him **eight Cs of 'good governance'** – all the more telling in the light of the recent report by RS Academics, '*The New Art of Headship*' (Oct 2023) – something Governors should also read! Here is a brief summary of Thomas' points:

1. **Challenge** (vs 14-17): '*why do you...?*' – it's sometimes very helpful to challenge practice
2. **Caring** (vs 18, 22): '*You will wear yourself out*' – we need to listen and be truly interested
3. **Counsel** (vs 19, 21-22): '*I will give you some advice*' – done professionally and appropriately
4. **Competence** (v 21): '*But select capable..*' men and women – consider diversity of skills, thought, culture, etc. and look at the RS Academics' summary of the key skills Heads need now
5. **Character** (v 21): '*...who fear God...trustworthy... hate dishonest gain...*' – it's very hard maintaining a school's Christian ethos if there are no Christian governors! Such governors must be bold to make a difference.
6. **Compliance** (v 20): '*Teach them his decrees and instructions...*' – monitor and evaluate
7. **Complaints** (v 22): '*...bring every difficult case to you...*' – Christian governors can bring compassion, integrity and prayer to school life, even though it's time consuming to serve well
8. **Confidence** (v 23): '*If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain...*' – good leaders will endure and the school will flourish

Thomas' eight Cs clearly apply to good governance but they also challenge each one of us in our relationships in daily life – and let's not forget two other Cs: be **Compassionate** and **Come to Him** for all our needs.



Thomas Garnier, Head at Pangbourne College

# School mergers and acquisitions – with a Christian ethos...some top tips

Heads

Governors



**Alastair Reid**  
TISCA General Secretary

TISCA hosted two online one-hour webinars in January 2024 in response to a request at our Governors' Gathering in October 2023 for some guidance around schools with a Christian ethos being faced with a merger, an acquisition or even the prospect of closure. Economic pressures, which may well intensify if VAT is added to school fees, together with secular pressures, are likely to hasten the squeeze on small schools, in particular, over the next few years.

Here is a summary of some of the key points from the webinars which were kindly led by Antony Spencer (CEO of Mill Hill) and Emma Taylor (Warden of Dean Close) – both TISCA trustees and with considerable experience of growing school 'families'.

Main options for schools:

- A merger with another school (s) either as the senior or junior partner, occasionally as equal partners
- A sale to a for-profit operator (e.g. Inspired Education) which may be foreign owned (China seems popular), some of which have large 'war chests' for purchases
- Purchasing smaller schools and joining them to the 'senior' partner

**A charity merger** – a relatively common occurrence within the UK independent sector and definitely to be considered:

- Some governing bodies are leaving it too late to plan such a contingency and the Christian ethos may be neglected...be faithful to a school's Christian ethos wherever possible!
- Permission is not needed from the Charity Commission but you will need approval from the DfE (and this is usually quite swift – a month or so) – and do look at the charity's deeds, especially the 'dissolution clause' as this will indicate the school's ethos clearly
- 12 Top tips:
  - Must be in accordance with your charitable objectives
  - Allow 6-9 months for the process
  - Be clear collectively with Governors on what's



*Antony Spencer, CEO of the Mill Hill Foundation; Cobham Hall, one of several schools merged with Mill Hill; Emma Taylor, Warden of the Dean Close Foundation*

meant by your Christian ethos (and thus probably good to have a strategy day on this)

- Draw up a potential partner list in advance: include the Christian element and consider geography (if remaining local, about one-hour drive time is a rule), the financial state of the other school, its educational ethos (etc.)
- Do all this now even if there is no immediate problem
- Have a 'plan B' in case the merger doesn't work
- Consider 'why' you are doing this (e.g. finances, the need for boarders, facilities' improvements...)
- Take great care over the other schools' 'heart', traditions, history
- Draw up some FAQs in advance: consider what current parents and prospectives will ask
- Be sensitive if the senior partner's chaplaincy is going to oversee the junior partner school – don't go in too strongly! Have a pastoral AND a business 'head'
- Have your internal teams ready (marketing, HR, finances...)
- Have a clear timetable of what's to be done and when

And finally...consider the opportunities that come with a larger group of schools: not only finances and resources but Gospel possibilities, too.

Many have made the move into being a school chaplain from various different areas of work and ministry. TISCA Trustee, Frankie Knight, asked a few new chaplains in TISCA-linked schools why they decided it was the job for them and their reflections so far.

# Making the move into Chaplaincy

Chaplains

Supporters



## Sam Erlandson

Chaplain at St David's College, Llandudno, Wales

### What were you doing before becoming a school chaplain?

I was a parish priest for just over ten years serving mainly in the Wrexham area and then most recently in Llandudno and the surrounding area. Before I was ordained, I was a primary school teacher.

### Why did you make the change to chaplaincy?

Because of my previous qualifications and training, teaching and school's ministry has always been on my heart. Even as a parish priest, I leant heavily towards my local schools and youth/children's work. When this

opportunity at St David's College in Llandudno became available, I really felt God was nudging me to test it.

### One reflection so far?

The most difficult yet most exciting thing so far is the congregation I am now preaching to. In parish ministry the preacher is preaching largely to a congregation of people who consider themselves Christian and who want to be there. Now, I am preaching largely to a group of people who would not necessarily call themselves Christian and who mostly would rather not be there. That is a heck of a challenge, but it is invigorating and an amazing opportunity.



## Becky Taylor

Chaplain at Berkhamsted School

### What were you doing before becoming a school chaplain?

I was a curate at St Paul's Church in Dorking, and before that I was a Geography teacher and a youth worker.

### Why did you make the change to chaplaincy?

My RE teacher at school was one of the key people who helped me grow in my faith as a teenager. She gave me the space to ask big questions; was always ready to listen; and encouraged me as I stepped out in sharing my faith. Through her witness I came to see the importance of schools' ministry. Over the past ten years, I've become increasingly aware of how significant our teenage years are. During my curacy I got to know several families with teenage children and as I chatted with them about the challenges of being a Christian in school today, I sensed God might be calling me back into schools' ministry.

### One reflection so far?

There was moment in my first half-term which demonstrated the wonderful opportunities of school chaplaincy. One of our chaplaincy team did a talk in Chapel on 'Aiming High': he said we can only 'aim high' if we know we're safe to fail. He then spoke of the unconditional love God has shown us in Jesus. That afternoon I was helping with a year 7 team-building activity on a high ropes course. It was my turn to climb the tower, so I tied in my harness and began climbing, with some year 7 boys belaying me from below. As I got half-way up the tower, I paused to look down and one of the boys shouted out to me: 'It's ok, Miss, you can aim high because you're safe to fail! We've got you!' In that moment, I laughed! But I was also deeply encouraged that he'd been listening in chapel and I could be there in the afternoon to chat with him.



## Ian Gulland

Chaplain of the Dean Close Foundation, Cheltenham

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### What were you doing before becoming a school chaplain?

I was Rector of Padstow and previously I was involved in leading churches elsewhere in Cornwall. Before being ordained, I worked in a variety of industries, most recently the public sector.

### Why did you make the change to chaplaincy?

There are two interlinked reasons: a call to reach the next generation and a recognition that my own children are those next generation (so aligning work, ministry and family life).

### One reflection so far?

It has been so encouraging to be around young people who are genuinely keen to explore faith. Within my first four weeks I baptised a 14 year old boy who became a Christian through CU (his best friend helped officiate in the pool), met with a L6th girl who wanted to become a Christian (encouraged by her friends), and was approached by several 5th Form boys who wanted to run an Alpha course for their friends.

Amidst the busyness, challenges of community, and need to re-tool for apologetics, these moments of grace and movement of the Spirit are so encouraging (Matt 9.38). There's also so much going on in our prep schools. Honestly, I think the children are the best evangelists and we are so indebted to the faithful staff for encouraging and nurturing them; we have a fab team.



## Tom Hutchings

Chaplain at Kingham Hill School, Oxfordshire

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### What were you doing before becoming a school chaplain?

I moved to Kingham Hill School from an Associate Minister role in a city centre church, having been a teacher before training for ordained ministry.

### Why did you make the change to chaplaincy?

The opportunity to share the gospel and life with young people really are enormous. Having done and then overseen youth work in busy churches, I can honestly say that I see more of each pupil here than I would have done of members of our church groups in years. And

any church youth worker would be overjoyed to have anything like the relationship with young people who don't follow Jesus that chaplains can have.

### One reflection so far?

It's hard work and I never quite know what I'll be doing next (from Rugby to Latin) but whatever I am doing I am free to proclaim Christ in it, and not many can say that!

*Do you know anyone considering school chaplaincy? TISCA would be happy to help them think things through. Contact Revd Anthony Buckley at [chaplain@tisca.org.uk](mailto:chaplain@tisca.org.uk) to start the conversation.*

We asked Andrew Lewer, MP, the Chair of the All Parliamentary Group for independent education, and a friend of TISCA, to reflect on how he has seen pressure build on schools and on people of faith today.

# ‘Be strong and of a good courage’ as Christians in society today get on their bikes!

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



## Andrew Lewer MBE

MP for Northampton South – and a former MEP

“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” (Deuteronomy, 31:6)

The Michaela School in Wembley, much praised by those who value rigor and structure in education and one of the most successful schools in the country, has been in the headlines of late. It has been burdened by a Legal Aid funded (that is to say, unwillingly funded by the taxes of my constituents funded) challenge about its secular approach to education in a part of London that is multi-faith but especially heavily Muslim. Additionally, we have Islamists threatening to close a primary school in Leyton and the horrendous and ongoing experience of a teacher at the hands of Islamists at a school in Batley, West Yorkshire. Alongside this, and in apparent and bewildering contrast, there are threats to teachers and to schools from those with a radical gender ideology as well. The challenges these situations, clearly on the rise, present to British society and to Christians in particular are profound.

As an MP they are important to me in that wider sense, but they also present challenges to me as a Christian. They have me asking the question about the role of Christianity in modern British society and whether secularism, more precisely the concept of ‘laïcité’ (so important to French society in particular but relevant here) is enough protection? One could see opportunities for the creation and growth of Christian independent schools from these growing controversies and threats perhaps, but we need to look more widely than that. It leads one to ponder whether the absence of sufficiently active faith in British society within the Judeo-Christian tradition is simply a matter of regret on

a personal / faith community level or whether it has even broader implications for our future.

The very concept of western societies being based within a Judeo-Christian framework is now more contentious in the UK than it once was. Mrs Thatcher said: “The truths of the Judaic-Christian tradition,



Alix, Andrew and Alastair at Westminster Hall

Andrew Lewer with Alex Aldous (TISCA Interim Chair) at the TISCA Annual Conference in 2023



Andrew Lewer speaking at the TISCA Annual Conference, June 2023



are infinitely precious, not only, as I believe, because they are true, but also because they provide the moral impulse which alone can lead to that peace, in the true meaning of the word, for which we all long." She said this - as a serving Prime Minister - in 1988. I would not only suggest that a British Prime Minister saying this in 2024 is almost unimaginable, but that the reasons why this is should be a cause of profound reflection and indeed regret.

I frame my thoughts with the quotation from Deuteronomy because it is increasingly clear to me that both retaining a Judeo-Christian framework to our society (within which those of all faiths and none are welcome and secure) and proclaiming our faith and living it openly and seeking its blessings for others does now require more 'good courage' than has been the case for several centuries.

My father gave my son a working model of a bicycle for Christmas. It is a beautiful thing but looking at it makes me feel guilty for not using my bicycle in this cold weather! However, it also led me to imagine someone coasting along on a bicycle with their feet on the handlebars instead of on the pedals. It feels fine for a while, but then the wobbles begin and then there is a rapid and unwanted change of course and probably a crash. It is a vision of society relaxing into thinking that its laws, conventions and protections look after themselves and do not need any effort to sustain. It is a vision for me as a Christian to reflect that pedalling is required to keep a personal faith alive but also to work for it more publicly, too.

As someone who is now in their twenty first year of elected office, I have never hidden my faith and I do not think I have ever been embarrassed by it. However, I have been inspired to 'pedal my bicycle' in a much more open fashion by the strong Christian example of a number of newer political colleagues: Miriam Cates MP and Nick

Fletcher MP in particular, although others too. I will never forget Nick's Maiden Speech which concluded, "I believe Christ is the greatest role model anyone can have"; I was in awe of him for it.

Since then and thus fortified I have pitched into such controversies as defending silent prayer in public places and defending women's rights rooted in biological facts. I have done so not in a 'I am with you' fashion but much more front-and-centre. It is not comfortable, but that such issues should even be contentious illustrates the need to step up. The National Prayer Breakfast held in Westminster Hall every year reveals that there are a substantial number of Christian MPs, but initially I was surprised that there were so many. That surprise leads me to a view that the need for Christians in politics to not only have faith but to express it more vocally and visibly is going to become ever more imperative.

Within teaching it seems that to "be strong and of a good courage" in standing up for Christian values is now often needed too. Prevailing trends make the Voltaire inspired quotation about disagreeing with you but defending your right to say it much less secure than was once the case. There is a playbook of first picking off those with views that are poorly expressed or seen as offending against 'protected characteristics', then comes a quiet reference as to why it would be best not to defend that person 'because there is more to it than meets the eye' and also 'inappropriate to comment while a live investigation is taking place'. Christians have to speak up for and defend one another as never before. We are not the default position that we once were in British society.

It is why I think TISCA is so precious and why I am so inspired by those of its meetings I have been privileged to be invited to. What solace having other Christian teaching colleagues to share with - and have solidarity with - brings!



# Out of the mouths of babies and infants (Psalm 8:2)...The Pupil Voice in school

Heads

Staff

Governors



**Chris Wheeler**

Principal of Monkton Combe School

More and more, schools have been seeking ways to ensure that we follow in the footsteps of Jesus: let the children come to us and strive not just to teach but also to learn from them.

With the new inspection framework giving ever greater focus to the power of pupil voice, we took some time to evaluate what more we could do both to hear and to listen to that song at Monkton.

Of course most of us probably have pupil surveys, pastoral questionnaires and regular forum discussions with pupils, let alone the regular informal feedback of boarding houses and tutor meetings. Trying to get a full picture of specific issues is a different question, however, and although we knew what we wanted to ask, we didn't have a mechanism by which to ask it.

In seeking to do more to hear our pupils' perspective, last term we identified key questions - some areas we thought we did well, some we thought we needed to work on - and asked one question of the whole school each week. The idea was that with only one question it would only take a few seconds to complete and pupils would focus on each specific issue.

I launched it in Principal's assembly, emphasising the importance of using your voice in order to be heard. Questions varied from the quality of relationships between teachers and pupils (97% positive) to the school's approach to EDI, Equality Diversity Inclusion

(70% positive). With only one question each week, I was able to give detailed feedback in every subsequent assembly, including percentages and quotations (with permission) from the responses. We allowed responses to be anonymous but encouraged pupils to give their names in order to allow us to respond directly to individuals with strong or valuable perspectives.

During the term, engagement rose from 60% to 90% and the number of pupils who chose to give their name and allowed us to use quotations in feedback also increased as the season went on. The implied increase in trust here was an unexpected bonus and was born, I surmised, from the open feedback being offered each week, sharing breakdowns of results by house and year group as well as summarising responses and action plans which the responses provoked.

The process was not always easy or painless - feedback never is - but in seeking to hear and demonstrate we were listening, we gathered detailed insight into the pupils' perspectives on a range of important issues. That commentary in turn fed into development plans so we are now acting on what we heard. Not only did trust in the school increase but we took real strides in modelling a culture that is kind not nice. After all, Jesus didn't go into the temple and comment on the lovely turtle doves; he turned over the tables and demanded we do better. And when we look hard enough at what we are doing, we always can.



Chris Wheeler with pupils

# Three Things to Know about Gen Z...

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



## Clare Williams

Clare Williams is a speaker and tutor at OCCA The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. Her work focuses upon questions of race, justice and culture, and what the Christian message has to offer these contested issues. Prior to her work in apologetics, she was an English teacher in London secondary schools for ten years. Clare has a degree in English Language and Literature from Oxford University, and Masters in Leadership (2012) and Culture, Diaspora and Ethnicity (2021) from the University of London.

### 1. They are digital natives

Also known as Zoomers or iGen, young people have grown up with smart phones and other devices at their fingertips. Information and entertainment are always available, which has both a positive and negative impact. On one hand, Gen Z is able to hear a diverse range of views about the latest fashion trends to geopolitics. And yet, they can also fall prey to views which sound true but aren't. Confident speech, a swanky background and a podcast microphone can often be mistaken for sound arguments.



### 2. Gen Z is a justice-conscious generation

Growing up amidst economic instability, a pandemic, political unrest and the war in Ukraine, young people like Marcus Rashford (child food poverty) and Greta Thunberg (climate change) are examples of Gen Z taking issues of justice seriously but also with a hint of cynicism toward traditional institutions. In the words of Jean Twenge, "*Gen Z was less likely to use the words 'class, status, nation, religious, or spiritual' and more likely to use the words 'stressful, relatable, gender identity, free, true, honest, fake, cancel, ghost, block, fam, and squad'.* This is Gen Z in a nutshell: concerned with authenticity, confronting free speech issues, pushing the norms of gender, and struggling with mental health. With the generation dominating the young adult group in the 2020s, Gen Z is demanding our attention."

### 3. They are open to spirituality

From 'witchtok' and burning sage to vibrations and manifestations, Gen Z has a penchant for exploring the

supernatural. This is unlike Gen X or Millennials before them who took to the charms of New Atheism, although this is beginning to change (Brierley 2023). However, according to the Scripture Union 95 Campaign, 95% of young people have no connection to a church, yet they are open to the idea of Jesus. The Talking Jesus Report also revealed that only 49% of young people aged 18-24 "*believe in the historicity of Jesus. When we work with younger generations we need to talk about Jesus as a historical figure*".

These 3 features of Gen Z provide a fresh challenge to presenting the Christian faith as both intellectually credible and existentially satisfying.

#### Sources

- Scripture Union 95 Campaign (2018)
- Generations (2023) by Jean M Twenge, PhD
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-63403467>
- The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God: Why New Atheism Grew Old and Secular Thinkers Are Considering Christianity Again (2023)
- Talking Jesus Report (2022)
- Youth apologetics: <https://www.rebootglobal.org/>

It's vital that the focus of schools, not least in the area of Christian witness, goes beyond the school gates. Most independent schools are also charities and work for 'public benefit'. Here one of our Chaplains, a regular on the weekly prayer zoom, describes how his school strives to reach beyond the classroom..

# School and Community

Chaplains

Heads

Governors



**Revd Ian Morris**

Chaplain at Bishop's Stortford College

## Reaching out beyond the school gate

Independent schools can easily be misrepresented by their local communities. Even before our students do anything at all, our neighbours will make assumptions about us simply because we are the private school – ours are the children born with silver spoons in their mouths who live a bubbled existence away from the harshness of reality in gilded cages. Moreover, because we are in a competitive market, we feed these assumptions in our publicity by promoting images of picture perfect happy, flourishing pupils. It is no wonder that our neighbours can be resentful and a school's reputation can falter on an unsubstantiated rumour or the slightest misdemeanour.

Consequently, independent schools have to work hard to cultivate their standing among those for whom the school is either beyond their reach or just irrelevant. In Jesus we have a role model who brought together both rich and poor, the outcast and the in-crowd and as chaplains we have a key role in developing our school's

engagement with its local community and contributing to the work of colleagues responsible for promoting those aspects of school life that tick the "Public Good" box of ISI.

At my own school I am involved in heading up four strands that seek to entwine the College and local community: Charity Days, Senior Citizens Christmas Party, Voluntary work and Lent Lectures. I find it useful at the start of each year to map out the who, what and when these will take place and build them into the school calendar so that community involvement is viewed as part of the school's ethos.

## Charity Days

Throughout the year each of our schools will hold charity days for chosen charities, many of which are part of our locality. Moreover, at the start of each academic year we hold a "Whole College Charity Day" in which all three schools raise awareness of and funds for a local charity. This day will usually involve cross campus assemblies featuring speakers from the charity and a whole College event which draws together everyone from the school community to take part, such as gathering together to sing, do a dance or even strike a pose for a drone photo.

## Senior Citizens Christmas Party

A much-enjoyed occasion of the year is hosting a Christmas party for local senior citizens. Letters are sent to local day centres just before half term asking them to save the date, then invitations issued in November. Appeals are made to staff to help with transport, or work with children making table decorations, quiz rounds, wrapping gifts and providing musical entertainment. Each House is then asked to provide volunteers on the day who will act as "meeters and greeters", table buddies and servers. Although it's a lot of work at a busy time of term, everyone involved benefits as young and old share stories and cross the generation gap.



*Bishop's Stortford College Memorial Hall*

## Voluntary Work

In addition to the voluntary work undertaken by those participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, we are committed to supporting the amazing work done by the Whitechapel Mission. We share with them produce from Harvest Festival and in return they give our 6th Form students the opportunity to participate in their Breakfast Challenge. On five Sundays through the year, we ensure that teams from all of our Houses are given the opportunity to get up at silly o'clock to prepare, cook and serve breakfast to the homeless. It is an absolute delight to see the transformation in our students who are initially a little apprehensive engaging with the Mission's guests but by the end of the session are confidently conversing with those who live on the 'wrong side' of the road. Many of those who participate talk about the profound effect it has on them, and some go on to do further voluntary work with the Mission.

## Lent Lectures

Whilst it is customary for chaplains to invite guest speakers to come to their schools to talk to the students, a lecture or series of lectures is an opportunity to welcome not only members of the school community but to also invite members of the local community. I am now in my third season of organising these events and I have to admit that it pushes me out of my comfort zone and lays heavy on my heart as one hopes and prays that the expectations of the invited speakers, the school and local community are met.

I am not someone who has friends in high places and so have used social media to message people who I think would be suitable. There's quite a thrill in receiving a response from someone you've seen on the telly or YouTube or heard on a podcast who you have asked to speak at your school. The process starts in the summer term so by the time the new school year starts in September I can go to the Head and SLT and put before them those I've pencilled in and the topics on which they are going to speak.

Whilst we want to host engaging individuals discussing important issues, it is imperative to secure the support of your school who will be very much aware that contentious content may be used to damage its reputation. Legal advice may well warn a school to steer clear of any issues that may be viewed by some as being 'phobic' or harmful, but guidance from government (Political impartiality in Schools. February 2022) and the legal duties set out in Part 2 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 give clear guidelines.

So if you do plan to include a "hot topic" then there is a case to stand your ground and persuade SLT that the speaker has a right to put forward their religious belief as long as it does not contravene the PREVENT criteria.

Alternatively, the school may see that a more palatable way is to hold a debate, inviting opposing parties to put forward their views on the same evening. From the school's perspective, balance is maintained as one view is not being seen to be preferred to another.

Having secured your speakers and topics, the hard work of securing an audience begins. Unless you work in a boarding school, one is aware that you will be asking day pupils to return to school later that evening so promotion within school needs to be on a par with promotion to the local community. Use assemblies, lessons and newsletters to appeal to your own and work alongside your school's marketing department – they are best placed to come up with creative poster designs, social media posts and website updates. Consider also writing an article for your local paper and provide publicity material as it gives one an opportunity to cast your net widely and attract those who would not see social media posts.

Contacting local school Heads or appropriate Heads of Department as well as local church leaders is a great starting point. By explaining to relevant Heads of Department in local schools as well as your own how the lectures tie in with GCSE & A Level courses – all schools will if they are able, take advantage of free opportunities that might help students pass their exams, plus it gives students who may be indifferent to the issue on a personal level, an academic reason to come and listen. Moreover, ask parents and colleagues who attend local churches to be your advocates – asking them to give a notice in their church about the lectures is more likely to raise people's interest than simply sending emails or literature to the church secretary.

Each year I have given the lecture series an overarching theme that not only gives you a strap line but it gives your speaker a perspective from which they can address the issue you want discussed. This year the overarching theme for our talks is "Reality: Authentic or Augmented?" and have asked the speakers to help us explore whether the issues that are addressed are just fabrications of the mind or authentic reality.

The joy and responsibility of school chaplains is to embrace all that life has to offer. Providing opportunities for seeds to be sown and bridges to be built is hard work but well worth the effort, even if its rewards are not revealed until much later.

I am not an expert on these matters, nor have a huge amount of experience, but am happy to share what I've learnt along the way should anyone like to consider reaching out beyond their school community to the locals who around us. Contact me at: [ian.morris@bishopsstortfordcollege.org](mailto:ian.morris@bishopsstortfordcollege.org) (and if this publication goes out before or during this series of lectures, please pray!)

# Why I love summer camps!

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



**Revd Phil Jack**  
Chaplain, Canford School

It has been my joy to serve at summer ‘camps’\* for at least one week for the past 28 years, and, before that, to go away with my church each year on our church holiday. Whether going as a young person or as a volunteer, I have found them to be spiritually refreshing, lots of fun and a place where friendship and fellowship flourish.

Fundamentally, they are great for the young people whom they are primarily aimed at. My three sons, now in their late teens/twenties, have been so blessed by different camps they have been on. Last year, my eldest son spent four weeks of his uni holidays at four different camps, he loves them so much. For those from Christian homes, it gives the chance to find Christian peers which they might be lacking at school or youth group, as well as providing healthy role models in young (and older) enthusiastic leaders who share the gospel and their life with them. For those new to the Christian faith, it gives an opportunity to explore, ask questions and hear the

gospel message explained clearly and faithfully each day, whilst having an amazing holiday full of excellent sport or activities.

Over the past ten years of school chaplaincy, I have been thankful for the ministry of summer camps, both personally and in the lives of pupils who have come along. Personally, they have given an annual dose of renewed energy and zeal for chaplaincy, reminding me of why it is worth sowing the seed of the Word week by week at school where often you don’t see the fruit. It is not always easy to encourage pupils along to camps, and I wish that more would go because of the impact they have. I have found our parents’ prayer meeting a great place to start as they catch the vision, sign their children up, and then encourage invitations to go out to their friends. Do get involved and pray that others go with you!

*\* Nb The term ‘camp’ originates from a time when holidays would have been under canvas, but often they are held in boarding schools or other outdoor centres.*



A CIS (Christians in Sport) ‘Sports Plus’ summer camp



Phil Jack as a cricket coach – with a CIS camp leader

# Christian Higher Education in the UK: Selden College

Heads

Governors

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## Dr Timothy Edwards

Academic Dean and Professor at New Saint Andrew's College, Idaho, USA

What is education for? The number of Christian primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom continues to increase as believers engage with that question. But what about higher education? What might a vision for degree-level Christian education look like?

### What are the Contours of a Christian Education?

Christian education acknowledges there is one triune God who created the world from nothing and has made himself known to us specifically through Christ, as revealed in Holy Scripture, and generally through creation. Christian education, therefore, seeks to train the next generation to *know this triune God and seek to understand all things in relation to Him*.

Christian educators give careful attention to educational content (God and all things in relation to Him). They understand that *knowing God* involves the formation of the person, not simply the acquisition of qualifications. And as creatures, they understand education as a gift that should be marked by gratitude and joy.



Photo by Naomi Hutchinson downloaded from Unsplash

### A Christian College?

It is just such a vision for education that built some of this country's oldest and most esteemed institutions of higher education. Oxford's motto, *Dominus illuminatio mea* (the Lord is my light), is a testimony to this heritage. However, the past 200 years has seen a departure from this vision, resulting in an education which is subject to the whims of every passing ideology. Modern education has sidelined God and removed Him to the 'safe space' of personal belief. It is time to recover our forefathers' vision for a thoroughly Christian higher education. This recovery lies behind plans for Selden College; a thoroughly Christian, in-person, Liberal Arts university-level institution.

### Selden College?

Selden College will exist to *graduate faithful Christian men and women who are prepared to act justly, skilfully and magnanimously in each and every office, private and public, in peace and war*. Such a mission encapsulates a vision for Christian higher education that serves the purposes of God for family, church, and nation, rather than simply providing a qualification for individual advancement. To fulfill this mission and provide such an education, Selden College will be an institution built around three interrelated principles:

- The worship of God;
- The promotion of Christian virtue; and
- The advancement of learning.

### Like to Know More?

Reach out personally to Dr Timothy Edwards at [tedwards@seldencollege.co.uk](mailto:tedwards@seldencollege.co.uk); sign up for updates at [seldencollege.co.uk](https://seldencollege.co.uk). July 2024 Summer school details available here.

Many TISCA schools take on gap year students (either pre-university or post-university graduates) to assist in a variety of ways over a term, a semester or a year. TISCA carries a list of a number of such opportunities. Here one of our members, Dickon Baird (Deputy Head at Westbrook Hay) sets out his top tips.

# Four Top Tips to supporting Gap Students and Graduate Tutors

Heads Staff



## Dickon Baird

Dickon Baird has been working in Prep Schools since 2006. He is currently the Deputy Head at Westbrook Hay, a coeducational independent Prep School with 360 pupils from 3 to 13 years, where he is responsible for day to day running of the school as well as taking a lead on all pastoral matters. Prior to moving to Hertfordshire, he spent seven years at Cheltenham College Prep School as Head of Boarding and Head of History. He has been involved in the recruitment and line management of Gap Students and Graduate Tutors since 2017.

My first proper experience of Gap Students was as a pupil at Dean Close Prep School.

At the time, I was a child of resident staff and was in awe of the 18 year olds who came for a year to live in the school; supporting lessons, coaching sport and assisting in the Boarding House. When I finished school, I was desperate to get out and see the world... of education! I wanted to do the same as I had seen countless Gap Students do before me and successfully applied for a role at Windlesham House School. It was an amazing year and this cemented my desire to continue to work in schools, so much so that after leaving Cardiff University, with a BA in Ancient and Medieval History, I accepted a position as a Graduate Tutor at Junior King's School Canterbury! Again, this was a hugely rewarding experience and I was fortunate to be offered the opportunity to complete the Graduate Teacher Programme with Qualified Teacher Status at the school through Canterbury Christ Church University. Undoubtedly these formative years provided me with an excellent platform with which to start my prep school teaching career. With this in mind, please see below 'four top tips' for supporting Gaps and Grads:

## 1. Warm Welcome

If your Gaps are from the southern hemisphere, it will be drastically colder in the UK than their home climates and a warm welcome (in more ways than one!) will probably be necessary! If you are able to meet them off their flight or be the first person to welcome them to your school, this can help put them at ease and let them know you are already invested in their arrival. On my first evening

as a Gap, I was invited round to the Head of Maths' house to meet his family and watch an England Football Match, this generosity has always stuck with me and I have sought to do the same. It was wonderful to be able to return the favour and employ the Head of Maths' son as a Gap at Westbrook Hay last year!

## 2. Regular Rendezvous

Having a regular meeting time, either once a week, half term or termly, can help to build positive relationships and give the Gaps and Grads a voice. Schools are always busy and it is not always easy to find time to meet but it is worthwhile and appreciated. As Houseparents, we would always have the Gaps and Grads round for pizza on the Sunday before the Boarders returned to school after an exeat (home weekend) or half term break. It was great to catch up and hear what everyone had been up to, as well as discuss the next few weeks and answer any of their questions.



*With former Gaps in Sydney, from 2010 to 2018 and representing 3 different schools*

### 3. Personalised Programme

If you have multiple Gaps and Grads, it is easy for them to inherit one of their predecessors' timetables. Anything to save time is obviously beneficial and some duties will need to be completed regardless of who it is done by. However, if you are able to tailor the timetables to the individual, either through their CV or interview, you are likely to get an instant return on your investment! To be able to use their interests, gifts and talents is a great opportunity to get the best out of your Gaps and Grads. Equally, at the end of the term or part way through the year, it is worthwhile reviewing their commitments and you might find that one person's redundant responsibility is another person's desirable duty!

### 4. Keep in Touch

It has been great to keep in touch with Gaps and Grads after they have returned home. I am hugely grateful for the relationships I made pre and post university in prep schools, I am still in contact with colleagues from Windlesham and get a half termly invite to the staff 'Curry Night' in Canterbury! Sometimes relationships with Gaps and Grads have led to siblings and other extended family members following in their footsteps!

We had an incredible holiday to Australia in 2019 and, as well as staying with the parents of a Gap for a few days in the Blue Mountains, we had a lovely time in Sydney meeting up with various Gaps we had worked with over the years. At the end of last term, we said goodbye to a Maternity Cover Teacher, who was a Gap with us in Cheltenham before qualifying and joining Westbrook Hay for a year. Our two children each have a former Gap as one of their Godparents and they will continue to be a big part of our lives as a family, as they were when working with us.

For those of you reading this piece who are involved in Gap and Grad recruitment and line management, I am sure that most of the above will not come as a surprise but hopefully will reaffirm what you are already doing. It is sometimes hard being a Gap or Grad, as well as knowing how best to support them. While they are colleagues, they are also making some of their first steps into the world of work and need nurturing. However, as I felt on that first night as a Gap being invited into someone else's home, you cannot go far wrong by following the commandment to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. This simple act of kindness has had a profound impact on my journey as an educator but also as a human.



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**£500**  
Standard cost £1000pw

## Exciting multi-media lesson for your students!



**GSUSLIVE.CO.UK**

An interactive classroom-based learning experience consistent with the requirements for the statutory provision of RE/RME/RVE for key stage 3 students. GSUS Live helps secondary school students explore the themes of fear, forgiveness and rejection through the teachings of Jesus.



In November 2018, the Headmaster of Stowe wrote this in a 'Daily Telegraph' article: 'We must reinvent education to prepare children for the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI)'. A parent later asked him what he was going to do 'to deal with the problem of AI', to which he replied: 'We're going to embrace it and teach our children to become experts in it'. In this article, the first of a series we plan for TNV, Adam Graber takes a look at AI from a biblical standpoint and encourages us to consider some of its opportunities, whilst being aware of potential pitfalls.

# Stewarding AI

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



## Adam Graber

@AdamGraber co-hosts the Device & Virtue podcast. He consults on Digital Theology for FaithTech, Leadership Network, and the British and Foreign Bible Society. He's written for *Christianity Today*, the *Lausanne Movement*, *The Bulwark*, *Relevant*, *Christ & Pop Culture*, and others. He's appeared in *The New York Times*, on podcasts, and on radio.

If a Christian asks ChatGPT, "How should the biblical concept of rewards influence my choices as a Christian?" what kind of response should they expect? Will the AI celebrate such rewards? Will it ridicule them? Or will it simply describe them without colour commentary?

In April 2023, researchers reported that GPT-3—the engine behind ChatGPT—generated responses that tended to echo the dominant US public opinion. If this is the case, how will these systems influence Christian beliefs and attitudes? If Christians use generative AI systems to explore Scripture and learn the Christian faith, what kind of faith will they develop?

Closer to home, if students use ChatGPT to compose an essay about biblical rewards, how might the system shape students' opinions? Or anyone's opinions for that matter? This is what the researchers were trying to answer: Would the AI systems change users' opinions in the process? In short, yes.

When writers composed essays using GPT-3, the research found they "were more likely to support the

[AI] model's opinion" afterward. In fact, their AI-aligned opinions persisted "in a later attitude survey." The researchers concluded, "The opinion shifts in the survey suggest that the differences in written opinion were associated with a shift in personal attitudes."

Many have voiced concerns about "AI bias," but the effect goes deeper than that. Simply using these systems draws our attention—like a loud noise does—toward some things and away from other things. Our concern about "AI bias" itself serves as an example.

As Christian leaders beat the drum about "AI bias," Christians everywhere will become more focused on determining "who is right" and "who is wrong." Over and over, they will say, "Truth matters above all."

The soundbyte sounds right until we encounter Bible passages like Ephesians 4:15 and John 13:34. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul doesn't place the truth "above all" but instead tempers it with love. Elsewhere, he said it more poetically: without love, we are only clanging cymbals (1 Cor 13:1). And Jesus of course, in John 13:34, says the greatest commandment is love. Love for both our neighbours (Mark 12:31) and our enemies (Matt 5:44).

Emphasizing truth to the exclusion of love is not what God calls his people to. But if we are ruled by fear of AI bias, we risk overemphasizing truth while overlooking love. Truth without love is like walking around with one eye open. We need two eyes for adequate depth perception.

A third way AI influences us is by enabling users to create mashups. One early user asked ChatGPT to provide instructions for removing a peanut butter sandwich from a VCR using the language of the King James Bible. The result was entertaining and fun, but the underlying belief is that "anything can relate to



Illustration generated using AI

anything.” By contrast, Genesis 1-2 shows that there is an order to the world. Relationships are meant to reflect a pattern God designed. It’s a world in which we count others more significant than ourselves (Phil 2:3). Instead of following the world’s relational pattern, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). In God’s world, AI systems are fitted to human values and virtues.

While AI systems currently have many pitfalls to beware of, Christian leaders need not fear these systems. Rather, as Christians, we must learn to steward AI well. Stewarding AI includes identifying its pitfalls and building guardrails that will protect users (Deut 22:8). Stewardship includes modelling healthy relationships to AI systems by subjecting them to human norms and

values. And stewardship includes stepping back and seeing a broader perspective, so that AI might find its role in the world without usurping our own.

### PS – a couple of ‘top tips for AI’

- Be wary for using AI to help write Biblical content – let it help you structure/shape your study but remember it isn’t reliable for these things.
- See where it can be used to make efficiencies in your work e.g. helping you manage your diary, filter your inbox or give you starters for topics and titles in any of your writing and work and teaching

# How do we know what the pupils are thinking?

## Pupil participation and involvement in Christian Schools. From a regional meeting talk.

Chaplains   Heads   Staff   Governors



### Revd Roger Leake

former Head of Leehurst Swan School and current governor at St David’s College, Llandudno. Roger is also a former ISI inspector

### Why bother with finding out or listening to the pupils voice?

1. **Because we want to be listening to pupils as Jesus listened to others** – both those he agreed with and those he disagreed with. Pastoral care comes with listening. If we are to witness to Jesus we need to know where the pupils are starting from.
2. **Because of inspections** - remembering that Educational quality inspections focus on the outcomes for pupils in terms of their achievement and in their personal development. Inspectors may not see the importance of biblical teaching or Christian ethos in comparison to personal views.
3. **Because of Parents** - Parents want to know that the teachers are listening to their child. They will judge a school by this and will rapidly complain if they feel their child is not listened to.



Delegates at the TISCA annual conference consider the pupil voice



4. **Because it is good for them!** *"Listening to children and young people empowers them, builds their resources and develops their skills and their knowledge".* (C of E Love Matters 2023). It helps children become more resilient and furthers their trust in adults who may help them.

## **So, what are the problems? Surely it is self-evident that schools need to listen to pupils, take into account their views and seek to develop them and their faith?**

### **1. Things are not what they used to be!**

Schools can no longer assume that parents sending their children to be educated at a school with Christian values, want Christianity for their children. In many cases they want the education but wish to discard the Christian faith.

### **2. Christianity is counter cultural**

At its best Christianity was always counter cultural as seen in, for example, the abolition of slavery, the provision of orphanages for destitute children, the foundation of the Hospice movement and even the opening of private estates to the public. They changed the social order and helped improve lives for so many. There was a general acceptance that community and society functioned best when Christian morals and perspectives were brought into play. Schools, among others, taught the need to contribute to society, play according to the rules and work together, all within a Christian understanding. That has largely gone. We have lost the community and contribution to society part. Volunteering is at an all-time low in this country for either faith based or secular organisations. People are now outwardly suspicious of Christian ideals and faith. Certainty brings the charges of fanaticism. The traditional morals of sex and marriage, and identity are regarded as antiquated, restrictive and at complete

odds with how society really works. The CofE report – Love matters April 2023 reported, "Pressure, especially on young people, to engage in sexual intercourse, often before either partner has considered the implications, has encouraged a belief that sex is simply a leisure activity, rather than an expression of love in a committed relationship. This highlights a huge shift in cultural expectations of marriage as the primary setting for sexual intimacy and commitment, to marriage being just one setting among others for intimate sexual relationships and raising children".

Never has there been a time in recent memory, when Christianity at the personal level is regarded as unnecessary, irrelevant and downright dangerous. These are the waters in which our pupils swim.

### **3. Individualism rules**

As Christianity has declined a new religion has grown up largely unchallenged in our midst: the religion of expressive individualism: it is your right to be yourself, to satisfy your desires and if you wish, help others especially if it makes you feel good. You can change the world if you only believe in yourself. Self-belief is more important than belief in anything else. Long gone has consideration of Sin and individual pride (as a sin) and of course, judgement by God.

We may even reinforce these values in the way we teach subjects in school. We engage in critical thinking and individualised learning.

We encourage pupils to be free thinking, exploring individuals and then wonder why they do not accept Christian teaching, or the authority of an invisible God.

### **4. Misunderstanding Christianity**

As we know, many parents and others think that Christianity is all about being "nice", to ourselves and our neighbours. It is all about love! Love is all you need. There is no judgement, sacrifice, self-denial, morality or fear of God. Most translations of the bible do even contain the word "nice"

## **The consequences**

Several Christian schools have been heavily criticised for their personal development provision, because they have not given enough voice to minorities or dissenting voices in their pupil body. Specifically, schools have been accused of not paying enough attention to dissenting pupil voices.

Legally, the pupils are not allowed to dissent against law and order, or in favour of terrorism or acts of violence but they are allowed to dissent against the Christian ethos and (some) biblical standards.

A Senior Christian Boarding school with a strong biblical tradition was heavily criticised for not including

the views of a minority of LGBT pupils and building their self-esteem in the teaching.

Several independent Christian day schools have been criticised for not paying sufficient attention to their pupil's world views. Their Christian worship and religious celebrations are thought to have divided the school community and by not celebrating other religious festivals.

From a recent inspection report on a Christian School with a registered faith ethos:

*The program of Chapel services and assemblies has been restructured. It now distinguishes between the school's promotion of the Christian faith and the promotion of secular values and practices, as required by regulations. Therefore, it now meets the standard.*

The message is clear; to meet the standard you must promote secular values!

## So how do schools promote Christianity, and a Christian ethos and retain compliance? Two things are clear:

Separation of Christian and secular. It should be clear what is Christian teaching and values and that which is not (secular), so pupils can decide for themselves what they wish to believe.

We need to listen and respond to the pupil voice. This can be done in a number of ways both formal such as: having a pupil participation policy, surveying the pupils, using the Pupil council, Food committee, and other groups of pupils to get feedback. The prefects or more senior pupils should pass on comments and a question / suggestion box in a central place in school may also help. The staff should inform discussion from form times and record all the answers.

You may wish to experiment with a self-choice assembly/ chapel for a period of time providing alternatives for those pupils who do not want Christian



Roger Leake (with Betty) and Alastair Reid (with Bernard) – rescued from an ISA Heads' conference in times past!

worship, prayer and thought whilst still providing for those that do.

Informal consultation comes from asking pupils what they think without having a set committee for example, when waiting at lunch or in an evening in boarding house. Listen to other members of staff who have a pastoral heart.

## What do you do next?

How do you respond? Not every voice is valid, or every request is able to be granted. We are adults and they do not yet have a full understanding of the world. *“When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am an adult, I have no more use for childish ways. What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face-to-face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete—as complete as God’s knowledge of me.”* 1 Corinthians 13:11-13

You need to filter out those views which are destructive of the Christian ethos and seek how best to inform and counteract them. You need to be very aware of youth culture and driving forces in their minds. What happens in the world and social media? What are they talking about?

Jesus met with much opposition during his ministry from those who did not believe in one God (Pilate and the Romans) through to those who thought themselves so religious that only keeping the law in every detail would give salvation. His approach to this ignorance and opposition is interesting and worth studying if we are to offer a truly Christian response in schools to the thoughts and views of our pupils.

Jesus provides gradual reasoning and setting the right values. For example, John 4: The woman at the well in Samaria. The old Samaritan point of dissent about where the Jews should worship is dismissed as being irrelevant in the times to come. The important point about salvation is made.

On other occasions Jesus denounces hypocrisy and double thinking, especially by the Pharisees and the respectable Jews. Matthew 23: 27 *“How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look fine on the outside but are full of bones and decaying corpses on the inside”.* That's not very “nice!”

Sometimes Jesus uses parables as the meaning only becomes clear through thought and application. And perhaps on occasions, the disciples telling people what Jesus has told them the parable means.

**Never underestimate the power of teaching about Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. The more you teach about Jesus, the more the Holy Spirit convicts and leads pupils to another dimension.**

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# Being Salt & Light - in school!

Chaplains Staff



**Graham Wright**  
Chaplain at Gordon's School

I remember starting at a new school with the usual apprehension and anxiety about how things would work. There was a more pressing concern - what kind of witness would I be and how could I winsomely commend the Good News to staff, students and parents alike?

A local bishop came to visit soon after I started and, in a quiet aside, told me that there was a member of SMT doing a great job of being 'salt and light' in the school. The comment, I soon discovered, was spot-on. Being salt and light in our schools is part of our calling. Good salt takes time to permeate, flavour and preserve. Light illuminates the darkness and brings clarity. Both aspects of our witness are important. We are called to patiently and slowly work good things into the school culture whilst shining as lights by living in the right way and serving others. This, Jesus said, would cause them 'to glorify your Father in heaven.'

What does 'salt and light' living look like in practice? Though mundane, being consistently smiley and friendly is a great start. It's a door opener for deeper things. Being an encourager, rather than a moaner, is a wonderful witness and gift to a school community. Authenticity is essential. Young people are particularly

shrewd when it comes to sniffing out anything spurious. Acts of loving kindness, especially when they go beyond the call of duty or are unexpected, speak volumes. Handwritten notes are always appreciated, showing support and concern, or to say thank you. Language, whether spoken or written, is a sign of who and what we are, and what we represent. Gracious and considered words are a precious, and increasingly rare, commodity. These things shine light and work good vibes into our schools and help make way for good news conversations

After a number of warm chats with a Deputy Head, they unexpectedly asked if I would do the Alpha course with them, one-to-one. Another staff member often talked to me about faith and Christ when we met, incidentally, on the quad. Young people love to be noticed and to have an adult take a genuine interest in them. As we support them and build trust, opportunities arise to raise spiritual questions and to speak of the Lord. I think of one sixth former, new to the school, who asked me a question after chapel one morning which led to a number of valuable 'good news' conversations.

Effective witnessing in school may be seen as the spreading of salt and light every day whilst looking out for the best moment to speak more intentionally about the good news. It's a long game, so don't give up!



Gordon's School, Woking

# Why explore Bible Stories outdoors?

Staff



**Sue Thomson**

Educational Resources Consultant | Scottish Bible Society



When we go outdoors, we discover a learning environment where children's creativity and imagination is unleashed.

A precariously balanced tower of loose parts might become Mount Sinai or the answer to 'What do you think is the most important part of the story?' might be created from the free resources nature provides. Intricate detail is provided by berries or tiny sticks; the shapes of leaves are considered as limbs and are added to pictures of people or animals; there are smiles of delight as previously unspotted colours in nature are found and bring the picture to life. Taking our learning outdoors provides space to be active. We might play games to help embed the story or consider the characters, race to collect sequencing cards or move around as we hear or act out the story using our outdoor places as the scenery and props.

Amongst the laughter, the movement and the creativity, the children discuss and question the story, gaining insight and sharing their views. Going outdoors is fun and makes the story and the learning memorable. We want children to associate hearing a Bible story with enjoyment and interest, so that they want to hear more,

and learning outdoors helps make that happen.

Outdoor learning ideas are a key feature of **The Must Know Bible Stories resources** produced by the Scottish Bible Society. They have been written to make RME teaching easy, relevant and engaging for nursery and primary school teachers (no matter their previous Bible knowledge). They're free to download and use, and although they're written with Scottish Schools in mind (and therefore include links to the Scottish curriculum) they're applicable to all settings. The resources include an introduction to the Bible story for teachers; lesson plans; PowerPoints with beautiful images to help tell the story; play-based learning ideas for younger children and Story Trails which include codes, puzzles and challenges - another way to help children explore the Bible story outdoors.

<https://www.scottishbiblesociety.org/resources/schools>

<https://www.scottishbiblesociety.org/rme-days>

[Sue.thomson@scottishbiblesociety.org](mailto:Sue.thomson@scottishbiblesociety.org)

#### Social media links:

<https://www.facebook.com/storiesworthexp>

<https://twitter.com/storiesworthexp>



*Sue Thomson teaching primary children outdoors*



*Primary children in Scotland learning from 'Ten Bible Stories' outdoors (Photos from the Scottish Bible Society)*





# Introducing FoeFace!

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Participation is free for schools and is led by qualified educators at Fer, ensuring a safe and enriching experience for participants.

If your school is interested in joining us in the Summer Term 2024, please contact project leader Jen Logan at [hello@ferproduction.com](mailto:hello@ferproduction.com).



FoeFace has been designed by educators and artists at Fer Production — a charity that creates initial experiences of Christian faith through contemporary art and creative practices for emerging generations.

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# Bright The Vision

## Public School Missions from the Victorian Age (Edited by Malcolm Tozer)

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters

**Peter LeRoy**

former Head of Monkton Combe Prep School

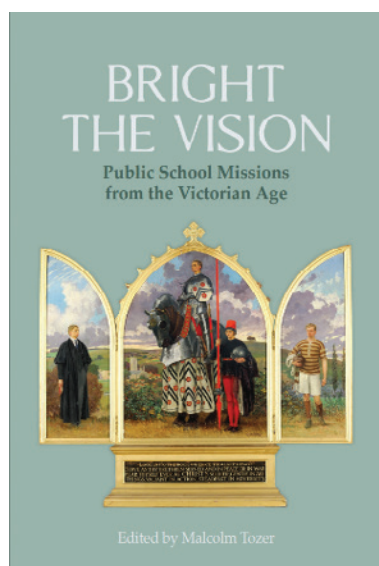
This wide-ranging and well-researched book provides a fascinating insight into the Christian impetus and practical outcome of the vision of Edward Thring, formative Headmaster of Uppingham School.

He encouraged his privileged boys to grasp the appalling conditions of the urban poor and to help them through donations and direct action. By founding the first public school mission in 1870 in London's East End, he set in motion a movement involving the 22 public schools covered by the insightful articles and illustrations in this illuminating book.

The practical action, moral imperatives, clerical leadership, and 'muscular Christianity' that shaped this development propelled a spate of church and club building in overcrowded neighbourhoods with desperate needs. These missions developed in varying ways, shaped by local conditions and changing political, social, and Christian viewpoints. Evangelism faded and few outlasted the 1960's; but a handful have morphed into bases for community service.

Two introductory articles provide informative contextual insights and Malcolm Tozer is a fully informed editor and guide. Do our schools today enable our pupils to address the material and spiritual needs of the disadvantaged?

*PS Some may argue that this book has little to do with the Welfare State of today. However, as Malcolm Tozer (the editor) has written in the 'Church Times': It is, though, the effects of secularisation which trouble the Bishop of Worcester. In his closing epilogue, he expresses the hope that this collection "will promote reflection which might lead to a renewal of Christian faith, ethos and values in the schools featured in this volume. Without the single golden thread of faith, the whole fabric may unravel; with that thread it will strengthen."*



### **BRIGHT THE VISION** Public School Missions from the Victorian Age - Edited by Malcolm Tozer

Published by SUNNYREST BOOKS, October 2023  
583 pages, 188 illustrations, 2 maps,  
bibliographies, footnotes, index



# Book Reviews

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

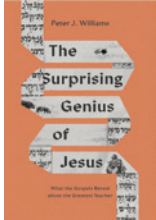
Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters

## Curated by Frankie Knight TISCA Trustee



### ***The Surprising Genius of Jesus*** by Peter J Williams

We might praise Jesus for his kindness, his compassion...but do we ever consider his genius? In this short but heart-warming book, Williams delves into one of Jesus'

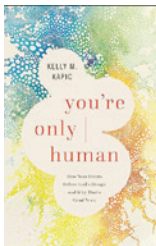
best-known parables and shows the deep layers of genius in its composition. A book which might inspire you afresh in your approach to the richness of Christ's teachings and how to share them with others.



### ***Stolen Focus*** by Johann Hari

In this timely book, Hari explores the many different factors that militate against our attention and our ability to think deeply in today's modern world. Easy to read and packed with

interviews with experts, this book is challenging and inspiring as we seek to help our pupils engage with the complexity of this world with focus, seriousness and empathy. Oprah called it 'the book...the world needs right now'.



### ***You're Only Human*** by Kelly M. Kopic

The subtitle of this book is: 'How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News'. Kopic argues that we need to rediscover, and embrace, the Bible's teaching on our finitude.

Rather than feeling stressed or guilty

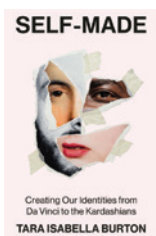
about our limits, recognising them and living within them is the key to a fruitful Christian life. If you ever feel frazzled and stretched too thin, this is a book worth reading!



### ***A Still and Quiet Mind*** by Esther Smith

Esther Smith combines Scriptural wisdom and her experience as a biblical counsellor to help her readers deal with anxious, unwanted thoughts. In this deeply sympathetic

and realistic book, she sets forth twelve steps to dealing with difficult thoughts and to seek mental, emotional and spiritual peace. This is a great resource of advice to put into practice ourselves and to bring into pastoral situations with others.



### ***Self-Made: Creating Our Identities from Da Vinci to the Kardashians*** by Tara Isabella Burton

Where did we get the modern notion that it's our right to shape our own identities and destinies? How did

the heady mix of authenticity and artificiality on social media come about? In this fascinating book, Burton traces the development of the 'self-made' man or woman from the Renaissance to the modern day. A brilliant read and a useful guide to how teenagers think about themselves and the world they inhabit.

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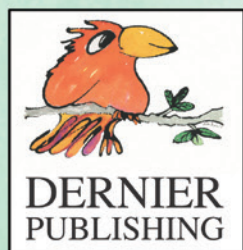
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