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Karen Wespieser
CEO, Teacher Tapp

TASTER ISSUE

Education Insights from Oriel Square: Quarterly Reports on the Schools Education Market

Everyone who produces content or provides services for teachers, learners and others involved in education wants to make a difference by delivering the most effective support possible. Through our work with a broad range of education stakeholders, we saw that there was an appetite for clear insights about what's happening now and what might be on the horizon in the industry. With our in-house team of education specialists, our expertise in research and publishing, and our broad network of industry and school stakeholders, we knew we were well-placed to deliver those insights.

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Left: Thought leadership for Oxford University Press; Middle: Publishing services (Happy Handwriting resources) for Collins; Right: Thought leadership for Cambridge University Press and Assessment.

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Directors' Foreword

We're proud that Oriel Square features regularly in UK Pavilions at international education events such as BETT UK and GESS Dubai, and we look forward to consulting with both UK and international organisations to help them access British and British international education markets. These events provide a meeting place for those of us involved in developing educational products and services around the world. The great privilege of being part of the UK education industry is to be able to support teaching and learning globally, whether through working with ministries of education and international schools, or through the distribution of great UK-developed products.

Showcasing our in-house expertise across research, communications and production, this special taster issue of our Education Insights reports brings together contributions from our previous nine editions, looking at topics from SEND, to phonics, to digital skills. We hope you find it useful, and look forward to having further conversations about how to design, develop and distribute the most impactful educational resources.

Sam Derby and **John Deans**, Directors at Oriel Square



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The Impact of Oracy

Voice 21's Amanda Moorghen tells us about the advangtages of an oracy-rich curriculum.

"Oracy has helped me so much – it's the best thing to help with your confidence and expressing your feelings." **– Jack, year 5.**

Every child should feel like Jack during their education. Oracy enables children to be heard which is vital for their learning, confidence and mental wellbeing. It is essential preparation for young people to take their place in democratic and civic life.

So, what is oracy?

The Oracy Education Commision defines oracy as 'articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication'[1]. In oracy-rich schools you will hear students solving problems collaboratively in maths and dissecting arguments in history, talking through conflicts in the playground and leading assemblies.

The impact of oracy at school

When we're teaching and learning, we're speaking and listening. Oracy comprises a body of knowledge and a skillset to be taught, and a crucial medium through which children access their learning. Students make their thinking visible to their teacher and their peers through talk, enabling deeper learning engagement.

There is strong evidence for the link between oracy and students' academic attainment. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) found that 'oral language interventions' have 'very high impact [6+ months' progress] for very low cost'[2]. A recent trial of dialogic teaching (a pedagogical approach that focuses on the quality of talk for learning) found that it has a consistent, positive effect on the attainment of students across English, maths and science[3]. An analysis of classroom talk found that features of a high-quality oracy education (elaboration, querying and student participation) are positively associated with students' SATs performance[4].

Students make their thinking visible to their teacher and their peers through talk, enabling deeper learning engagement.

Insights from Voice 21 Oracy Schools

Voice 21 is working in over 1000 schools, including 44 accredited Oracy Centres of Excellence. Our schools are demonstrating that embedding oracy education in every element of school life is the future: it enhances children's learning, attainment, confidence, wellbeing and sense of community. Every child feels their voice has value and is empowered to use it to thrive.

Our latest impact report revealed that Summerhill Academy, Bristol, has made a huge improvement in maths. Explicitly teaching students to engage in high-quality, collaborative problem-solving through talk has resulted in 95% of students achieving or exceeding the expected standard in maths SATs, an increase of 25 percentage points on the previous year.

Teacher-led research in our schools shows that teaching oracy explicitly – supporting students to extend their own and others' thinking through discussion by bringing oracy-rich approaches to the teaching of vocabulary – rapidly delivers measurable results for teachers who are monitoring students' analytic writing.



Amanda Moorghen is Head of Learning, Impact and Policy at Voice 21. She joined Voice 21 in 2019, supporting the development of the organisation's whole-school approach to oracy education, which launched in September 2020 and now reaches over 1000 schools across the UK.

1 Oracy Education Commission, 'We Need to Talk' (2024)
2 https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/oral-language-interventions
3 https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/dialogic-teaching
4 https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/programmes/classroomdialogue/

Originally published in *Education Insights: Issue 6*, December 2024.

Is the UK Still a Leader in Inclusion?

Everway's Paddy McGrath discusses the opportunities and pitfalls of the schools white paper.

Q: What's Everway's view of the white paper and its impact on the SEND landscape?

As a company we broadly welcome the white paper, particularly for its focus on mainstream provision. There are certainly some substantial areas we feel are missing, but we welcome the widening of the cultural value of inclusion, teacher training and the resources available to include as many children as possible in mainstream education. There's clear recognition that the current system is unsustainable, and I think it's genuinely looking ahead and trying to solve key issues.

We should remember that, internationally, the UK is seen as a leader in inclusion. The fact that we have clear recognition and support in place for many learning challenges, and have had access arrangements clearly defined for many years, is important.

Q: What risks or challenges do you foresee?

Many of the principles that are embedded within the white paper are, on paper, the right thing to do. The challenge of course, for us as an industry and for schools, is in the implementation. We have funding, but is it being prioritised to have a meaningful impact? We have the move from EHCPs to ISPs for many learners, but will that be accepted by families? We have a huge challenge with scalability in terms of teacher training, and we haven't even begun to address what the cultural change looks like for schools – how are teachers feeling about being asked to do more?

There's also a question over public acceptance of the new ISP system. Industry and the government has to be very clear about what the alternatives are, and what rights are still afforded to families. If communication and implementation isn't done well, it could look on the surface like access to support is being eroded.

Q: What's missing from the white paper?

For me, there's a lack of evidence regarding where technology might play a role in supporting the move to mainstream inclusion. Secondly, though there's a clear move towards mainstream inclusion for everyday practice, there's no reference to assessment, particularly high-stakes exams. Does assessment fundamentally change if you're a mainstream school admitting children with more complex needs, and if so, how? Without clear guidance, companies might pursue their own understanding of the market needs, which may not align with the DfE's intention.

For the industry, the current framing of the white paper is insufficient to encourage proper investment or innovation. From experience, it would be understandable if there were nervousness about the government's long-term commitment at this stage. A clear implementation plan would foster competition, innovation, and encourage companies to pursue opportunities, ultimately benefiting learners.

Q: What role do you see tech playing, and how ready are schools for that?

In a mainstream school environment where you're looking at a wide range of needs in any given class, tech will increasingly play a role in supporting specific needs. This requires a cultural and skills shift, where it is the responsibility of the SENDCo to coordinate provision, and the duty of the classroom teacher to understand and embed the necessary tools to include all learners. However, there's a question over how to spread that responsibility without extra workload.

There's not yet enough on the role of technology in the classroom to give EdTech providers confidence in the market. The only way you can realistically scale mainstream provision is to use technology in some way – whether for inclusive assessment, early detection of SEN, teacher training or progress tracking.

It's important going forward that the industry comes together and works with policymakers to help them understand what is important for the system, leveraging the depth of knowledge. A major focus for us at Everway is ensuring we work together with policymakers to support the system and the industry.



Paddy McGrath is an educator, speaker, blogger, and Head of Education at Everway, the world's largest specialist assistive technology company. Paddy is an advocate for inclusion, accessibility and universal design, shaping policy, culture and practice across EMEA.

Originally published in *Education Insights: Issue 11*, May 2026.

Recommendations from the Black Curriculum

*Lavinya Stennett shares the Black Curriculum's response to England's interim Curriculum and Assessment Review report.**

The Black Curriculum works collaboratively to develop ideas, recommendations and frameworks for embedding Black British history, culture and contributions into all subjects and key stages.

History and geography

There are many opportunities across the curriculum to embed the teaching of Black British history:

- **Key stage 1:** People and Places – investigating local area and family histories
- **Key stage 2:** Migration – exploring the question 'who are we as Britons?'
- **Key stage 3:** Multicultural Britain – discovering why British society looks the way it does today
- **Key stage 4:** The Global Community – connecting previous topics on a global scale.

For key stage 1 history this means studying events within living memory (Windrush Day; Stephen Lawrence Day), and discussing figures beyond Mary Seacole (Tony O'Connor, Yvonne Connolly and Betty Campbell to name but a few). It is also important for young people to learn about significant Black Britons and events within their own communities. Key stage 2 opportunities include studying Black presence in the Roman Empire, and considering Anglo-Saxons and Vikings as invaders and colonisers. When studying Ancient Egypt, it's too easy to gloss over the fact that one of the earliest civilisations was African. We also recommend studying a non-Western society as a contrast to Britain, such as Baghdad c.AD 900, the Mayan civilization c.AD 900 or Benin c.AD 900–1300.

At key stage 4, pedagogical approaches should emphasise culturally responsive teaching, and the co-production of knowledge by drawing on local resources and people. There are cross-curricular links with geography, RE, PSHE, English and drama.

Geography recommendations include studying local diverse histories at key stage 1 and linking locational knowledge to Commonwealth regions and British colonialism. Human geography lessons could explore migration and colonial links, and consider cultural practices that are similar across the world such as carnivals in Brazil, London and the Caribbean. Climate disaster coverage could look at which communities are most affected. Assessment could include local fieldwork, significant places and 'living geographies' by creating local guide books.

Science and maths

Black British history permeates science as well. Students can study and be inspired by Black scientists like Lewis Latimer and Dr. Maggie Aderin-Pocock, and the work of the Hidden Figures in NASA. In maths there is scope to compare the Hindu-Arabic numeral system with Roman numerals, and appraise prominent mathematicians like Nira Chamberlain and Katherine Johnson.

Art and citizenship

There is opportunity in art and design to study local Black artists, and fashion as protest.

There are many possible topics in citizenship to cover Black British history: Sustainable Development, centring on activists outside Europe/North America, Global Citizenship (migration, community), Media and Society (representation, Black media figures), and Law and legal systems (case studies like Stephen Lawrence, the Mangrove 9, SUS Laws, BLM).

Teaching could also look at international political organisations, multi-culturalism (with case studies like Windrush and the Black British presence across history), human rights, active citizenship and politics, including case studies of Black politicians and the rise of the far right.

Lavinya Stennett is a social entrepreneur, author and Founder/CEO of the Black Curriculum.



Originally published in *Education Insights: Issue 8*, July 2025.

*Please note, this article was published before the release of the Curriculum and Assessment Review final report.

How has Phonics Teaching Evolved in Different English-Speaking Contexts?

England and Wales

2005

Publication of Clackmannanshire research study (Johnson and Watson) which gave strong evidence for the efficacy of synthetic phonics – though not the first study into the subject, it had a major impact on policy and contemporary thought

2006

Rose Report[1] into the teaching of early reading

2007

Government publishes *Letters and Sounds* – guidance for effective phonics teaching

2010

Change of government; Nick Gibb, new schools minister, is very positive about phonics as a method for teaching reading

2012

Government announces 'matched funding' on approved phonics resources of up to £3,000

USA

1997

Congress convenes the National Reading Panel (NRP) to challenge poor reading standards across the country

2000

Publication of *Teaching Children How to Read*, advocating systematic phonics instruction for all students, based on findings from NRP

2006

Publication of second edition of *Teaching Phonics for Balanced Reading* by E. V. Starrett, to help teachers plan lessons

2013

Mississippi adopts a phonics scheme in its schools and rises from 49th place in USA reading scores to 29th in reading scores by 2018

Australia

2004

Brendan Nelson, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, establishes a National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy in Australia

2005

The Australian Government participates in a major study on literacy teaching, culminating with the publication of a report entitled *Teaching Reading*

2017

South Australia becomes the first state to implement a phonics screening check for year 1 students

2018

The State Government of Victoria published a Literacy Teaching Toolkit that included phonics

1 Department for Education and Skills, 'Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading: Final Report' (2006)

Originally published in *Education Insights: Issue 6*, December 2024.

The origins of teaching reading using synthetic phonics can be traced back centuries. This timeline focuses on significant research and events in three major anglophone markets across the last two decades to contextualise the phonics teaching in schools today. In both the United States of America and Australia, individual states have freedoms to implement education policies under federal governmental systems, while in the UK, education policy falls under the control of central government and the Department for Education.

2012

Pilot of the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) at the end of year 1; 32% of children met the expected standard

2013

PSC rolled out nationally; pass-rate went up to 59%; currently around 80%

2014

New National Curriculum; phonic knowledge should be taught as the only method for decoding words

2016

DfE sponsors phonics 'roadshows' to share good practice nationally and eliminate regional variations in success in the PSC

2018

Launch of Early English Hub schools – supporting neighbouring schools to improve teaching of phonics, early language and early reading

2024

Curriculum and Assessment Review launched; 80% of pupils meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check in year 1[2]

2017

The use of phonics to teach reading becomes known as the Science of Reading, popularised by the work of journalist Emily Hanford, host of *Sold a Story*

2019

Individual states begin to introduce legislative steps to reform the teaching of reading – by 2023, 45 states and Washington DC had introduced at least one bill[3]

2023

New York City orders elementary schools to adopt one of three phonics-based reading schemes

2023

Publication of *Reading Reform Across America: A Survey of State Legislation* (Albert Shanker Institute), analysing the effectiveness of more than 200 bills

2020

Australian government launches free year 1 phonics check

2021

New South Wales adopts the phonics screening check for year 1 students

2022

Tasmania adopts the phonics screening check for year 1 students

2023

Victoria added a phonics screening check to its English Online Interview (EOI) and mandated the use of a second assessment in year 1

2024

In Victoria, all students from prep to year 2 to be taught using a systematic synthetic phonics approach, with at least 25 minutes of daily explicit phonics teaching

2 https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/phonics-screening-check-attainment/2024-25
3 https://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/reading-legislation-data-dashboard

Originally published in *Education Insights: Issue 6*, December 2024.

Rethinking Maths: A Deep Dive into Product Innovation and Impact

Sam Derby speaks with Caroline Hamilton and Tony Staneff, founders of Rethink Maths, about their journey since leaving White Rose, their philosophy on product innovation and the launch of their new screen-free intervention programme, Groundwork Maths.

Q: To start, what led you to create Rethink Maths after your time at White Rose, and how does your approach differ?

Tony: Leaving White Rose was a big change. We knew we wanted to continue the work we enjoy, but we didn't want to just start another curriculum scheme. Instead, we looked at the challenges schools face and asked why they are facing them. Rethink Maths is about solving problems that a couple of thousand schools might have, rather than trying to find something every single school needs. We are very focused on innovation and impact – things that are different from what is currently out there.

Caroline: Having a blank piece of paper has been a real privilege. We've spent the last 12 months reflecting on our experience, visiting schools, and talking to the team and to teachers. Those open conversations have been vital in shaping our direction.

Q: The visual look and feel of your products is very polished. How do you balance the mathematical content with the design of the resources?

Caroline: We take the visual design as seriously as the mathematical content – I think that's one of our superpowers as a team. We have big debates about how many words to use on a page or how to use space, whether it's digital or on paper. It makes a significant difference to how a teacher uses the resource. We keep challenging each other until it's right.

Tony: We have a very skilled team who love creating quality content. While we use some automation, the layout of content is meticulously done by hand. We're playing to the specific strengths of the people we've appointed to ensure that quality.

Q: You made a significant strategic pivot during the development of your intervention programme, Groundwork Maths. Can you talk us through the decision to move away from a digital subscription model?

Caroline: That was a major U-turn. We had the business model, the pricing and the forecasts all ready for a digital subscription. Then, during a school visit, Tony and I realised it wouldn't work. Groundwork Maths is predominantly aimed at Teaching Assistants (TAs), and some TAs may not have access to a work laptop or PC. Having one central person manage a login and download everything would create a barrier. We weren't afraid to do a U-turn, but it's not easy to go to a team and say we're totally flipping the entire model on its head. However, I strongly believe it was the right decision and I'm really glad that conversation happened.



© Photo by Ahmadreza Rezaie on Unsplash

> "We weren't afraid to do a U-turn, but it's not easy to go to a team and say we're totally flipping the entire model on its head."

Tony: The feedback was clear: schools wanted it packaged up so they could just give it to a TA to deliver. They also felt that downloading and printing bits of paper undervalued the product. It changed our business model – moving away from recurring subscription fees toward a printed model – but it was the right decision for the reality of the classroom environment.

Q: As someone who was a maths publisher for a long time, I'm really interested in that slightly retro element of a physical-first approach for the business model. Can you talk a bit about that?

Tony: Children who struggle with maths often lack a mental image of mathematical concepts. They can't always form that image just from looking at a slide deck. We wanted a product focused on physical, hands-on manipulation for maths interventions. We have seen a growing pushback against screens in classrooms, and we feel that will grow, so we want to be in a position where we can offer products that aren't as screen-heavy.

Caroline: When I spoke at conferences and mentioned 'screen-free', people were immediately interested. From my experience as a teacher, I always found that the pupils that were struggling most craved that 1-1 or small group interaction. They didn't want to learn from a device, no matter how good the technology was. The biggest impact comes from a teacher or TA sitting with them, teaching them directly.

Q: Have you got a particular way of representing mathematical models that you think is really important, and does that relate to specific physical materials that you recommend?

Tony: Rather than specific models, we are more focused on consistency. In the past, many products would have shown multiple representations on a single page, but for many children, especially those who might be struggling, it's too much. Based on feedback from users, we decided to focus on one consistent model and image throughout.

Caroline: It's helpful for teachers too. Not just in terms of practical set-up, but also because it allows them to gain mastery of a model rather than trying to juggle five different ones while also managing all the other subjects they have to teach.

Q: What can we expect to see from the launch, and how are you planning to measure impact?

Caroline: We are launching in stages starting in September with place value and number facts, followed by addition, subtraction, multiplication and division in October, and finally fractions and geometry in November. Schools have been pre-ordering the full package, which is exciting but also puts pressure on us to ensure it's implemented well.

Tony: Another thing that we always said is that we would have CPD alongside everything that we do, so we built a three-tier CPD model: Identify, Teach and Grow. We're also focused on impact and community-building so that schools can share what's working. We don't want to wait two years for full trial results – though we know those independent studies are also important. We want early feedback on pupil engagement and outcomes so we can see what's working, what's not working and how it's being implemented.

Q: Finally, what else is on the horizon for Rethink Maths?

Caroline: We're incredibly excited about Number Phonics and our Foundations programme for nursery pupils, which we will start talking about more soon. Our focus is squarely on lower-attaining pupils and closing the gap before it even forms. We have loads of ideas for secondary as well.

> "We're committed to being innovators in this space."

Tony: We're also using AI to prototype and automate internal processes, allowing us to innovate faster without compromising our pedagogy. We want to keep doing things that are genuinely different. Whether schools use it, time will tell, but we're committed to being innovators in this space.





For over a decade **Caroline Hamilton** and **Tony Staneff** have dedicated themselves to supporting maths education around the world. Starting out as classroom teachers, driven by a shared belief that every child deserves to feel confident and successful in maths, Caroline and Tony have helped shape resources and approaches that are now used in schools across England and in over 140 countries. They created Rethink Maths to keep pushing for high-quality content, inspiring professional development and a more positive experience of maths for everyone.

Originally published in *Education Insights: Issue 12*, September 2026.

Content Creation and Adaptation for International Markets

Oriel Square experts share their experience of creating and adapting content for different international audiences.

Metrication

Project: Global Educational Publisher, maths textbook series

Project lead: Hannie Kirkham

The 'why?' The publisher needed to prepare a series of English language maths resources for a procurement review and eventual adoption by a Middle East ministry of education.

What treatment was needed? We updated the Arabic translation of the materials to account for changes from US customary to metric units, and made mathematically and culturally sensitive changes of context for the locale.

Our approach? We built an in-region team of editors to review and update all content, working across components to ensure that changes made to the student book were also reflected in the teacher materials and answers pages. This included answer checking and fact-checking to ensure examples and questions remained sensible after metrication. Our project lead reviewed the editorial work as an additional quality assurance step.

The challenges? Being a designed mathematics text, multiple things were changing at once: the mathematics of the new measuring system and the appropriate cultural contexts had to continue to be useful to convey the target maths teaching, which often meant further contextual change.

What worked well? Working across all components concurrently meant that changes were caught in both directions.

Culturally appropriate history content creation

Project: Wainfleet Education, ancient history content creation

Project lead: Maegan Dobson Sippy

The 'why?' The publisher identified a need to support English medium instruction schools in North Africa with history resources that were more linguistically and culturally appropriate for learners than existing materials.

What treatment was needed? Authoring and illustration of content had to be highly culturally relevant for the target market, including avoiding any colonial bias such as a European-centric historical perspective.

Our approach? We worked with regional educational and historical experts across all phases of the content creation to ensure a good cultural fit. This was a highly visual product and to ensure that images were both historically accurate and culturally appropriate, we used specialist libraries, including approaching individual museums and art galleries to source photos, and commissioned bespoke maps and illustrations rather than using stock supplies.

The challenges? In some instances the historical subject matter was complex, as well as having multiple, at times conflicting, interpretations. This needed simplifying for the audience age range and cultural context, without introducing historical inaccuracies.

What worked well? Blending our existing expertise of British curriculum history publishing and the rigorous use of regional and cultural experts throughout the content creation led to a very high engagement value of the end product for the target audience.

Qualification mapping and regional teacher support

Project: British Council, ELT course exams mapping

Project lead: Eva Steenhuis

The 'why?' The client identified a need to support teachers using their English language resources in providing explicit links with examinations their students were concurrently studying for. This included as IGCSEs and local qualifications, for countries across North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

What treatment was needed? Rather than changing content, we created a series of exam tips that were specific to a prioritised list of regional and international exams and then added these into the existing teaching resources.

Our approach? We first had to identify which exams to prioritise, by working with regional experts in the target countries. We then worked with in-region editors to map out how well the resources fitted with those exams, comparing the curricula and highlighting where examination guidance would be useful. Our specialist ELT authors then drafted an exam tips section for each of the teacher guidance chapters.

The challenges? Working across multiple regions meant we had to be strategic about which qualifications we provided exam tips for; it was important to balance the additional content so that it was useful for a broad range of teachers and learners without burdening the resources with too many options.

What worked well? This was an effective and efficient way to demonstrate the application of the English language resources to a range of different examinations, while supporting teachers in that application, without causing significant changes across the whole content suite.

Format change and cultural review: digital to print

Project: Collins, SNAP Science – conversion to print workbooks, with adjusted culturally sensitive content

Project lead: Liz Cremona-Howard

The 'why?' The publisher's sales team had a request from international schools for an existing primary science series to have a supporting printed workbook instead of a digital component, along with localisation and cultural sensitivity updates that would improve engagement in Middle Eastern territories.

What treatment was needed? The content needed transforming from a digital format to printed workbook, including content creation and layout. It also needed a cultural review of content and images to ensure the client's cultural sensitivity standards for the region were adhered to.

Our approach? Our specialist primary science development editors worked closely with designers to adapt the online material into a print format, ensuring the layout was workable for answer spacing whilst retaining the look, feel and pedagogy of original content. All members of the team were also engaged with the client's cultural guidelines, which our regional expertise further fed into.

The challenges? The intention was for the workbooks to be sold across multiple international markets, meaning that content changes that would work well for one cultural region might not work well for another. For instance, different regions experience different seasons. In such cases we made a priority call, or had to consider the most appropriate one-size-fits-all approach.

What worked? The close working relationship between the expert editorial team and the designers made the process efficient, and enabled us to understand content issues very early in the production.

Digital Skills in the Curriculum: It's Not Just About Computer Science

*Peter Marshman, CEO of charity digit<all>, spoke to Hannie Kirkham about how teaching digital skills in schools could change for the better.**

Q: Which areas of the curriculum could better integrate digital skills?

Really, crosscurricular change is needed. Until now, we've relied heavily on the computing curriculum, which overemphasises coding, to cover digital skills. This means that if young people don't study computer science, they miss out on a lot of digital learning. Both the curriculum review and the increasing prevalence of AI have made people rethink the integration of digital skills in other subjects.

Q: Are there specific recommendations you would like to see from the C&A review?

I'd like to see a framework that supports every subject to embed digital skills meaningfully. Even in PE, recording and analysing performance is complementary learning, not shoehorning in digital skills.

Digit<all> works on climate literacy, AI literacy and digital literacy, which quite helpfully go together. I hope data science and machine learning and AI are weaved into any curriculum change in computing.

Q: What are the most important digital skills?

We must teach the ability to make critical judgments when using technology. With low-code and no-code options merging together, young people still need to understand how the programmes work because, if you don't, you can't be a discerning user. This involves what we call a notional machine level of understanding – for instance, understanding that the machine does X because it goes through these steps.

Q: Have there been any particularly effective or ineffective initiatives for digital skills over the last few decades?

Aside from the computing curriculum, the micro:bit has been really transformational. Its low cost means every school has it, and it allows students to code something physical and develop engineering skills. Computing can be seen as very sedentary, so the fact that you can code a device and then take it outside, monitor conditions and look at animal habitats is a great way for young people to see how technology can interact with their physical environment.

Q: What about the future of assessment?

There are so many online platforms that make assessments fun and engaging. That's useful for formative assessment, and student use of AI for this is interesting – it's not necessarily bad. If a kid comes to a teacher and says 'Miss, I've done my poetry homework but I used AI to write the first line because I was really struggling with it…' then that's great. But it's important for teachers to understand how to support both their workload and, more importantly, their students with targeted guidance for AI assessment platforms.

Q: What recommendations would you give to the educational publishing industry?

Context is now more important than anything else. Publishers should link programming to the real world, always beginning with the 'why', because that's the hook for children now. Consider skills that employers are looking for that are not automatable. Publishers also need to understand the amount of time between the Review's decisions and its implementation; the last curriculum change took half a decade to go through. It takes time.



Peter Marshman is CEO of digit<all>, having worked with schools for over 15 years. He's also Secondary Computing Lead for Computing at School (CAS), an EU Code Week Ambassador and has worked with BCS, the BBC, Hodder Education, the Royal Society and more.

Digit<all> is a charity committed to advancing digital competency through strategic support and partnerships with schools. They host teacher training, workshops and enrichment camps with learners, and provide resources to support the inclusion of computing skills in schools and communities.

Originally published in *Education Insights: Issue 9*, September 2025.

*Please note, this article was published before the release of the Curriculum and Assessment Review final report.

The Classroom Perspective

At Education Insights, we want to hear from the people on the ground. Our reports regularly feature innovative educators from a range of school contexts. Here are some highlights of teacher insights from our previous issues.



Edd Moore, award-winning eco-coordinator and Oriel Square's Classroom Expert for Sustainability, discussed climate education.

"Since the publication of the DfE's Sustainability Strategy in 2022 there has been increasing urgency for schools to get children into, and learning from, nature. In my last primary school I embedded nature and the environment into the curriculum to inspire students. For example, sustainability can be woven across subjects in enquiry-based projects. We want learning to impact students' thinking and actions to enable them to focus on issues at the school, community or global level. These enquiries link with the natural cycles of the seasons and aim to open up a journey of meaningful exploration. The Harmony Project is a great example of a sustainability curriculum in practice. Building understanding and appreciation of the natural environment is the first step to nurturing a generation who actively want to care for their world."

Excerpt from *Education Insights: Issue 5*, September 2024

Karl Coutet, who taught in Saudi Arabia for over ten years in both US and British curriculum schools, characterised the international education market in the region.

"The region is the second fastest growing area for international schools after China. The growth is due to a move from international education being a provision for emigrants to one for the local market. Local parents want their children to have an international education but their objectives for this have changed. They previously wanted their children to secure entrance to universities abroad, but increasingly students are staying more local: they might study abroad but intend to return to their home country afterwards. Schools are therefore required not just to prepare students for Higher Education but for life in a more global market. This means they must model their provision in a more sophisticated way to offer students an international education while still maintaining their home language and culture. It might be too much to ask a publisher to think beyond the standards they are following, but enrichment activities that support the local context would add a lot of value to international curricula."

Excerpt from *Education Insights: Issue 2*, October 2023

Imogen Melton, learning support assistant in an SEMH specialist school in the North East, explained how she created appropriate literacy resources for her students with SEND.

"A lot of resources I created from scratch, and I always made three versions at varying difficulty levels, so that I could ensure I had something suitable for every student. We had a school subscription to Twinkl, so sometimes I could use material from there as a starting point, but it would usually need to be heavily edited to suit our context – even the SEND-specific content. The main difficulty was that, even if an activity provided the correct learning content, it was often not designed for older children, so was not appropriate for many of our students. It was a challenge to make sure the resources I was using looked like they belonged in a secondary school. Often this involved changing fonts or reducing point size, and deleting images and illustrations aimed at very young children. We had to be careful not to demotivate our students by giving them learning materials they deemed as 'babyish'."

Excerpt from *Education Insights: Issue 7*, March 2025

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