

# News & Views

# 92 · SPRING 2026

*Photos of leadership days with senior and junior pupils this academic year*



## Keeping the Faith















# 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 nearly 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**  
For HODs, Deputies, Year heads, etc.
-  [@tisca\\_uk](https://twitter.com/tisca_uk) Follow us on X, we regularly post
-  [/tiscauk](https://www.facebook.com/tiscauk) Follow us on Facebook
-  **TISCA The Independent Schools Christian Alliance**  
Follow us on LinkedIn
-  **Comments and feedback** on publications, events, our platforms welcomed

## Trustees

- **Revd Alex Aldous**, Chaplain, Prestfelde Prep School, Shrewsbury (Chair)
- **Mrs Sue Clark**, Trustee and Treasurer of Jericho Road project, Nottingham
- **Mrs Anna Graham**, Chaplain, Trinity School, Sevenoaks
- **Revd Jim Houghton**, Chaplain and Head of Spanish, Eltham College
- **Revd Andy Hutchinson**, Head of Chaplaincy, Monkton Combe School
- **Mrs Frankie Knight**, Ludgrove School
- **Mr Ray Maher** former Bursar of King Edward VI School, Southampton (on sabbatical)
- **Mr Peter Middleton**, Head, Oswestry School
- **Revd Alice Monaghan**, Associate Chaplain, Dean Close School, Cheltenham
- **Mrs Lizzy Nesbitt**, Head, Emmanuel School, Oxford
- **Mr Norman Patterson**, Treasurer, former Bursar at Luckley House
- **Mr Victor Selvaraj**, Teacher, Mill Hill School, London
- **Mrs Joanna Wright**, Head, King Edward's School, Witley

## TISCA admin

- General Secretary:**  
Alastair Reid  
OFFICE: Box 17634, Redditch, B97 9RW  
EMAIL: [gensec@tisca.org.uk](mailto:gensec@tisca.org.uk)  
WEB: [www.tisca.org.uk](http://www.tisca.org.uk)  
PHONE: 07702 950730
- TISCA Chaplain:**  
Revd Anthony Buckley  
EMAIL: [chaplain@tisca.org.uk](mailto:chaplain@tisca.org.uk)  
PHONE: 07841 800609

## Council of Reference

- Stephen Baldock
- Dr Priscilla Chadwick
- Revd Tim Hastie Smith
- Revd Hugh Palmer
- Nick Pollard

## Previous General Secretaries

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

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No. 1047025 and was established in 1995

# Keeping the faith – lessons from a life in schools

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



**Alastair Reid**

General Secretary of TISCA

I was privileged to speak at two regional meetings this academic year – at Canford and at Felsted.

This gave me an opportunity to reflect on how I came to faith largely through the influence of key Christian teachers – especially Harold and Beryl Elbourne at Drumley House Prep School (Ayr) where I was a boarder from aged 5 to 13 years. In addition to sharing about Jesus winsomely in the school (including Bible Stories in the dormitory accompanied by the Elbournes' large golden retrievers, Romulus and Remus!), they took me to Studland Bay Crusader Camp in Dorset where I saw the Gospel being lived out by many camp leaders. My faith was strengthened at senior school – Fettes College in Edinburgh – and especially through the commitment and testimony of the school chaplains. Such servant-minded Christian staff are still the core Gospel witnesses in schools today.

I am also blessed to have been part of TISCA from its origins. In 1995 I joined the staff at Dean Close School in Cheltenham as Deputy Head. Christopher Bacon was Head and one of the founders of TISCA (as it emerged from the Wadhurst Fellowship) and he also made a big impression on me as he modelled Christ through simple acts such as picking up litter, dedicating time in the school week for CU and also in ensuring he knew everyone's name, support staff included. It was also through TISCA (and the then General Secretary, Michael Hepworth) that I heard of the vacancy at Hebron School in India for the position of Principal. On my return from Overseas to the Headship at Ballard School in Hampshire, I was delighted to be asked to join the TISCA Trustees and enjoyed hosting the General Purposes Committee in the school over many years. And, after retiring as a Head, it was also a blessing to be invited to take over from long-serving and servant-hearted Hugh Bradby as General Secretary. (Hugh and I have both been Principals in India – but that's another story!)



Alastair and Alix, part of 'Team TISCA'

And so, just over seven years have passed since I took up this post alongside my eldest daughter, Alix, who had also worked alongside me for a while at Ballard School. The time has come to hand on to someone else and I do so with much thankfulness for the opportunities the position has given me to visit schools, to pray with many Heads, Chaplains, Staff and Governors, and to build on the shoulders of the 'giants' who went before. Alix writes later on in this magazine about her reflections of her time with TISCA and I simply want to say 'thank you' to all for your support, prayers and encouragement. I shall continue to support the ministry in every way I can and take, in this time of trial for independent education, these words from 1 Peter 4:10,11 for us all:

*'And the God of grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.'*

## TISCA's Vision Statement (as renewed in July 2025)

TISCA exists to uphold, protect and champion Biblical Christian ministry, teaching and leadership in education.

Our vision is that as many young people as possible will have the opportunity to consider for themselves the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and that the adults who serve them in schools will be encouraged and equipped in helping them to do this.

We seek to encourage and equip Heads, Teaching

and Non-Teaching Staff, Chaplains and Governors through Conferences, Prayer, Resources and the provision of compassionate and understanding Networks of contacts and friendships.

We have seen much flourishing of the work in recent years, including a welcome in the State sector alongside our Independent origins, and indeed now in some schools Overseas. We believe that God is calling us to continue to grow for this challenging time, to reach out to schools and individuals as much as He gives us strength.



*TISCA Trustees (and some Council of Reference) at the Annual Conference 2025*



*Alastair Reid (left) with Andy Wolfe (right), a member of TISCA's Council of Reference and Interim Chief Executive of the National Society and Chief Education Officer for the Church of England - with Andy Spens (centre), Head of Professional Learning with the National Society for Education*

## TISCA Council of Reference members

Stephen Baldock (Mr)* BEM	Former High Master of St Paul's School, London SW13
Allan Beckett (Mr)	Founder and Director, Carnelian (executive search and board advisory)
Priscilla Chadwick (Dr) +	Former Principal of Berkhamsted School and Chair of HMC
Robert Court (Mr)* +	Former Head of Birkdale School, Liberal Democrat; Parliamentary candidate (CoR coordinator)
Michael Cuthbertson (Mr)*	Former Head of Monkton Combe School
Thomas Garnier (Mr) +	Former Head of Pangbourne College
Nick Pollard (Mr)	Co-founder and chair of Family Mental Wealth. Co-founder and director of Ethos Education
Andrew Lewer (Mr) MBE+	Former MEP & MP, Council leader, founder APPG for Indep. Ed., Editorial Board of School Management Plus
Claire Osborn (Mrs)	Principal and education advisor, Oak-Tree Group of Schools, school inspector, Hon member of ISA
Antony Spencer (Mr)*	CEO of The Mill Hill School Foundation
Libby Talbot (Revd)**	Vicar of St Stephen's Church, Twickenham, former school chaplain (Dean Close 2005-15)
Margaret White (Mrs)+	Former Deputy Head of St Faith's, Cambridge, school consultant (Sandpiper), author of A Good Education (2018)
Andy Wolfe (Mr)	Executive Director of Education, National Society for Education (Church of England & Church in Wales)
Peter Woodroffe (Dr)+	Deputy CEO of ISA (Independent Schools Association)

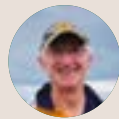
\*former TISCA Trustees +school governor





# TISCA Events & News

## for the Autumn Term 2025



Summary by  
**Alastair Reid**  
General Secretary of TISCA



## Junior Pupils' Leadership Training

### Kingham Hill School, 18th September 2025

We had another super day of training run by the Kingham staff and led by Magnus Eyles, Deputy Head.

The themes were 'leading from the front' (and we considered Alexander the Great, as a military leader, and then Jesus as a servant leader), 'being a team' (several outdoor 'command tasks'), 'listening to others' (based on

the assault course) and 'prefect goals' (which concluded with a personal task encouraging the young people to assess their day and to consider what they might take forward from it – and how to be accountable). There were 28 young people in attendance from three schools (Kingham, Monkton and Dean Close), plus their staff, and we enjoyed fantastic food and even a visit to the Kingham farm. A great way to get the Autumn Term well underway!

*Left to right: Teams in discussion; Being challenged!; Trusting the leader*





# Senior Pupils' leadership training

## Dean Close School, Tuesday 30th September 2025

A wonderful gathering, on a gloriously sunny day, of over 40 pupils from 7 schools were stimulated and challenged through a variety of sessions.

Ian Gulland, the Chaplain, focussed on 'upside down leadership' and on Jesus' words regarding servant leadership – something very counter-cultural today. Bradley Salisbury, the Senior School Head, took as his theme 'Caring enough to Confront'. He considered the roots of different types of conflict – including miscommunication, cultural differences, historical grievances and unmet needs – and challenged us to turn these into opportunities to reach out to others caringly. One quotation he used was this, by David Augsburger: 'Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable'.

An outdoor 'command task' involved using rope, string, elastic, wood and tennis balls to design a self-standing and usable 'sling'! Much fun was had by all here. An innovation this year was to hear the Head of School, Maxwell, being interviewed about the pressures – and the joys – he has found in being a prefect 'on the ground'. This was very effectively delivered. Our final session was with James Mears, on the staff at Dean Close and also part of 'Salmon Swimming' which delivers coaching and leadership training. James went through 'the Five Voices' (nurturer, creative, guardian, connector and pioneer) and spoke about 'healthy leadership'. He reminded us that we should always be willing to learn new things: he now writes 'WAIT' on his hand when delivering a session – 'Why Am I Talking?' Perhaps something for us all to consider?!

*Left to right: Mr Bradley Salisbury, Head, sharing; Miss Eleanor Dickens in discussion with Head of School, Maxwell; In discussion 1; Team building task 1; In discussion 2 – with Revd Ian Gulland, Chaplain*





## TISCA Governors' Gathering

### Stowe School, 13th November 2025

This was our third Governors' Gathering and it once again proved to be a super time of sharing, challenge, encouragement and fellowship.

Some 17 people gathered, representing twelve schools in the TISCA network – and ranging from small Christian schools to larger boarding/day institutions. Our venue was stunning: first constructed in 1677 as the country seat of the Dukes of Buckingham, Stowe School was then established within this grade 1 listed building in 1923. Our host and school chaplain, Revd James Righetti, gave us a very enthusiastic tour and one of the highlights was the chapel. It was constructed to house the original 99 pupils but built to accommodate 1,000 – a real testimony to the faith of the founders, and realised in recent years.

Antony Spencer, CEO of the Mill Hill Foundation (and a TISCA member of the Council of Reference), spoke from his experience about 'reactive' and 'proactive' school mergers. The challenge for schools with a Christian ethos is to avoid the 'reactive' and to plan in such a way as to preserve their key ethos and emphasis. To help with this consideration, Antony spoke about five key points: firstly, be clear on the question, 'what is a Christian school?' Secondly, consider how important the Christian ethos is to the school. Thirdly, take time to choose the right partner in a merger. Fourthly, ensure that legal protections are in place and, fifthly and most importantly, trust in God! A very lively and helpful discussion then ensued as we considered problems facing independent schools, geographical considerations, the motives of some partners in mergers and the safeguards for staff within the 'marriage bureau' of mergers.

Our second presenter was Paul Ridout, a Legal Director for Schools and Charities with our friends Moore Barlow Lawyers. Paul's experience with the Charity Commission proved invaluable as he sought to help governors answer the key question, 'Who is in



*Sharing dinner amidst palatial decoration!*



*Some of the school's interior (with Chaplain, Revd James Righetti as tour guide)*

charge around here?' He made sure that we considered the wishes of parents and pupils, as well as staff and large organisations. We considered the role and responsibilities of charity trustees and also looked at the crucial relationship between the Head and the Governors. Paul then dovetailed back to Antony's presentation by looking at some of the legal frameworks around mergers and what is meant by 'giving power away'.

Ahead of dinner in palatial surroundings, our host James Righetti, led a devotion, having first thanked governors for their time, expertise and efforts – all given freely and voluntarily. James helped us look at the importance of prayer, as seen in Peter's release from prison (Acts 12): there was a bleak background (James' recent execution) but God's people made prayer a priority and they came to see God's overwhelming power in what was a bleak situation. The final challenge for us all was this: are there things we don't pray for because we feel alone or it's too big? If so, the most powerful thing we can do is to pray to the most powerful God!



# TISCA Team on the Road: visits to schools in northern England and Scotland Nov 2025

Alix and I spent four days 'on the road' in mid-November and had a very encouraging time visiting five schools.



Our first stop was at **Stockport Grammar School** where we met up with Revd Liz Leaver. She has been Chaplain at the school for nearly 26 years and Liz is a regular on our

weekly zoom prayer time. It was a joy to see her in person in her school setting. Liz and the chaplaincy are clearly highly valued in this school which dates back to the Fifteenth Century and now occupies fine buildings and grounds and welcomes pupils from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. It was evident that the Chaplain's role in such a setting is key to ensuring there is a fresh and vibrant reminder of the centrality of Jesus' life and presence to the lives of young people today, whatever their faith background.



After lunch at Stockport, we drove into the North Yorkshire hills to visit the beautifully situated **Giggleswick School** near Settle. The copper-domed chapel is stunning and we had a wonderful meeting with the Chaplain, Revd Jonathan Womack. It was exciting to hear about the ministry into the local community as well as among the pupils in the school. The 'Oxygen' group for

young people is evidently great fun and also serves to challenge pupils in their faith. Once again, we were struck by the busyness of a Chaplain's life as Jonathan seeks to be both a pastor to the community as well as a teacher in the classroom – all on top of family commitments, too!



We were privileged to visit three schools in Scotland. Our first stop was where both Alix and I used to live – and where I had been a HOD and a Housemaster: **Glenalmond College** in Perthshire. This stunningly situated rural boarding and day school, has a collegiate-style chapel originally built for the Episcopal Church of Scotland college. It remains the centre

of Glenalmond life. We were hosted by the Chaplain,



Revd Dr Duncan Weaver – our tour guide initially – and then held a regional meeting in the Staff Common Room attended by some ten people, including the Warden (Head), Lucy Elphinstone. Once again we were encouraged by the witness for Jesus in this close-knit school community. As part of the regional gathering, I shared about my own journey of faith and how school played such an important part in this. It is so good to see schools today doing everything they can to share the gospel and also to nurture pupils and staff in their faith.



After Perthshire, we moved on to Edinburgh and a visit to **Cargilfield Prep School** where our host was newly arrived Head, Colin McIntosh. Once again a very

warm welcome and an opportunity to look round this long-established Prep School in Cramond. A Christmas Fayre was being set up by parents and Colin took us into school lunch (very appetising!) and then had some time with us for prayer. Colin is a long-term supporter of Titus Trust camps and it was great sharing matters for prayer and for encouragement together – as well as networking through our contacts in Scotland.



Our final stop was at **Loretto School** in Musselburgh. Here we had two delightful UVith form guides, Archie and Jess, who are also key members of the Christian 'growth' group in the school. We were able to glimpse some of the boarding houses, see inside the ancient Pinkie House building (somewhat like a castle), appreciate the welcoming



atmosphere of the chapel and then to join with other Sixth Formers for the 'growth' discipleship group. The lay chaplain, Ed Barker (also HOD of History and Politics as well as being CCF commander), led us in a detailed and enthralling study of Psalm 23. We then shared and prayed together. This was a great encouragement and also an insight into the work with pupils today. Ed also has a large SU group of 'seekers' – after the CCF the largest 'activity group' in the school! Alix and I were also able to have time with Ed sharing and praying together. It was a fitting finale to our journey 'up north'.





## A TISCA evening with...

### Tamsin Evans

(Founder, Pure Creative Arts)

Tue 25 Nov

19.45-21.00



**TISCA** | The Independent Schools  
Christian Alliance



## TISCA Online evening with... Tamsin Evans, founder of Pure Creative Arts and also of Sunshine & Fire Productions

25th November 2025

Tamsin wrote for the Autumn 2025 edition of TNV about her work with young people and how she and her Arts' programme is seeking to address their mental health needs.

For our evening meeting, Tamsin took the title, '**What happens when you step into the impossible?**' She spoke about her own youth: aged 11, she was a school refuser and this was linked to anxiety about her godmother's illness and concern that the same might happen to her mother. She couldn't easily share with anyone and sought to control the situation by refusing to leave home. She described herself as being like a 'wild animal' and even considered taking her own life. An educational psychologist helped and then, aged 13, she went to Spring Harvest. Here she saw a Christian band and heard a song which spoke into her soul: 'When will you see I died for you?' She gave her life to Jesus and in her late teens, following further disappointment, she was reminded of Jeremiah 29:11 '*For I know the plans I have for*

*you...*' She sensed God speaking to her and, remembering the band she had heard at Spring Harvest, she went and auditioned with them to do a school tour. From then on she went to LIPA – the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts. God knitted her life together and she came to create Pure Creative Arts – a means to help young people, through song and dance, to discover the truth that their life is worth living. George Muller's statement has come to mean much to her: '*This man of trust stands as an example of what God can do with one who is fully consecrated to Him*'. Tamsin is now involved in the 'Talk Tour' to schools in the UK and the USA, helping young people tell their story and taking time to listen as they open up and then encourage their creativity. Look out for the TV series in the offing!

Do consider contacting her if you'd like her 'Talk Tour' to come to your school or your area:

e: [tamsin.evans@purecreativearts.org](mailto:tamsin.evans@purecreativearts.org)

w: [www.purecreativearts.org](http://www.purecreativearts.org)



# Regional Meetings

## Spring Term 2026

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters

TISCA tries to visit at least six schools each year to hold a regional gathering in different part of the UK. These can be quite small gatherings (from 6 or 7 people to 25+) but great opportunities for sharing, encouragement and fellowship. If you'd like to offer to host a meeting, please contact the General Secretary.



Summary by **Alastair Reid**  
General Secretary of TISCA

## Canford School January 2026

Despite the floods in the south of England and the temporary closure of some schools, we managed to get to Canford and enjoy a warm welcome, a superb tour from Beks, the 'gaplain', a presentation and then fellowship over a fantastic dinner.

Some 20 persons, representing seven different schools, came together and were welcomed by the Chaplain, Phil Jack, and the new Head, Chris Wheeler, and his wife, Georgie. The speaker was myself (!) and my topic was, 'Keeping the faith: Lessons from a life in schools' (*a personal journey of an overseas' boarder, teacher and schools' worker*). I sought to illustrate my 'faith journey' by pointing out the importance of Christian teachers in helping me come to faith and then sustain me, both as a pupil and then as a teacher. We looked at Acts 4 where Peter and John, 'unschooled and ordinary' men, who nonetheless demonstrated that they 'had been with Jesus'. Standing up for our faith, appropriately, graciously and with courage is all the more vital today.



## King's Bruton January 2026

Another very warm welcome, even from a school being inspected during our visit, and another really informative school tour led by George Beverly, the Chaplain.

Our speaker was James Cary, comedian, BBC writer ('Miranda' etc.), General Synod member and self-confessed 'stand up theologian', and his theme was 'What's so funny about Esther?' James is currently leading a young person's Bible Study group in his church and his talk reflected on the importance of the 'Quiet Revival' and how we need, like Esther, to 'seize our moment' and to speak up courageously and winsomely for the Gospel. He taught from the Book of Esther and explained how, in the end, Esther 'pulls a blinder' despite Mordecai's shortcomings, the King's extravagances and Haman's wrongdoing. He put this down to three things - all of which we should consider doing more of



today: firstly, she fasted (and prayed); secondly, she spoke up clearly and publicly about her people and faith; and, thirdly and vitally, she looked to the providence of God to bring all things to fruition in His time and way. An inspiring evening.

As a 'PS' to the King's meeting, we received this very encouraging email following the event from one of the delegates, a Head: *Thank you for providing such a welcome break and reset in the daily conversations about income, groups and pupil numbers! To spend an evening with fellow Christians, to have time to stop and think about the challenges faced by Esther and the encouragements being seen in schools and churches across the country was not what I thought I needed but was absolutely what I needed. Thank you.*

## Felsted School, Essex February 2026

Once again a relatively small gathering but also a most encouraging evening with some four different schools represented.

I was able to share once more something of my faith journey and the significant impact that Christians in schools (and camps) had made. We took time to discuss the importance of a clear Christian witness in school and it was evident that several of those in the meeting also had stories to tell about teachers who had courageously shared their faith, appropriately and winsomely, and who had also 'been there' for pupils in tough times. Amani Simpson of 'Aviard', a speaker at a TISCA online evening last year, was in attendance and he testified to just such a person looking out for him. It's worth also noting that when we visit schools it is not just to take Christian meetings. In this instance, my wife and I were prevailed upon to be judges in the inter-House 'bake off' competition – hence the photo below!



## Shrewsbury School February 2026

We were privileged to be invited to a presentation of the 'Tyndale 500' lecture and presentation by Robin Brooke-Smith, Taylor Librarian and Archivist at Shrewsbury School.

This was coordinated by our TISCA Chair, Revd Alex Aldous, and proved to be the largest regional meeting in many years. This is Alex's report: *'We had a fabulous evening with nearly 70 attending with reps from TISCA, prayer groups from Shrewsbury School and Shrewsbury High School, Old Salopians (one of which was a donor - a Geneva Bible no less), Chaplains and people from at least five different churches, etc. Robin spoke excellently, tracing the development of the production of holy writ from parchment to published works, and discussed and illustrated the many bubbles that grew out of Tyndale's influence, pointing out that 80-90% of Tyndale ended up in the 1611 Authorised version. He talked of the profound influence he had on language and society and at such cost to communicate God's word in the vernacular. The lecture was followed by an inspiring exhibition of many Bibles, pre and post Tyndale. I spoke briefly about the purpose and function of TISCA which was followed by a superb buffet supper and great fellowship.'*



We asked Alix Stockwell for her reflections on her six and a half years serving with TISCA as Development Officer. Here they are!

# My reflections on nearly 7 years with TISCA

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



## Alix Stockwell

TISCA Development Officer (2019-2025) and now Operations' Manager for the Redditch Mission Area with the Church of England

### Top moments

- Hosting Chaplains' Conferences
- Running the Annual Conferences in London and making the day go smoothly for all the delegates
- Re-branding and being part of creating the new website
- Visiting schools as part of the 30 at 30 and meeting Heads, Chaplains, Governors and staff 'where they are'
- Touring Scotland and the north of England twice
- Seeing prayers answered, especially through Chaplains' prayer weekly - I'll miss the regular links with schools and those who serve them
- Onboarding new trustees who I had considered would be suitable for the board
- Having Anthony join the employees for the A Team - meeting weekly to catch up and pray together online
- Senior and Junior Pupil Leadership Training - the change to meet the leaders of tomorrow at many of the TISCA schools

Alix (with John Ash) at the senior prefects' training day in 2021 (at Dean Close)



### Especially thankful for

- Supportive trustees and Council of Reference
- A chance to work with a variety of people and see lives changed
- Opportunities to walk the long road with Chaplains especially, over the years
- A chance to meet other agencies and those working within them to help Jesus' name be shared in schools
- 6.5 years of working with my dad (Alastair, the General Secretary, in case you didn't know!) - our second iteration of working together

Many schools hold 'Lent Address' or 'Mission weeks' during the Spring Term. Some, like Steyning Grammar below, run these in the Autumn Term as part of the Advent season. Steyning joined TISCA recently and is one of a growing number of academies and state schools to do so. Steyning is a Church of England secondary school with state boarding facilities. The following article describes the 'mission week' and is then followed by a reflective piece which relates to the 'Quiet Revival'.

# Mission Week at Steyning Grammar School: Faith, Joy, and Community in Action

## Steyning, West Sussex (Nov 2025)

Chaplains



**Felicity Barnun-Bobb**

Comms co-ordination at Chanctonbury Church

### Highlights of Mission Week

- Prayer Zones on each site offered peaceful spaces for reflection and calm, with students invited to pause, breathe, and receive blessings. Activities like bubble prayers, colouring for calm, and blessing bracelets created tangible reminders of peace and hope.
- Encounter Teams engaged students in conversations about life and faith, sharing popcorn, "fruits of the spirit" bracelets, and sweets. More than 800 Bibles were given out and eagerly received by students, many of whom could be seen reading them and discussing their meaning during break times.
- 'Grill a Christian' RE sessions gave students the chance to ask honest, sometimes challenging questions about faith and belief. Volunteers shared personal stories of living out Christian faith in everyday life, sparking deep and thoughtful classroom discussions.
- 'Illuminate' wellbeing lessons led by the band LZ7 combined music, dance, and discussion to help students explore mental health, identity, and purpose. Their message ("there's only one you") inspired students to consider their full potential. About 95% of participants chose to take a symbolic step toward leaving negativity behind and embracing "life in all its fullness."
- After-school gigs by LZ7 and Saintz brought year groups together in a joyful celebration of music and meaning, where hundreds of students responded to



invitations to follow Jesus and begin new journeys of faith.

- The Bishop of Horsham, Ruth Bushyager, conducted holy communion, offering a moment of reflection and forgiveness – a symbolic new start for those who attended.

### A Lasting Impact

The Behaviour Leads at the school said there had been a transformation in behaviour throughout the week. Mission Week has ignited new opportunities for ongoing faith exploration at Steyning Grammar School with the launch of Church@5, a new weekly youth-focused service in the school's Drama Hall at Shooting Field. In addition, the Youth Alpha course has started on each campus, inviting students to continue asking big questions about life and faith in a welcoming, open environment.

Reflecting on the week, the school chaplain said: "Much is said about the challenges young people face today – anxiety, social media pressures, and negative

behaviour. At SGS this week, the opposite was true. Our school motto, 'to live life in all its fullness' (John's Gospel 10 v 10), came alive throughout Mission Week. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control were the hallmarks of everything said and done. The care shown by staff, the chaplaincy team, and volunteers has had a transformational impact on our school, where everyone is known, valued, and loved for who they are."

## Faith in Action

Teachers, volunteers, and students alike described the week as uplifting and life-giving. From "joyful mosh pits" with LZ7, to quiet moments of prayer and reflection, Mission Week created a unique space where faith met fun, and community flourished. One volunteer summed it up beautifully:

"Perhaps a little slice of heaven dropped into West Sussex this week."



# A Quiet Revival in the classroom: How Steyning Grammar School Reimagined Mission for a New Generation

In a culture where faith can feel increasingly private and young people seem to be drifting away from spirituality, something extraordinary happened this November at **Steyning Grammar School** in West Sussex.

For one week, classrooms, corridors, and canteens buzzed with laughter, music, heavy beats, and meaningful conversation as more than 170 local church volunteers joined the school's chaplaincy team for **Mission Week** – a bold initiative that brought faith, wellbeing, and community together in a way that felt both natural and transformational.

## Mission in a Changing Culture

Mission and evangelism in schools today demands care and discernment. In a pluralist and often sceptical culture, anything perceived as religious "pressure" risks misunderstanding. The Steyning Grammar chaplaincy team approached Mission Week through what missiologist Lesslie Newbigin called "an explosion of joy"! Rooted in prayer, the planning from this joy-filled ecumenical group prioritised robust safeguarding, non-coercive invitation, and genuine collaboration with local churches. The goal was to create opportunities,

not expectations; to offer space for curiosity rather than conversion pressure. "Students could explore, question, or simply enjoy the music," one chaplain explained. "There was no pressure, only invitation."

## Faith That Feels Real

The week offered a full range of activities:

- **Prayer Zones** became havens of calm reflection.
- **Encounter Teams** invited open conversation about life and faith while handing out "fruits of the Spirit" bracelets and sweets.
- **'Grill a Christian' sessions** allowed students to ask big questions about meaning, suffering, and belief.
- The band **LZ7** led their 'Illuminate' tour with high-energy wellbeing assemblies exploring identity, mental health, and hope through music and movement.
- Gigs by **LZ7** and the band **Saintz** took place in the evening, during which hundreds of young people responded to the invitation to give their lives to Jesus.

More than 800 Bibles were handed out, hundreds of students sought prayer, and teachers spoke of a tangible uplift in mood and sense of unity across the school. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and goodness," one staff member reflected, "became visible realities."

## Headteacher's Perspective

For Headmaster Aidan Timmons, the week revealed the very best of his students.

"I can't hide how proud I am of the way the Steyning community has shone," he said. "Students engaged with big questions in their RE lessons – *Why does God allow suffering? Do you believe in creation or the Big Bang? Why this faith among so many?* Developing the ability to form one's own opinion is essential, especially in an age of AI and social-media noise. I have never seen such engagement, happiness, and energy in my 20-plus years in secondary education. I often worry we can't compete with the power of the online world, but this week completely disproved that. Human connection and community are alive and well – and that has been at the heart of Mission Week for me."

## Contextual Mission in Practice

This kind of contextualised mission echoes Vincent Donovan's conviction in *Christianity Rediscovered* that the Gospel must always be shared in language and forms people can understand. For 11–18 year olds shaped by digital culture, Steyning's mix of music, creativity, and open conversation offered precisely that. The approach also aligns with the SIAMS framework for Church of England schools, which calls for a '*deeply rooted Christian vision lived out through relationships, ethos, and action.*' Mission Week wasn't about numbers or proselytization – it was about nurturing a community where students could experience faith as something life-giving, thoughtful, and safe. It was about letting a community know they are loved.

## The Quiet Revival

Sociologists and theologians are beginning to speak of a "Quiet Revival" among young people; an emerging curiosity about God, spirituality, and meaning. Research by *Theos*, *Youthscape*, and the Church of England's *Growing Faith* initiative suggests that teenagers are not rejecting faith, but longing for authenticity and belonging. Steyning Grammar's Mission Week showed what can happen when those longings are met with creativity and care. It was a mission that listened before it spoke, that offered the good news in language young people understood – through rhythm, questions, and relationship.

## A Model for the Nation

What happened in this West Sussex school may serve as a blueprint for mission and chaplaincy across the Church of England's 4,600 schools – and even beyond, into independent schools, academies, and

state schools open to exploring spirituality and wellbeing as a way to offer students and staff something meaningful and community based in a world that seems so fragile, troubled and polarised. Steyning's success rested on a few timeless principles:

- prayerful collaboration between chaplaincy and church partners,
- clear safeguarding and respect for student agency,
- contextual creativity that responds to the school's own culture.

These are principles that could be adapted nationally through local Mission Weeks – events that celebrate dialogue, wellbeing, and hope, helping schools live out their vision to "enable all to flourish."

This is missiology in motion – Lesslie Newbigin and Vincent Donovan re-imagined for Gen Z.

In a recent article, Graham Tomlin emphasised the need for new theologians who can support this revival and "articulate the fresh sense of the presence and power of God". Drawing on his experience as a former teacher, the school chaplain, Rev'd Neill Stannard, brings decades of involvement in theological education to his current role. He recognises the unique opportunity that missions like Steyning Grammar's Mission Week provide, not only for sharing faith, but for nurturing a generation of theologians equipped to engage with their peers. Rev'd Stannard believes that such initiatives have the power to inspire young people to articulate faith in a way that resonates with the deepest hopes and questions of their time, thus "satisfying the longings of their particular age."

## A Sign of Hope

Mission Week at Steyning Grammar School offered a glimpse of what the future of school evangelism and Christian education might look like: faithful yet respectful, joyful yet deeply rooted.

And as one volunteer put it at the end of a week filled with laughter, prayer, and song:

"Maybe a little slice of heaven really did drop into West Sussex."



TISCA has a close relationship with ACT, the Association of Christian Teachers, which primarily (but not exclusively) works within the maintained school sector. We are delighted to promote ACT initiatives and the article below by their Executive Officer, Lizzie Harewood, reflects on the importance of their course called 'Faithful Foundations', now in its second year.

# Faithful Foundations

Staff



**Lizzie Harewood**

Executive Officer for ACT – The Association of Christian Teachers



Last week, I received a message from a teacher returning to the classroom after a period away from education. Among other things, she asked me, *“How do I be a Christian well at school? I feel as though I’m constantly erring on the side of caution in how open I am about my faith.”*

My heart went out to her, because her question echoes the experience of so many ACT members and other Christian educators working in schools across the country. She longs to be a distinctive presence: to bless her pupils and colleagues and to stand firm in Biblical truth. Yet like so many she feels unsure what that looks like in practice.

In education, being salt and light must be more than simply avoiding unbiblical ideologies or waiting for the right moment to talk about Christianity, important though those things are. Surely it calls for a deeper and more holistic engagement with what the Bible says about work, the child, culture and influence. That’s why, at ACT, we’ve been thinking about what it really means to integrate faith into every aspect of teaching – what it might look like for Christian conviction to shape how we teach, not just what we say, and consider whether biblically informed principles and pedagogy can be embedded into daily practice in ways that are

professional, faithful yet non-manipulative.

Maybe you’ve asked yourself these questions. Would it help to have someone who listens, encourages, and walks alongside you as you explore them?

Our course, *Faithful Foundations*, now in its second year, is an opportunity to grow together in faith and fellowship. It is designed to connect and support Christian education professionals as they explore four key areas: the purpose of our work in schools, a Biblical view of the pupil, creating a classroom environment that reflects the fruit of the Spirit, and influencing school culture for the sake of the gospel. The course is open to any educator, whatever your role or school, and regardless of your stage of career or level of experience.

Work in schools *really matters* to God because it serves His mission of reconciliation and restoration. Through Faithful Foundations, we pray to foster a spirit of ‘one anothering,’ helping each other embrace the call to “work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24).

Will you join us?

Email [admin@christian-teachers.org.uk](mailto:admin@christian-teachers.org.uk) to express your interest

# TISCA's origins as the Wadhurst Fellowship

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



**Robin Vickers**  
former Bursar of Wadhurst College

In 1982 I began my 12 years of service as Bursar and Clerk to the Governors of Wadhurst College in Sussex. The College has been founded before the second world war as a Boarding School for girls on a clear evangelical Christian foundation. Having survived the war as an entity Day pupils began to be admitted also.

The Head when I joined was Daphne Swatman, a lady of great faith and dedicated commitment to those in her charge. Also at that time the College was one of a number of schools of which the Rev John Eddison was a Governor.

During the mid-1980s cultural changes in society began to challenge the Christian viewpoint in a number of areas – not least in education. Recognising that she was not alone as a Head dealing with such issues Daphne sought a way in which prayer and fellowship could be established amongst Heads of similar schools.

Daphne, John Eddison and I discussed this on a

number of occasions and eventually it was agreed to invite a number of Heads to meet together to share in fellowship and prayer over a meal. The first meeting took place at The Royal Commonwealth Society in 1988. On John's advice those invited to attend at the start were from schools whose foundations were wholly evangelically Christian to avoid the possibility of any of the Heads being compromised with their Governing Bodies.

At this first meeting the group decided to call itself the Wadhurst Fellowship and to meet at least annually in London. As the group developed and the benefits became clear it grew in number and broadened its scope of membership. As this happened it became clear also that a firmer foundation and clearer structure was needed and after some research and debate the decision was made to establish The Independent Schools Christian Alliance in 1995 as an independent Charity which celebrated its 30th Anniversary in 2025.

*Wadhurst College, Sussex*



*Church House, Westminster, where TISCA first began in 1995*



# AI or RI?

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

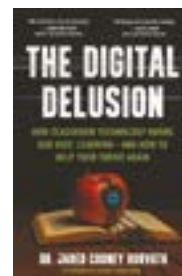
Pupils

Supporters



## Jason Fletcher

Headmaster | Heritage School, 17-19 Brookside, Cambridge  
www.heritageschool.org.uk | 01223 350615



It is just over three years since the latest technological revolution in the form of ChatGPT was unleashed upon humanity, firing the starting gun for the current frenetic scramble to get ahead, and stay ahead, in the AI race. Progress (read: “money”) beckons!

No matter that many industry leaders have warned, literally, of an existential threat. No matter that we don't know what we're progressing towards. We cannot afford to pause. We must keep up or we'll be left behind!

Caught, as we are, in yet another techno-frenzy, the unquestioned assumption seems to be that AI must be allowed to do its revolutionary work, including to the way we do education. We may prefer the way things used to be, but, when push comes to shove, we have no choice. Technology is the future! The question is not *whether* AI has a role to play in education – of course not. We just need to work out how.

But hold on a moment.

What if all that is hype? What if our casual assumptions are wrong? What if EdTech generally and AI in particular undermines RI – Real Intelligence?

I just finished reading a wonderful book, one many of us have been waiting for, called *The Digital Delusion* (2026) by Dr Jared Cooney Horvath, a neuroscientist. In it, Horvath makes precisely these arguments – that it's all hype, that our assumptions are wrong, and that EdTech is harmful. He reviews the evidence from the international assessments like PISA and thousands of studies on EdTech and arrives at this damning conclusion: “Outside of a few narrow domains suited to adaptive repetition, *EdTech impairs learning*.” (p.43)

The reason for this, he says, is that, “Digital tools clash with the way human beings are built to learn.” (p.43) How so? The first and most important point we need to grasp is this: *long-term memory is “the central, dominant structure of human cognition”*. (p.113) Make sure you pause and re-read that. This is an immense idea and we really need to “get” it. Why is it so important? It

tells us that if we want our pupils to develop RI, they need to keep building up a store of knowledge in long-term memory. “Stuff”, as Horvath puts it, “is the foundation of all deep thought”. (p.113)

This brings us to the second critical point. In order for knowledge to get into long-term memory it must first pass through working memory. But here's the problem: “*the lack of working memory is a fundamental bottleneck of human cognition*.” (Daniel Willingham, *Why Don't Students Like School?* 2009, p.109). Willingham is telling us what we all know from experience: that we can only take in a thimble-full of new information at a time. Not only so, but if we are to take in even a thimble-full, the conditions need to be just right. “Real learning,” says Horvath, “requires... stillness, stability and sustained thought.” (p.52) Put these two facts about long-term and working memory together and the conclusion is clear: there are no shortcuts to developing RI.

The lie of AI, the ultimate cognitive offloading device, is that it promises precisely that. It's one thing for an expert who already has a rich store of knowledge to use AI to do high level research; it's quite another to use it in education ostensibly to support the cognitive development that AI is designed to short-circuit. Horvath summarises the issue: “Students who start with offloading never develop the necessary foundational knowledge.” (p.112)

The brain is a muscle and for muscles to get stronger they need a lot of exercise. Simple as that. Believing that using AI develops RI is like going to the gym and getting machines to lift the weights for you, and then walking away patting yourself on the back as if you just had a workout. What is needed, says Horvath, is a rejection of EdTech and a return to traditional learning methods – particularly reading on paper and writing by hand. These methods go with the grain of the way the brain works, and have proven themselves over centuries to be outstanding tools for cognitive development. “If we truly care about our children's development, then we can no longer afford to be fooled by what merely looks like progress.” (p.20)

# What Christian Educators Aren't Saying About AI

Chaplains

Heads

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Staff

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Supporters



## Ben Whitaker

Ben is an education consultant, writer, and speaker who works with schools, colleges, and trusts on navigating educational change, particularly around AI integration. A former teacher and Head of Sixth Form, Ben now helps educational leaders develop practical strategies that align technological innovation with pedagogical purpose.

He is the founder of The Ideas Guy, a platform exploring the intersection of education, technology, and human flourishing, and writes the FRiDEAS newsletter, a weekly exploration of innovation, digital culture, education, authenticity, and strategy. His work focuses on asking better questions rather than providing easy answers, and on helping educators maintain what's distinctively human in an increasingly algorithmic age. He has written *The Ideas Guy: Unleash Your Inner Genius* and is the contributing author on a number of upcoming publications.

Ben co-hosts the *Edufuturists* podcast, speaks internationally on educational futures, and has a particular interest in how philosophical and theological frameworks can inform our approach to emerging technologies. You can find him at [www.theideasguy.io](http://www.theideasguy.io) or connect on LinkedIn.

A Year 9 student asks whether ChatGPT has a soul. A deputy head discovers staff using AI to write reports. A teacher watches pupils generate entire essays in seconds. We've likely all encountered these moments. Yet the conversations that follow rarely venture beyond plagiarism policies and efficiency protocols.

What nobody's discussing, particularly in Christian schools, are the theological questions AI actually demands we answer: What does it mean to be created in God's image when machines can reason? How do we teach wisdom when answers arrive instantaneously? What happens to 2,000 years of discernment tradition when knowledge becomes algorithmic?

Christian educators should be leading this conversation, not copying secular responses. The problem is we've forgotten our own intellectual tradition offers precisely what's needed.

## The Knowledge Problem

AI doesn't *know* anything; it predicts patterns. Yet we're treating it as an authority, creating a genuine theological crisis.

Augustine distinguished between *scientia* (knowledge of facts) and *sapientia* (wisdom oriented toward love of God) a distinction collapsed by our modern obsession with information. Michael Polanyi argued that "we can know more than we can tell," emphasising that all knowledge contains tacit dimensions impossible to codify. Thomas Aquinas insisted knowledge requires grasping *causes*, not just correlations, yet AI excels precisely at correlation whilst remaining blind to causation.

When students outsource essays to AI, they're bypassing the very process by which personal knowledge forms. Christian tradition has always understood learning as *formation*, not information transfer. But church schools too often prize Ofsted results over wisdom formation, making us as vulnerable to AI shortcuts as secular schools.

AI in Church



## The Human Problem

Martin Buber's philosophy insists that "all real living is meeting" so authentic relationship requires mutual subjectivity. Can we have genuine educational relationships mediated through AI? When students receive instant "pastoral support" from chatbots, have we enhanced care or merely simulated it?

Daniel Dennett's concept of "competence without comprehension" captures what's happening. AI performs tasks that in humans require understanding, but does so without genuine comprehension. This matters profoundly for education, where the process of struggling toward understanding forms character.

Shannon Vallor's work on "technomoral virtues" reminds us that Christians possess a 2,000-year tradition of virtue ethics to draw upon. Church schools claim to form character, not just transmit knowledge. Yet how many of us are asking whether our AI implementations actually support virtue formation?

## The Discernment Problem

Discernment - testing spirits, weighing evidence, distinguishing truth from deception - is core Christian practice. It's exactly what's needed for AI. And exactly what AI can't provide.

Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises developed sophisticated methods for discernment that remain remarkably applicable to assessing AI outputs. Paul instructed, "Test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Yet we're training students to trust algorithmic recommendations rather than develop judgment.

David Hume observed that reason serves values that come from our nature. AI serves values too, but whose? The hidden assumptions embedded in training data reflect the priorities and prejudices of their creators. Christian tradition's emphasis on examining whose authority we're submitting to becomes urgently relevant.

## The Path Forward

This isn't technological Luddism. It's a challenge to recover theological resources before implementing technical solutions. Start with anthropology, not efficiency. Before adopting AI tools, ask what they assume about human learning and flourishing. Create communities of discernment rather than top-down policies. Use Christian intellectual tradition as a resource for critical evaluation. Maintain what's irreplaceable - embodied presence, unhurried conversation, and the slow formation of character through struggle.

The real danger isn't AI itself, it's Christian schools adopting secular frameworks because we've lost



confidence in our own tradition. When church schools implement exactly the same AI policies as secular schools, we announce that our faith has nothing distinctive to offer. That's the crisis worth addressing.

## Key Takeaways

- Christian theology offers distinctive resources: epistemology (what is knowledge?), anthropology (what makes us human?), and discernment (how do we judge?).
- Wisdom cannot be generated algorithmically; formation cannot be automated; discernment requires practiced judgment.
- *Imago Dei* grounds human dignity in relationship with God, not in capabilities machines can mimic.
- Church schools should lead AI conversations from their own tradition, not follow secular trends.
- The greatest risk: losing distinctively Christian practices (contemplation, discernment, virtue formation) in pursuit of efficiency.

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The distinction between Augustine's *scientia* and *sapientia* is drawn from Peter Leithart's scholarly interpretation in his 2005 article, which itself references Augustine's *De Trinitate* Book XII and Ellen Charry's analysis of how these terms evolved through medieval theology.

# ‘AI & Me’ – Chapel Sermon Series

Chaplains



**Revd George Beverly**

Foundation Chaplain at King's Bruton, HOD Politics and History teacher

Like most people working in schools, I'm fed up with AI! It seems to fill far too many insets and staff meetings (yawn).

It's causing all sorts of challenges with pupils' prep, work, revision, and NEAs (brain rot). Worst of all, it seems to have become endemic amongst the way that many staff are working. Indeed, AI is churning out some of the laziest and low-quality teaching I've ever seen! Now don't get me wrong: I'm no Luddite. Nor do I want to ban AI. Indeed, I'll gladly admit that I use AI. But have we as chaplains, teachers, and pupils paused to think through a Christ-honouring approach to how we use it? That's what our chapel series this term at King's Bruton seeks to do. After reading J C Lennox's '2084 & The AI Revolution', I've pieced together a sermon series called 'AI & Me'. Week-by-week we're considering how the Bible gives us eternal wisdom - it shows us God's plan for how to thrive as humans. So far we've considered that we're made to feel; Genesis 1-3 makes that clear. Yet

AI can't feel - it doesn't know the phenomenon of what pain, love, forgiveness, betrayal, joy etc feel like. But Jesus does! He knows all those feelings - He's far more useful than AI. We've also pondered how the Bible tells us God's made us in His image to be those who create and work. Thus, if we get AI doing much of our creating/ work, we're robbing ourselves of a glorious identity and purpose God has given us. Last week we saw how AI might have unrivalled worldly intelligence, but it lacks the eternal intelligence (wisdom) of God. Consider this: I asked ChatGPT "Should I love my enemies?" It told me, "No - you're not required to love someone who's unkind to you. If someone treats you poorly, create distance - physically, socially, & online." Yet Jesus calls us to love our enemies, to pray for them - and he beautifully embodies that posture at the cross for us. There's plenty more sermon topics to come - it's my prayer that all of them will ultimately show us how if we truly want to flourish as humans, then the answer isn't AI, it's Jesus - so invest in Him!



King's Bruton - at night - showing the oldest part of the Sixteenth Century foundation



The Chapel at King's Bruton - the parish church

# Leadership & Wellbeing Sessions for Students

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



**Ayo Awotona**

Leadership Educator & Speaker for Schools

Ayo Awotona is a leadership educator and experienced school speaker who works with students to help them navigate confidence, self-belief, emotional regulation, and peer dynamics during key stages of adolescence.

With a background in learning design and emotional wellbeing, Ayo delivers reflective, interactive sessions that create safe, engaging spaces for students to explore their voice, understand their emotions, and take ownership of their choices. Her work is human-first, practical, and rooted in lived experience – meeting young people where they are, rather than where we expect them to be.

Ayo has worked with hundreds of students and school leaders across the UK, USA, Africa and Mexico, supporting areas such as:

- Confidence and self-esteem
- Emotional regulation and resilience
- Peer relationships and conflict
- Leadership development
- Identity, values and faith-informed character development



## Workshops & Assembly Talks

Sessions can be delivered as classroom-style workshops or whole-year assemblies, with content adapted by age group and context. Popular topics include:

- Becoming a Better Version of Yourself
- Leading Through Uncertainty
- Navigating Conflict with Confidence
- Your Voice Matters
- Body Image and Self-Respect in a Filtered World



Ayo is also the Founder of Joy Uplifts, a leadership and personal development organisation, and the creator of its flagship schools programme, **She Lights Up™**. She Lights Up is a structured 5- or 10-week leadership development coaching programme for girls, designed to strengthen identity, leadership skills, and emotional resilience. The programme includes an evaluation framework to track impact and is delivered in collaboration with school staff.

Ayo also delivers **INSET and staff CPD sessions** for educators and pastoral teams, focusing on emotionally intelligent classrooms, language and micro-messaging, and supporting student confidence without reinforcing perfectionism.

To discuss availability or design a bespoke session, schools can contact: [ayo@joyuplifts.com](mailto:ayo@joyuplifts.com), Ayo Awotona, Founder & CEO of Joy Uplifts



Mental Health Awareness week (11-17 May) is a fixture in most schools and concerns about pupil (and staff) mental health are to the fore in all schools. Patrick Melville, author of this article, is a regular at TISCA meetings and recently spoke at a TISCA member school, Sherborne Girls, where the Chaplain (Katie Windle) gave this feedback: 'Patrick's engaging and interactive talk provided some helpful ways in to managing mental health through combining faith, curiosity and practical everyday methods. His gentle and inclusive approach was appreciated by the pupils and staff and opened up some helpful conversations.'

# Using Mental Health Awareness Week to build Curiosity about the Positive Mental Power of Prayer

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



**Patrick Melville**

patrick@melville-solutions.com



Is Mental Health Awareness Week (11–17 May) in your school diary? Each year, the **Mental Health Foundation** sets a theme to prompt reflection and awareness. This year's focus is "*Action: moving beyond awareness towards practical steps that genuinely support wellbeing*".

I deliver mental health training in UK schools and a consistent message emerges: pupils (and staff) are under increasing pressure, with very little calm in their day. UK research continues to link peer pressure and high expectations with rising anxiety and reduced sleep among young people. 'Stillness' is a positive tool to use and decide on suitable actions, however, it can be hard for anyone to find. I asked a group of at a secondary school about when they use stillness. The most common answer was simply: "bedtime." Reflecting on that alone means a full day with no pause to breathe, reflect, calm nor reset....

My purpose is to help de-stigmatise mental health by giving simple and practical tools they can use every day. Alongside my professional background, I also serve as a lay preacher in my local benefice and am currently training through the Centre for Chaplaincy in Education. This dual perspective has shaped my work to support schools, blending the role of faith as a good mental tool. One theme I share is "**The Hs of Healing through Prayer**."

Prayer encourages action by first helping acknowledge a worry, something that can feel difficult

to share in school life. The first 3 Hs create the mental conditions to find help:

1. **Honesty**: admitting that help is needed, and naming worries to a trusted and loving listener.
2. **Humility**: recognising that alone, we do not have all the answers, and that we need to learn, like the disciples.
3. **Open to Hearing**: beginning with silence, then listening to the calm and the Word, as they surface.

From the stillness in these H's, further actions can follow, with more prayer and other ways. The mind becomes more open to recognising **Help**, discovering and realising the power of **Hope**, and finding **Homeostasis**. This can be followed by **Happiness**, perhaps just a deeper breath or a small smile. These are not instant fixes, but sustainable habits. Prayer, like mindfulness and meditation, helps calm the nervous system but has been a practice rooted in centuries of lived experiences of stillness - "**but Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.**" (Luke 5:16)

Mental Health Awareness Week is an invitation to explore how prayer is a relevant and practical tool to use. Not just for the week but all year round. Would you encourage prayer before a school review, pupil exam, an inter-house match, or just on a Wednesday morning?

If your school would like to explore how prayer and faith can be useful mental health, I would be very happy to continue the conversation.

# Boys and Politics

Chaplains

Heads

Staff



## Revd Joel Knight

Minister at Christ Church Wokingham and married to Frankie Knight, Chaplain at Luckley House School and a TISCA Trustee

There is a right-wing turn among males underway. We shouldn't overstate this turn: young people still seem to skew more left-wing overall and to move right as they age. But nonetheless, the statistics do suggest a shift. Anecdotally, it also seems that young men drawn to Christianity are often attracted to right-wing views.

All this is happening in the context of right- and far-right figures increasingly speaking positively about Christianity. The phrase "*Christ is King*" has become a slogan within certain parts of the right, and Tommy Robinson organised a carol service in central London in the run-up to Christmas, at which he spoke about his personal Christian faith.

In what follows, I lay out three broad ways to respond, focusing on broader strategic priorities rather than speaking into specific political movements, policies, or analyses of particular public figures. Developing these three responses will aid evangelisation and discipleship efforts with those we serve, whatever their political inclinations.

## Develop your literacy in political theology

Famously, the ex-British Prime Minister Tony Blair "didn't do God." The problem is that the Church in the UK often hasn't "done politics." I suspect this means that many of us—whether theologically trained or not—have an impoverished political theology. This makes it hard to have conversations about politics in a distinctively Christian register, and leaves us less able to engage positively with those who no longer seem ready to accept principles or values we once took for granted. For example, increasing numbers of young people no longer believe democracy is the most effective instrument of government.

If you'd like to develop your own political theology, various rooms are available within our shared Christian house, but personally I'd suggest the Augustinian room. You could start with *How the Nations Rage* by Jonathan Leeman, or, from a slightly different corner of the same room, *Awaiting the King* by James K. A. Smith.





## Be willing to “punch” left and right

The Bible refuses to be co-opted by the political left or the political right. Left-wing progressivism is perhaps drawn to “the kingdom without the King,” and the right to “Christianity without Christ.” We therefore need to be willing to critique both. We should also recognise we’ll be more comfortable ‘punching’ in one direction over another, depending on our own sensibilities and context.

Of course, we need to be wise about this. Frontline workers in mostly secularised spaces may have different freedoms to speak than church-based leaders. But within our context we need to be willing to wisely and carefully subvert the underlying logic and ideology of both “Kingdom without the King” and “Christianity without Christ” thinking. To aid in this task, one important tool in the frontline worker’s toolkit is the concept of “diagonalisation,” popularised by the academic philosopher Christopher Watkin in his book *Biblical Critical Theory*. This tool helps us see how, “time and again the Bible disrupts the oppositions that structure much of our culture’s understanding of everything from the nature of fundamental reality and human beings to politics and work.”

## Confidently articulate Christianity’s positive contribution to public life

The Bible grounds many of the values we hold dear in Western liberal democracies, and without it, it’s not clear where those foundations will come from. The sobering question the West needs to consider is whether the house can stand when the foundations crumble.

Let me give five examples:

1. Christians believe in freedom of conscience and freedom of speech because belief is not a matter of institutional coercion. No one is forced against their will into the kingdom but drawn by Jesus’ beauty and

love.

2. Christians believe in democracy because the Bible teaches the value of the individual.
3. Christians believe in and promote the inherent dignity of *all* human beings because we are made in God’s image.
4. Christians believe rulers are subject to the rule of law as an expression of being subject to God.
5. Somewhat more controversially, given prevailing assumptions about what “secularism” should mean, Christians reject the privatisation of religion and its banishment from public (or educational) life, because the Bible teaches that all people are inherently religious.

Our Christian confession is a mountain from which we can survey all of reality, including politics. As we allow the Scriptures to shape our understanding of both the political sphere, and this political moment, we have good news for the public sphere, as we have good news for every sphere. So, whatever our political leanings, let’s develop our political theology literacy so we can confidently engage in conversations as believers. Let’s work hard to show how Jesus’ piercing truth and soothing grace speak to everyone, wherever they stand politically. And let’s maintain our confidence that Scripture provides bedrock on which to stand for every sphere of life; personal, social, cultural and political.



Leadership in schools can be a heavy burden but it's also a calling and an act of service. We asked a TISCA supporter and leadership coach, who has been a Deputy Head, to give us his perspective and then there are two articles from current Heads with their reflections.

# The Burden of the Backpack: Walking the Teacher's Mile

Chaplains

Heads

Staff

Governors



## Joe Sidders

The Pilgrim Coach, is a thinking partner mainly for leaders who are Christians, helping them to integrate their faith into their leadership roles. He has taught in a number of schools, recently serving as Deputy Head Academic at Repton and Monkton. Joe's website is [www.thepilgrim.coach](http://www.thepilgrim.coach) and you can get in touch with him on [joe@thepilgrim.coach](mailto:joe@thepilgrim.coach)

In the staff room, the conversation often turns to the weight of the workload. We talk about marking, safeguarding and curriculum changes as burdens we have to carry. As Christian teachers, we view our work as a vocation, but that sense of calling can sometimes make the weight feel heavier rather than lighter. We want to do it all for the glory of God, but we often end up carrying it all in our own strength.

## The Shift from Owner to Steward

The heaviest item in a teacher's rucksack is often our mindset of ownership. When we slip into an ownership mindset, we claim the classroom as our personal kingdom. The success of a pupil becomes our personal victory, and their failure becomes our personal indictment. This is a crushing way to live because it demands we bear total responsibility for outcomes - even from a worldly point of view - we cannot fully control.

Stewardship offers a lighter way to walk. To be a steward is to acknowledge that the school, the students and our specific role belong ultimately to God. We are the caretakers for a season.

This shift changes everything. If the classroom belongs to God, then the ultimate responsibility for the outcome rests on His shoulders, not ours. We are responsible only for our obedience and our effort. The trade-off, of course, is that we must also relinquish the praise. If the results are His, the glory is His.





## A Place to Unpack

To maintain this mindset, we need a space to put the backpack down. We all know the Sunday experience: feeling inspired by a message of grace or patience. Then comes Monday morning. The bell rings, a lesson plan falls apart, or a colleague is sharp with you, and Sunday feels a million miles away. There is often a disconnect between the theology we absorb and the reality we live.

We often lack a confidential space to bridge this gap. We need a sanctuary where we can be entirely honest about the gap between our faith and our professional reality. This might be a quiet coffee with a trusted friend who knows how to listen without offering instant solutions. It's about finding a space where you can be the pilgrim rather than the guide, creating room to process how Sunday's truth shapes Monday's decisions.

## Walking with a Companion

When I was teaching, I felt the sense of isolation that I know so many Christian teachers feel and the busyness of school life can conspire to compound it. But even for Jesus' disciples as his pioneer missionaries, they travelled in pairs.

This is a core principle in how I work with my clients and why I call myself the Pilgrim Coach. I act as a fellow traveller for a season. I walk alongside leaders, helping them navigate the specific terrain under their feet, often helping them rediscover their compass, and seeking a vantage point to gain some perspective.

But whether you seek out a professional coach or simply a wise peer in your church or department, the principle remains the same. We were not created to walk in isolation.

As you head back into the classroom, consider who is walking with you. Are you gripping the ownership of your career too tightly, or are you ready to walk lightly as a steward? Find a companion, share the load, and remember that the road is better when shared.



# The Busyness of Christian Leadership

Chaplains

Heads

Staff

Governors



**Peter Middleton**

Headmaster at Oswestry School and a TISCA Trustee

## Schools are busy, buzzy places.

That vibrancy and variety is part of the joy and privilege of working in education, but part of what makes it challenging, too. As Christian leaders how, then, should we lead through the busyness of school life? As we look forward to all that 2026 may bring, I offer some *Busy Be's* that I am personally focusing on this year that may be helpful to others. That is, if you're not too busy to read them!

- **Be Prayerful.** We have been placed in roles with considerable responsibility and the decisions we make have enormous ramifications. Take time to pray through the issues that come your way, praying through individual circumstances, praying for wisdom and discernment, strength and courage. Even better, pray with others. I am blessed to have the opportunity each week to pray with my school chaplain, and I'm very thankful for that particular blessing;
- **Be Positive.** HMC Chief Executive Simon Hyde likes to refer to Heads as COOs - Chief Optimism Officers - and that's a title that can certainly be extended to chaplains, too. People look to us, listen to us, take their cue from us, and take confidence from us, too. As Christian leaders, we should take courage and strength from knowing that we have a Lord and Saviour who equips us and protects us, no matter how busy it gets, no matter the scale of the challenge. It's hard not to be positive in that knowledge!
- **Be Present.** It's very easy to become bogged down in the busyness of day to day life - our diaries swallowed by seemingly endless meetings and an ever-swelling inbox. Our impact won't come from being efficient administrators, however. As Charles E. Hummel put it, "Your greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important." Making ourselves available for others, carving out time to listen and be truly present, this is where we can offer real value as leaders;



- **Be Habitual.** Taking time to pray and being nourished by the word of God are vital habits to sustain and protect, but we also shouldn't feel guilty about taking time out for ourselves and for our families; in fact, carving out this time is likely to make us better leaders and more likely to be energised for the busyness of school life. My own personal 'head space' is running and it's where I tend to do my best thinking, de-stressing and praying. Whatever or wherever your sanctuary is, take time to prioritise you. You'll be a better leader for it.

These, of course, have all been modelled for us by Christ. If we thought we were busy over the past few years, just think of the extraordinary breadth and busyness of Jesus's short ministry, the impact of which has changed lives for multiple millions worldwide ever since. Christ made time to be with his Father in prayer, he did not despair in the face of relentless challenge, took time for rest and nourishment, led with humility, calm and positivity, and was driven by a greater purpose. We will, of course, fall far short of that example, but we'd do well to walk in his footsteps as we journey through the year ahead. Strength and grace to you all in your various roles, and may 2026 bring blessings as well as busyness!

# Encouraging more Christians to consider school leadership positions, especially Headship

Chaplains

Heads

Staff

Governors



## Richard Backhouse

leaves Berkhamsted at Easter 2026, after serving the school as Principal since 2016. He takes on a new post leading RS Academics UK Appointments' team

An interview with Richard Backhouse, Principal of Berkhamsted School...I interviewed Richard, a former TISCA Trustee, online and was a little daunted when I realised he had once aspired to be a journalist. However, he quickly put me at my ease as we spoke about our desire to be more than occasional golfers (and Richard speculated that perhaps handicaps should reflect the number of times in a year when we are able to play!). The interview focused on four question areas...

### Question 1: Introduce yourself, please, and explain what you're doing and what you're moving on to do...

I've had only one year out of school since I first went to primary school in 1973, and always thought I'd finish around now. I've been sounding out friends for the last two and a half years and, after extending my stay at Berkhamsted until Easter this year until my successor takes over, I'm looking forward to taking on the leadership of UK Appointments at RS Academics. Like Berkhamsted (and Monkton previously where I was also Principal), I thrive in values-led organisations, and I am looking forward to moving to another organisation which leads with its values. Schools need good leaders, and pupils need to have good leadership modelled to them: being part of finding the best person for leadership roles is important, therefore, and I also think it's really interesting.

### Question 2: What have you observed in terms of the next generation of Christian leaders in schools?

I'm not sure: there may be fewer Christians coming forward for leadership. Faith is a 'protected characteristic' (and a recent HMC speaker on diversity actually *started* with faith when listing these); it's vital that people of faith model their beliefs well.

### Question 3: Why do you feel fewer people of faith want to take on leadership roles?

It's perhaps a misguided sense that being ambitious in this way is inappropriate. So many independent schools are founded on Christian values and so it's crucial these are reflected well. I certainly understand the case that at least one person, not necessarily the Head, should be a committed Christian in a school which has a strong Christian foundation and ethos.

### Question 4: What more can be done to promote people of faith in leadership?

It's important that the best suited person is appointed into a leadership role. However, I think that people of faith should strive to be leaders and in so doing demonstrate their faith effectively and positively. I am the Principal of *all* pupils and *all* staff in my school whatever their gender, faith, heritage, (etc.) but I need to own my Christian faith and not feel embarrassed by it. Being open as a Christian helps all people of faith (and none) to appreciate the importance and value of a strong faith position. I think leaders' authenticity helps other members of the community own their own authenticity within the school community. It's also important to acknowledge one's own weaknesses and be prepared to share these appropriately and sympathetically. I have, for example, recently talked to pupils about my inherited condition (Charcot-Marie-Tooth Disease) and I believe this has helped others be more open and reflective of their own weaknesses as well as strengths.



The Lych Gate at Berkhamsted School

# How to pray for a school community? Where to start...

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



## Revd Andrew Hutchinson (Hutch)

Head of Chaplaincy, Monkton Combe School – and a TISCA Trustee

### How to pray for a school community? Where to start...

I need to admit, I am not someone who finds prayer easy. Indeed, it is an area of my walk with the Lord that I have to continually work at and give attention to. A few years ago I was challenged that if we believe in a God, “who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,” (Ephesians 3:20), why would we not be praying more?!

I have been Chaplain at Monkton for 11 years and inherited a wonderful and faithful group of parents who met weekly to pray for the school. In addition to this, there was a staff prayer meeting over breakfast each week. Yet, on the back of the recent challenge from Ephesians 3 and my seeing our need for the Lord to be more evidently at work at Monkton, we have sought to foster a far greater culture of prayer here. We have done this in two ways:

### Parents’/Families’ prayer meeting

Whilst we remember, with perhaps dread, the days of Covid, they taught us two valuable lessons and skills – WhatsApp and hybrid meetings. Our weekly prayer meeting is available online as well as in person, meaning boarding parents can also join. One of the parents compiles summary notes with prayer pointers/requests for the week ahead, which are sent out to all parents on the WhatsApp group (I am admin of the group on my work mobile). Whilst a relatively small group is able to meet each week, there is a considerable number on the WhatsApp group – all praying for the school.

### Year of prayer for Monkton

We are now in the third year of our “Year of Prayer for Monkton” initiative. Each day I post a short prayer request on our Year of Prayer website. Initially, I just



sent out the link across our school, OM, and community networks; however, I soon realised that not many were actually clicking daily on the website to pray! To engage more people in praying daily, I invited people to receive a daily email or WhatsApp notification with the prayer request. There are now many across the UK and worldwide praying daily for Monkton!

It has been such an encouragement to see so many prayers being answered. This last year we have seen a significant increase in the number of pupils attending the Christian Union, pupils hungry to read God’s word and starting their own Bible studies in boarding houses, and the biggest number we have had being baptised and/or confirmed. God is clearly at work and doing immeasurably more than all we ask and imagine – it should be no surprise, really!

Andy Pritchard is the lay chaplain in Elstree Prep School. Some years ago he authored 'The Blockbuster Bible' which has been well used by many TISCA chaplains. In this article we asked him to tell us what it's like to be a chaplain in a Prep School setting...

# Ministering in a Prep School setting

Chaplains



**Andrew Prichard**

Elstree School Lay Chaplain and Head of TPR

Jesus welcomed the little children to him and even told us to become like them (Matthew 9:14, 18:3).

Ministry with prep school children is not just to show them Jesus but to be like them before Jesus. So the children help us! The work is one of sowing small seeds. To hijack the metaphor, Prep School Paul plants the seeds and Senior School Apollos waters; both are co-workers, but God makes seeds grow (1 Corinthians 13:5-9). The work is a unique privilege laying foundations where no one has been, opening the Bible and finding simple truths that stick. The church needs workers willing to sow seeds and see little long-term fruit.

Many are talking about a 'Quiet Revival'. I can say that Gen Alpha are exciting to teach. They come with amazing questions, and where previous generations asked similar things, there is a much greater interest in the answers, willingness to keep asking questions, and even an unembarrassed desire among a number to

read the Bible. I think one of the best things we can do is listen to the questions without interrupting, check you understood their question right, and be genuinely delighted with their thinking. Questions are not just safe nor expected but so wanted. We want them to think, 'there's more where that came from!'

Last term we did an assembly scheme on the idea behind the C.S. Lewis quotation, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." We saw how believing in Jesus helps us to 'see everything else' – order/pattern/logic; language and story; goodness and beauty; joy. Each assembly gave a framework for why we believe in these things, using verses from John's Gospel on 'light and seeing' to undergird them (John 8:12, 1:1, 8:21, 1:4). I recommend developing a whole-term topic (much like a week away scheme) and finding areas of enquiry – it's not just about sharing stories but giving whole concepts of God and life, to start them thinking.



Andy Pritchard with his book – 'The Blockbuster Bible'



Elstree classroom

# Chaplaincy in a Prep School

Chaplains

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Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



## Jess Sanderson

Chaplain at All Hallows Prep School near Frome –  
part of the Monkton family of schools

As we know in a small school, most people wear many hats and the Chaplain is no different – I also teach Languages to the Juniors, TPR (Theology, Philosophy and Religion) to the Seniors and I am currently an Assistant House Parent. It's busy, but the privilege and benefits of living so much of school life alongside pupils, staff and parents are enormous. There are two distinctive aspects of this life that I particularly cherish.

Living on site means means that it's not just boarders who you see a lot – it's also the pupils with their extra curriculums at either end of the school day and staff when they're on duty or burning the candle at both ends. You become a face that most people can't avoid seeing everyday, giving me the opportunity at least to say 'hi' and smile at everyone each day as well as opening a door to be a listening ear or a supportive shoulder in the trickier moments. Additionally, being able to greet each

child by name you see around school at drop off and pick up does wonders for parental relationships. The apparent downsides of living on site – you're always the one who can open up a classroom after hours, or find the missing coat – are actually blessings in disguise as you get to serve the community in small but meaningful ways.

As a Prep School, we're keen to do things in the most engaging and helpful way possible and that often means doing things differently. This philosophy means that there is freedom in Chapel services to engage pupils in the gospel in fun and quirky ways. Water guns, a giant beach ball, treasure hunts, giant games of Heads Up, kazoos, quizzes, my trusty judge's wig and enormous cardboard boxes are just some of the things that make appearances at Chapel as I try to help pupils access the big idea of the Bible passage we're looking at. The Juniors are also pretty phenomenal dancers and singers – and they are hugely encouraging!

All Hallows assembly



# Helping older pupils share their faith...even when there is sickness about!

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



**Revd Jim Houghton**

Chaplain at Eltham College – and a TISCA Trustee

It was 3am. I was sleeping soundly — dreaming, I imagine, of the outstanding bacon sandwiches we were planning to cook in the morning — when there was a knock at the door. Or rather, quite a few knocks, because I was *very* soundly asleep.

Eventually I woke up.

“Hello?”

“Hi Sir, sorry to disturb you — it's Bildad (names cunningly disguised for confidentiality!). One of the younger boys has been sick.”

The last thing any teacher wants to hear at 3am.

I got up and snuck out of the room, leaving my colleagues to continue snoring peacefully. It turned out that one of the younger boys had indeed been sick — pretty dramatically. But instead of coming straight to get me, Bildad had already woken up, cleaned most of it up (apart from the bits that had oozed down the side of the stairs), sorted the bedding, and only then come to find me.

Pretty amazing.

I can almost guarantee that a sixth former doing that

for a younger student will, humanly speaking, achieve more than an entire year of chapels from me. In fact, they still talk about it to this day: *that time when a sixth former helped clear up vomit on a CU weekend away.*

I've been asked to write about helping students to share their faith — and I am. Because I can say with confidence that the times I've seen the most students come to faith have, without exception, been when older students have served younger ones with Christ-like humility.

Of course, we can't manufacture that. And I regularly thank the Lord for students like Bildad, whose lives have been profoundly transformed by the gospel. But we *can* create opportunities for this kind of service — sixth formers leading younger groups, helping on residential, mentoring one-to-one.

Granted, there's more to it than I've outlined here. Students need to know and believe the gospel. But in my experience, genuine, John 13-style service between students has spoken more powerfully of Christ than almost anything else I've ever seen in schools.



Eltham College Christian groups' weekends away – seniors



Eltham College Christian groups' weekends away – juniors

TISCA has now run a Governors' Gathering on each of the past three years. We asked one of the members of our Council of Reference, Allan Beckett, what he looks for when advising schools on choosing Christian governors...

# Marks of a good Christian Governor

Governors



## Allan Beckett

Allan founded Carnelian: an executive search and board advisory firm. He is involved in the appointment of board members to many Christian organisations, and conducting board effectiveness reviews. He is also a trustee and board chair and a TISCA member of the Council of Reference



At the most basic level, a board is a team that talks. A good Governor must be wise at these activities: talking and teamwork.

## Talking

In the boardroom, talking wisely means having the intellectual nous to size up the issues, the judgement to understand what is helpful to say, and the communication skills to know how to say it. A good Governor must do their homework, wrestle with the trade-offs, see the complexity, see through the complexity, and then articulate points clearly and concisely.

## Teamwork

A good Governor does not shape their contribution to the Board with the aim of making themselves look good, but with the aim of moving the team in the right direction. This includes using your expertise to serve the team. Collective decision-making means the whole board is responsible for each decision, even decisions outside of your area of expertise. Other Governors cannot merely pass the buck to the financial Governors to make the financial decisions, for example. Rather, the financial Governors must use their expertise to help all Governors make wise financial decisions.

TISCA Governors' Gathering at Stowe School in November 2025



Neither teamwork nor talking is overtly Christian. But *Christian* talking is distinctive: it's gracious, truthful, gospel-centred, aimed at building up, and shaped by prior prayer. It reminds the board that it has a Wonderful Counsellor and Mighty God. And Christian teamwork is distinctive: it's Christ-centred, quick to ask for and accept forgiveness, ready to honour others above myself, and sacrificial.

What is more, good Governors require good character. Humility is of particular importance: the humility to be a team player, and the humility to accept collective responsibility for the decision even when I personally voted against it. The other vital character trait is courage: the courage to speak against the consensus and be the grit in the oyster, especially when it would be easier to nod along.

Humility and courage sometimes look like opposites. But at the cross they come together. Jesus had to die for me – that's now lost I was. It's humbling. But though I was lost, now I'm found, and His Spirit is within me. That's courage-making.

Increasing numbers of parents are choosing to homeschool their children and some, especially those living overseas where schooling options are fewer, find that homeschool with online support is the best option...

# Online schooling – whatever is that?

Parents



**Jonathan Marvin**  
School Director, Immanuel Online School



If we are called by Jesus in Matthew 6:33 to ‘seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness’, what does this mean for education?

Immanuel Online School was born from this key verse and a vision for making Christian education available to as wide a range of families as possible, in as many places as possible.

From tiny beginnings, the school has grown in a way that we can only credit to God’s work and provision.

We launched as a proposal in winter 2021 and began with a pilot group in September 2022, having combined that summer with the well-established Christian online distance learning provider NSWLearning. We now have students from across Britain and 18 countries internationally, working with families, local home education hubs, learning centres and schools.

Launching from scratch enabled us think creatively about structure and a design for being online – we did not want to just mirror a typical school day that might work well in person but not so well online.

IOS has two teaching tracks: synchronous (live) and asynchronous (non-live), to suit different needs. The live track uses a unique flipped LTT model (standing for lesson, test, tutorial) to facilitate flexibility and self-paced learning, alongside continuous tracking and highly interactive live small group tutorials.

Our tutors are experienced Christian teachers in the UK and we follow our own curriculum in Years 7 to 9, at or above the level of the English National Curriculum, leading up to preparation for Cambridge International GCSEs in Years 10 and 11. Weekly Foundations LTTs in Bible study, theology, apologetics and culture, plus Christian Worldview courses on the non-live track, ensure students are regularly grounded as we study and pray together.

Digital tools integrate neatly with online education and we make use of a range of classroom and personal learning platforms, resources and simulations. Students are not bound to screens though, as we incorporate reading books and allow flexibility in most work to type or write by hand, together with artistic or musical creative activities.

IOS summer school



To help students develop friendships and meet the wider school community, we arrange meet-ups, seminars with guest speakers and a range of clubs, including chess, football, nature, student-led Bible study and book club. For any students, whether or not they are enrolled with Immanuel Online School, who want to explore and be stretched, we have Masterclass courses on topics such as Nobel Prize winners, IOS Enterprise (starting your own business) and advanced technology and maths pathways.

Our goal is to give families an option they might not otherwise have; and the online world at this moment offers a remarkable window of freedom, opportunity and flexibility. Not having to maintain physical infrastructure means our standard fees can be kept intentionally low at £2,800 per annum or £280 per course, plus VAT for UK students, on the live and non-live tracks respectively.

To assist parental supervision, we provide a 24/7 parent portal with updated information and feedback and assign a pastoral mentor to each child and family on the live track. Pastoral mentors have an accurate overview of their progress and are there to listen and offer guidance and advice.

We describe the vision of Immanuel Online School as being a Christian learning community of educational excellence, where the Christian faith inspires and illuminates our teaching and learning. Our desire is for ‘what we do’ and ‘how we do’ this to reflect that vision, to help raise up young people around the world in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Discover more at [www.immanuelonlineschool.com](http://www.immanuelonlineschool.com)

Many independent schools have been involved in partnerships with maintained schools over the years. It is super to see the work being done to accelerate and cement this process through SPA – the School Partnerships Alliance. One such collaboration involves the National Society for Education, of which Andy Wolfe (Acting CEO and a TISCA member of the Council of Reference) is instrumental...

# Stronger Together: the work of the School Partnerships Alliance

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



## Dr Joe Spence

Chief Executive of SPA and formerly Head of Dulwich College, a TISCA member school



The School Partnerships Alliance (S.P.A.) is emerging as the national authority on collaboration in education and helping schools with an ambition to work across the state and independent sectors to think more strategically and impactfully about their partnership work.

In addition to helping create networks of partnership professionals and to brokering relations between schools in different settings, it's been a delight to work with third parties to ensure that their missions can serve pupils in both the state and the independent sectors.

One example of this that will interest a TISCA readership is the work that S.P.A. is undertaking with the National Society for Education, the Church of England's educational directorate. Early in my time at S.P.A., I was introduced to Andy Wolfe, Acting CEO of the NSE, and we quickly realised the scope there was for independent schools to work with the NSE and benefit from its Flourishing programmes: see <https://www.nse.org.uk/foundation-for-educational-leadership/flourishing-leaders> and <https://www.nse.org.uk/flourishing-teacher-programme>.

At the time of writing, Andy and his colleague Andy Spens and I are plotting a specific systems leaders' *Flourishing* course which will be open to those leading

on partnership work in schools. It was extraordinary to find that the work of NSE was not directly engaged in by any independent schools, not even those with a Church of England Foundation. This changed in 2025, and more independent schools will be introduced to the programmes through 2026-27.

I'm sometimes asked whether VAT on school fees might lead to a retrenchment of partnership work. I would say that this is the time to double down the good effort rather than batten down the hatches. Never has work of partnership been more necessary, and proving the impact it can make is one of the major roles of the S.P.A.. To date, it's been too easy to dismiss a good deal of partnership work as performative or tokenistic, but at its best it can support national educational needs and particularly the needs of the most disadvantaged children.

S.P.A. is looking to concentrate schools' attention on the value of partnership work at moments of educational transition, when many disadvantaged children can be lost to the educational system – be that in the move from primary to secondary school or into Sixth Form or between school and university.

Through the work of programmes like SpringBoard and Lumina, it's clear that care experienced children can benefit from support which can enable them to take up



Alastair Reid meets with Andy Spens and Andy Wolfe, as mentioned in this article



SPA Conference launch



SPA booklet launch – with TISCA supporter Julie Robinson (right), the CEO of the Independent Schools Council (ISC)



opportunities that too few of their number have taken in the past. As one of my own mentees puts it, she suffers greatly from imposter syndrome - until made to believe that that she had every right to every opportunity other children are taking up.

I hope TISCA senior schools offering their older pupils the chance of mentoring primary school children may think about how their schemes could be focussed on helping more disadvantaged children to be more confident and aspirational as they approach their transition to senior school.

I imagine that TISCA members are excited as those in other settings by the findings of the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) of November 2025. I believe the CAR provides an extraordinary opportunity for sustained partnership working.

As it happened, a day after the publication of the report I was talking to 100 co-curricular leads from

independent schools. I was able to suggest to them that they may be the single most important people in ensuring that the CAR's call that every child benefit from an enhanced education (comprising oracy and cultural and sporting activities, adventurous and charitable engagement, and career networking) can be realised. What I foresee is independent schools upskilling staff in state schools where there may not be the time, resource or expertise in these areas. I think they can make real what could be an educational revolution, promoting that holistic approach to schooling which has been at the heart of independent education for centuries.

I hope all I've written above encourages TISCA members whose schools are not yet engaged with us to consider joining the S.P.A.. As we know, in schools we are always stronger together and to have TISCA members as members of S.P.A. would be a personal delight for me and a boon for the partnerships movement.

In a further article on being a Chaplain to a Prep School, we hear from Alice Monaghan who serves at Dean Close School

## 'Think Big' in Prep School chapel!

Chaplains



### Revd Alice Monaghan

Associate Chaplain, Dean Close Foundation – and a TISCA Trustee

As Associate Chaplain in the Dean Close Foundation, I have specific responsibility for the Prep (Year 3-8), Pre-Prep (Nursery-Year 2) and Airthrie School (Rec-Year 6) all in Cheltenham.

My office is in the Prep School and I teach this age group. Each week we have a 'Chaplaincy Assembly' and a Friday whole school Service. When it is exeat, Half Term or the end of Term, our Friday Service is in Chapel and many parents join us in the balcony. (They don't fit into our school hall, so can't come on other Fridays.) The children love having parents at Services, and this is one of the many joys of being a Prep School Chaplain, knowing that parents are also hearing the Good News and taking part in the worshipping life of the School.

As I write, we are in 'Think Big Week', a once a year week with visiting speakers coming in to give a special talk every morning break. This runs concurrently with the Senior School's 'Lent Addresses'. The Prep School

children can come to listen and ask questions and get a doughnut. This morning, 200 children chose to come. Their questions included, "Why will there be a judgement day?" "What is your favourite Bible verse?" "How can Jesus be God and God's Son?"! These visiting speakers will also be at our three CUs this afternoon and will give the talks at Assembly and the Friday Service. We will give the children an opportunity to respond to Jesus on Friday and if they say yes to him for the first time, we will give them a Bible and a Bible activity book and encourage them to come along to a CU or break time Bible Study.



'Think Big' week at Dean Close Prep

# TeachBeyond: Who Are We?

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

Supporters



**Matt Coe**

TeachBeyond, National Director, UK & Ireland

“TeachBeyond? Who?” It’s an easy question to ask if you haven’t heard our name before.

Our story began over 70 years ago with the founding of the Janz Brothers Gospel Association. Originating in Canada, the ministry travelled to post-war Germany to share the good news of the Gospel through word and song. Thousands came to faith, and from this ministry emerged the first students of what is now Black Forest Academy—a school that continues to serve Christian workers from around the world. TeachBeyond was born in 2009 when the focus of the mission moved to education.

Today, TeachBeyond serves in more than 80 countries, partnering with over 200 schools and educational projects, impacting over 40,000 learners daily. Through many specialist services, we support many aspects of school life, including safeguarding, alumni relations and fundraising, leadership development, member care, and curriculum design, among others. Our desire is simple: to help headteachers, governors, staff, chaplains, and parents thrive where God has called them to serve.

TeachBeyond is guided by four core values: **Humility, Excellence, Love, and Partnership**. We do not seek to work in isolation, but to collaborate closely with those who share our vision and purpose and understand why we do what we do.

Our work takes many forms. This includes helping independent schools establish advancement programmes covering alumni engagement, fundraising, and communications; partnering with schools to deliver leadership training that builds unity and cohesion among senior and aspiring leaders; developing curriculum for schools without permanent buildings, including those in refugee camps or remote locations; running summer camps around the world where students encounter the message of Jesus through English and sport; and

providing qualified coaching for headteachers and chaplains who need space to process leadership challenges and workload.

Simply, our vision is “*a world where individuals and communities become all God intends*” coupled with our mission to be “*a global community of followers of Jesus, providing transformational education services as part of God’s ongoing mission to transform individuals and communities into all He intends.*” These two statements along with our values with God’s leading help guide us each day.

We have a particular heart for our own nation, with a new strategic plan, “Reaching the Nations through Education”. We are planning to offer services and support that can address the needs of an entire school or be tailored to individuals within it.

We appreciate your prayers.

If you would like to hear more about services that could help you and your school or simply wish to find out more, please contact: Matt Coe, National Director, UK & Ireland, [mcoe@teachbeyond.org](mailto:mcoe@teachbeyond.org).



# Book Reviews

Chaplains

Heads

Parents

Staff

Governors

Pupils

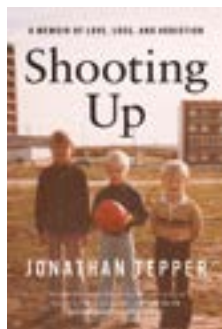
Supporters

## Book reviews by Alastair Reid and Frankie Knight

### **'Shooting Up'**

#### **A memoir by Jonathan Tepper**

I can't remember when I last read such a moving and emotional book. It's well written, keenly focussed and inspirational. The book chronicles Jonathan's childhood in the 1980s and 1990s, primarily in Madrid's San Blas neighbourhood where his missionary parents reach out to drug addicts at the height of Spain's heroin epidemic. This is a book which will appeal to TCKs (Third Culture Kids) – the Tepper family are from the USA and find themselves immersed in Spanish culture – and to all interested in those who reach out with compassion to those going through dark times. It's honest about faith – there are no easy answers – and it is profound in its treatment of grief. You won't be able to put this book down!



### **One with my Lord**

#### **by Sam Allberry**

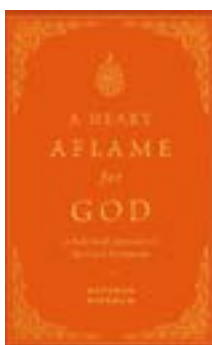
True to form, Sam Allberry takes a doctrine which Christians might feel familiar with and shows its real wonder, power and relevance in our everyday lives. This time, it's union with Christ. In short, readable and well-illustrated chapters, Sam explains and applies the various aspects of what it means for believers to be united to Jesus and the difference that it makes. This is a great doctrine for teenagers to get their heads round to know deeper assurance and joy in their Christian walk.



### **A Heart Aflame for God**

#### **by Matthew Bingham**

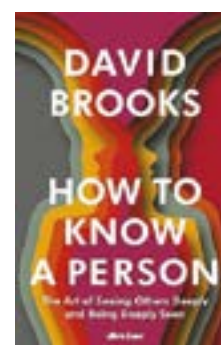
Bingham argues that evangelical Christians can often look to other Christian traditions, such as Catholicism or the Orthodox church, to supplement their spirituality. However, in this winsome but meaty book, he is at pains to show that our own evangelical tradition has rich resources for deepening our walk with the Lord Jesus, we don't need to look elsewhere. Focussing on the Puritans, he beautifully expounds all they have to teach us about having our hearts on fire for God – well worth a read!



### **How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen**

#### **by David Brooks**

In this heart-warming and challenging book, Brooks celebrates the power of making others feel 'valued, heard and understood'. Aware that our interactions with others can often be rushed and superficial, Brooks encourages the reader to slow down and to pay much closer attention to those around them, giving practical help about how to do that. Full of personal anecdotes, psychological insights and inspiring stories, this book is well worth a read.



# TISCA | The Independent Schools Christian Alliance

Join us for our Annual Conference:

## 'WE TAKE FAITH SERIOUSLY'

With our theme this year we are seeking to celebrate the increased interest in spiritual matters by the younger generation and looking at ways to engage more fruitfully with such interest. In doing this we shall also consider how best to promote the positive welfare of young people - physical, spiritual and mental.

Speakers include Rico Tice, Rachel Johnson, Thomas Garner.

Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June All Souls, Langham Place, London Sign up: [tisca.org.uk](http://tisca.org.uk)

[www.tisca.org.uk](http://www.tisca.org.uk)