Meet the Team

School Improvement Partners: Primary Specialists

Paul Ackers
Julie Cheung
Mike Dixon
John Evans
Vicki Guest
Lisa Hesmondhalgh
Karen Hunter
Collette Mather
Mylene McGuire
Tim Nelson
Dave Paton
Ray Rudd
Colin Watson
Wendy Wheldon
Cassie Blackwood
Cath Cooke
Lesley Else
Abigail Fielden
Michael Gaskill
Katie Hague
Kate Hurley
James Marsh
Mark Mullin
Kevan Naughton
Kathy Nichol
Nikki Patel
Gillian Talbot
Jeanette Westhead

School Improvement Partners: Secondary Specialists

Ray Biglin
Paul Buckland
Tony Birch

School Improvement Partners: SEND Specialists

Jude Lomas
Steve Lowe

Early Years Consultants

Cassie Blackwood
Katie Hague
Lesley Else
Wendy Wheldon

English & Science Consultants

Emma Caulfield
English

Donna Harris
Science

Ray Biglin

School Improvement Partner

Secondary Specialist

ABOUT RAY

Ray has worked as an Ofsted Lead Inspector in both the primary and secondary sectors. He has also worked as a school improvement adviser with Leeds Authority and as a lesson observer expert practitioner at Leeds City College, one of the largest further education colleges in the country. Ray currently works as a Lead Reviewer and QA assessor with Challenge Partners, an organisation providing reviews and school improvement advice for nearly 500 primary and secondary schools across the country. Ray also works as a school improvement partner for a large secondary school in the North East.

Ray has wide experience of working internationally, carrying out primary, all-through and secondary school reviews in the Middle East, New York and France. He is an accredited BSO inspector and was part of a team that carried out an inspection in Abu Dhabi. Since 2018, Ray has led or been a team member on 15 inspections in the Cayman Islands and has quality assured a large number of reports.

Between 2013 and 2017, Ray worked as an Education Challenge Partner across Norfolk, providing regular support and challenge to over 30 primary schools, resulting in significant improvement.

Ray can offer support in the following areas: preparing for Ofsted; lesson observation skills; teaching and learning; self-evaluation; curriculum development; post-16 provision; and management training for both middle and senior leaders.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Ofsted preparation
- Lesson observation skills
- Teaching and learning
- Curriculum development
- Post-16 provision
- Management training for both middle and senior leaders

Paul Ackers

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT PAUL

Paul is an experienced senior leader within primary schools. He is in his fourteenth year of headship, and he is currently a headteacher of a school in the north of Liverpool. Prior to relocating back to the North West, he was an Executive Head and school improvement partner for a large Multi Academy Trust, with responsibility for school-to-school QA support, digital innovation and also the development of subject leader expert groups across the Trust.

Paul has worked in a number of very contrasting school contexts in the North West and East Midlands and has experience of leading a VA school, a stand-alone academy and schools as part of a large Multi Academy Trust. He has a proven record of school improvement and has successfully led a number of schools through Ofsted inspections, achieving 'Good' each time, the most recent taking place in January 2025. He has also led schools through a Catholic Schools Inspectorate process (most recent July 2025), achieving both Good and Outstanding judgements. Paul's leadership has been described as being 'strong and transparent' and that his focus is on 'high ambitions for all pupils' and a 'passion for providing pupils with memorable educational experiences' are 'highly effective'.

Paul is passionate about developing people and building relationships with communities. Throughout his headships, Paul has actively promoted opportunities to facilitate staff development.

Paul has worked within settings in redesigning and refining their curriculums and has provided advice and solutions on how to promote pupil welfare and the raising of aspirations through the implementation of a character curriculum focus. He has also supported schools going through a restructuring process and during inspections.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Safeguarding
- Effective communicator
- Proven track record of school leadership in more than one school
- School improvement partner as part of a large MAT
- Curriculum development and implementation
- Coaching and mentoring expertise
- Strategic and financial planning
- Staff development
- Building relationships at all levels and with all stakeholders

Tony Birch

School Improvement Partner

Secondary Specialist

ABOUT TONY

Tony is the Founding Director of Birch Education. This bespoke educational consultancy, founded in 2020, is dedicated to empowering individuals and teams, supporting them to develop sustainable and successful approaches. Focused on 'insight-analysis-growth', his recent commissions have included strategic planning, partnership development, and supported self-evaluations. He works with a range of organisations and is a facilitator on National Professional Qualifications for headship and executive leadership. He is also a Challenge Partners lead reviewer.

Tony is also a member of the 'development team' at the Association of Education Advisers (AoEA), fulfilling a range of roles that include candidate assessment and facilitating various training and development sessions. He is currently the 'Series Editor' for their collection of books documenting the role of the adviser. He is also the author of "Primary Education as a Whole: Sociocultural Perspectives for Leaders" (2022).

Previously, Tony worked for Bolton Council for more than 20 years where he managed an award-winning educational ICT team, served as a school improvement adviser, and Head of School Improvement before becoming Assistant Director and the lead for education and learning strategy. In his role in Bolton, he also took a secondment to the commercial sector, completed work as an Ofsted lead inspector, and served as an Additional Inspector on ICT surveys. Tony was involved in the governance of various organisations.

He is currently a Trustee at Woodbridge Multi-Academy Trust and chair of Woodbridge College, a post-19 SEND provision. Recently, he was Chief External Examiner for Manchester University's primary PGCE. Tony has a Ph.D. and is an accredited Neurolinguistic Programming practitioner. He is a Senior Associate of the AoEA and a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Evaluation and review
- Performance management
- Training and development
- Partnership review and development
- Facilitation
- Coaching
- Investigations and complaints
- Change management
- Organisational development

Paul Buckland

School Improvement Partner

Secondary Specialist

ABOUT PAUL

Paul was Headteacher at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Cumbria for seven years, the highest-performing school in that county. During this time, Paul also worked as an Ofsted inspector for four years until 2022 in the Northwest. Prior to this, he was Deputy Headteacher at North Halifax Grammar School, Calderdale for 10 years.

Paul's early career included experience in three comprehensives in North Yorkshire and Leeds, including time as Assistant Headteacher in Horsforth School. Paul has led two large comprehensive English faculties but has extensive experience of supporting and reviewing most subject areas. Paul has led on many areas of school improvement: CPD, behaviour for learning, quality assurance, student outcomes and attendance.

Paul is an advocate of the Mindsets philosophy and encourages students and colleagues to grasp every experience as a learning opportunity. Paul is a school improvement consultant with experience across many trusts and contexts in the North, in addition to being an Associate for ECM. Paul also coaches colleagues through NPQ programmes, including SENDCO, carries out safeguarding reviews, writes for The Good Schools Guide and Teach Secondary and has his own blog, *Tales from the Headteacher's Desk.*

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Leadership and management
- Safeguarding
- Ofsted preparation
- Making clear judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and supporting schools in working towards school improvements; teamwork and developing leadership across school, including robust self-evaluation, governance; safeguarding and headteacher appraisal

Cassie Blackwood

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist & Early Years Consultant

ABOUT CASSIE

Cassie Blackwood is a highly respected Early Years Specialist with over 20 years of leadership experience across the education sector. She is recognised for her unwavering commitment to raising standards, strengthening leadership and ensuring that every child receives the highest quality education, care and support.

Throughout her career, Cassie has successfully led and supported a wide range of educational settings, including private nurseries, maintained schools, academies, multi-academy trusts and wraparound childcare providers. Her work focuses on improving outcomes for children through exceptional leadership, robust safeguarding practice, curriculum excellence and inclusive provision.

Cassie works nationally with senior leaders, governors, proprietors and management teams, providing consultancy, quality assurance, inspection preparation, training and strategic improvement support. She is particularly recognised for her ability to translate statutory requirements, inspection expectations and educational theory into practical, sustainable actions that make a measurable difference to children, families and staff teams.

A passionate advocate for high-quality early education, Cassie specialises in supporting leaders to establish ambitious cultures, develop effective leadership and governance systems, strengthen teaching and learning and create environments where all children can thrive. Her work is underpinned by a deep understanding of child development, safeguarding, inclusion and curriculum implementation.

Cassie delivers a wide range of professional development programmes, leadership training, safeguarding courses and conference presentations across the country. She is highly regarded for her engaging and practical approach, empowering leaders and practitioners to confidently drive improvement within their own settings.

Alongside her extensive safeguarding expertise, Cassie has significant experience supporting children with SEND and additional needs. She is PEG trained and has worked extensively with schools and early years providers to develop inclusive practice, strengthen SEND provision and ensure that every child receives the support they need to succeed.

Known for her honest, supportive and solutions-focused approach, Cassie is particularly skilled at identifying strengths, diagnosing barriers to improvement and helping leaders develop clear, achievable improvement strategies. Her work consistently focuses on creating lasting impact, improving children's life chances and building sustainable excellence across educational provision.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Early Years Foundation Stage
- Regulatory inspection preparation and quality assurance
- SEND and inclusive practice
- Nursery registration and compliance
- Quality improvement and school readiness
- Wraparound childcare provision
- Forest School trainer

Emma Caulfield

English Consultant

ABOUT EMMA

Emma has worked for 15 years as Director of her own independent literacy consultancy business and, more recently, as a commissioned consultant for an internationally renowned writing approach.

A strong career in the classroom, in challenging urban contexts, preceded this work, followed by working for Manchester City Council as a literacy consultant and as an Intensifying Support Programme consultant.

Emma served as Assistant Head (Teaching & Learning) in a school in Special Measures and was part of the SLT that led the school to an Ofsted 'Good' judgement. At the time, she was also the Y6 teacher who taught the children, resulting in their attainment rising from 30% to 70% in English and Maths.

Later, Emma was Deputy Head in a large city-centre primary school. In addition to overseeing English and Foundation Subject teaching and learning and CPD, she was DSL, NQT mentor, TA line manager and a governor.

Emma has over 20 years' experience of school governance. She has been a school governor and Chair in two primary schools and the largest secondary school in Manchester. She is currently Chair at an inner-city primary school which underwent a successful inspection under the new framework (November 2025). Despite the many challenges of intersectionality, the school has transformed its Reading, Phonics and Maths results, maintained a healthy balance sheet, and extended its offer of specialist SEND provision.

Emma's knowledge is grounded in the realities of school life. She has a thorough understanding of how to support school leaders to get the best out of their staff, colleagues, pupils and families. As well as seeing the 'big picture' and working at a larger, strategic scale, she is able to drill down into the detail and support with finer yet significant areas for improvement and development.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Teaching and Learning
- Subject Leadership
- Early Reading
- Reading Comprehension
- Early Writing
- Writing
- Oracy
- Foundational Knowledge & Skills
- Governance

Julie Cheung

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT JULIE

Julie Cheung is an experienced primary headteacher with a strong track record of leading sustainable improvement, developing leadership capacity and establishing high-performing school cultures. She is currently Headteacher of Brownlow Fold Primary School in Bolton and has extensive experience supporting schools, leaders and governing bodies through periods of change and improvement.

Julie is recognised as a strategic and outward-facing leader who combines a deep understanding of the educational landscape with a relentless focus on securing the best outcomes for children. Her leadership is characterised by integrity, resilience and a commitment to inclusion, ensuring that every child receives the support they need to thrive.

The school's most recent Ofsted inspection recognised the strength of leadership throughout the organisation. Inspectors noted that leaders have an accurate understanding of priorities and overall practice and that leadership decisions have brought about clear improvements. Ofsted highlighted leaders' precise identification of pupils' individual needs, their commitment to inclusive practice and their ability to remove barriers to learning through evidence-informed approaches. The report also recognised the productive partnerships established with families and the wider community, alongside leaders' determination to secure positive outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

Julie has significant experience beyond her own school. She previously undertook an Executive Headship on behalf of the local authority, providing stability and strategic leadership to a large primary school during a period without substantive leadership. She successfully supported the school through its Ofsted inspection while strengthening leadership systems and improving organisational effectiveness.

As Chair of the Bolton School Funding Sub Group, Julie contributes strategically to local authority consultations and decision-making processes, ensuring that funding priorities reflect the needs of schools and pupils across the borough. Her involvement in local and regional networks reflects her commitment to system leadership and collaborative school improvement.

A passionate advocate for leadership development, Julie has embedded a coaching culture within her own school, creating an environment where professional learning is personalised, reflective and impactful. Ofsted recognised the school's commitment to purposeful coaching and evidence-informed professional development, particularly for early career teachers and trainee staff. Julie is a qualified instructional coach and is currently completing her Level 5 Professional Coaching qualification, further strengthening her expertise in leadership coaching, mentoring and professional growth.

Julie firmly believes that culture is the foundation of successful school improvement. She has established a positive and supportive working environment where staff wellbeing is prioritised, communication is open and professional development is valued. Ofsted highlighted the school's positive working culture, noting that staff feel welcomed, supported and part of a cohesive team, with leaders managing workload and wellbeing carefully.

Known for her rigorous yet supportive leadership style, Julie is skilled in self-evaluation, accountability, strategic planning and organisational development. She works collaboratively with leaders at all levels to build capacity, develop authentic leadership and secure lasting improvement. Her leadership combines high expectations with compassion, enabling both staff and pupils to flourish.

Julie brings a combination of strategic insight, practical experience and proven leadership expertise, making her a highly effective partner for schools seeking sustainable improvement, leadership development and organisational growth.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Executive leadership and school improvement
- Leadership development and succession planning
- Coaching
- Establishing effective school culture
- Accountability conversations
- Rigorous self-evaluation
- Strategic school improvement planning
- Special educational needs and inclusion
- Teaching and learning
- Staff wellbeing and organisational culture
- Governance and strategic leadership
- Attendance and inclusion strategies
- Professional development and instructional coaching

Cath Cooke

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT CATH

Catherine is an experienced former headteacher with a strong track record in school improvement, leadership development and SEND, including within a multi-academy trust. She has expertise in school reviews, curriculum development, inspection preparation and headteacher appraisal.

Her extensive knowledge of the inspection framework and process enables her to support schools in evaluating their effectiveness, identifying priorities and preparing for inspection with confidence. Catherine works alongside leaders to develop leadership capacity, strengthen provision and secure sustainable school improvement.

Catherine has supported the development of aspiring and established leaders through national programmes including NPQSL and NPQ SENCO. She holds an education degree, the National Professional Qualification for Headship and a Postgraduate Certificate in Attachment, Trauma and Mental Health.

As a qualified coach, Catherine is particularly skilled at supporting leaders to navigate the demands of school leadership while maintaining a strategic focus on improvement. Her coaching approach combines support and challenge, enabling leaders to reflect critically on their practice, develop confidence and make informed decisions that strengthen outcomes for pupils and their school communities.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Inspection preparation and readiness
- School reviews and self-evaluation
- Curriculum development and design
- SEND and inclusion
- Leadership coaching and development

Mike Dixon

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT MIKE

Mike is the Headteacher at Acresfield Academy, as well as an associate for ECM. He has been Headteacher at Acresfield Academy for 15 years, during which time he has moved the school from satisfactory to outstanding. The school achieved a second outstanding under his leadership in 2024. The school is a one-form entry primary school in Chester, with a nursery and resource provision for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and complex needs. As an associate for ECM Education, he supports school improvement, Headteacher appraisal, and carries out various training programmes. Mike enjoys working closely with senior leaders to help drive whole-school improvements in a manageable and timely way. This includes working with curriculum leaders and middle leaders to secure improvements and develop the leadership skills of staff.

Ofsted acknowledged the "outstanding leadership of the Headteacher" in the way he has "successfully driven the school forward." Since becoming an academy in 2019 and joining the Northwest Academies Trust, Mike has continued to drive improvements at the school to ensure that children's outcomes remain excellent, both in terms of their academic attainment and personal development.

Mike ensures that he presides over a school that is a happy and vibrant place to learn, with inclusive practices that meet the needs of all learners. Maintaining high standards is always a challenge for school leaders, but it is one that Mike is proud of achieving at Acresfield. He has been able to share his expertise with others by mentoring Headteachers and supporting their early development in the local area.

Mike's particular expertise lies in school improvement planning and robust self-evaluation; curriculum developments, including the wider curriculum; making clear judgements about the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment; supporting schools in working towards school improvements; teamwork and developing leadership across the school; Headteacher appraisal, developing pupils' behaviour and attitudes, and supporting their personal development.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Ofsted preparation and the inspection framework
- Curriculum Development
- Inclusion
- Assessment
- Retrieval Practice
- School Improvement
- Self-Evaluation

As headteacher of Our Lady Star of the Sea, I cannot speak highly enough about the transformative impact Mike has had on our school. His dedication, expertise, and tailored approach to school improvement have been nothing short of exceptional.

Before engaging with Mike, our school faced several challenges, including declining student outcomes. However, through his comprehensive analysis and strategic planning, he provided us with a roadmap for positive change. Regular visits and support were instrumental in continually monitoring progress and writing an effective school self-evaluation, offering valuable feedback.

Today, I am proud to say that our school continues to be judged as 'good'. Test scores have risen, teacher morale is higher, and most importantly, our students are thriving. The expertise, professionalism, and unwavering support of Mike and ECM have been instrumental in our journey towards becoming a high-performing school.

I wholeheartedly recommend Mike to any school seeking a partner dedicated to fostering lasting positive change and achieving excellence.

Louise Finlay | Headteacher at Our Lady Star of the Sea Primary School

Mike has been with us on our journey as our learning partner since our previous Ofsted inspection in 2017 to our most recent one in 2023. During this time, we have progressed from 'Good' overall to 'Good with outstanding features' as a result of his direct support in school.

Mike's insight has guided us in reviewing our curriculum and ensuring that it is appropriately progressive and meets the needs of all learners in our school, and that our assessments enable our most able learners to demonstrate their understanding.

Mike has also been pivotal in developing strong subject leadership within the school and enabling subject leaders to fully understand the vision and intent for their subjects. Pupil outcomes have been positively impacted in all areas of teaching and learning.

Alongside Mike's support with curriculum development, he has also coached less experienced members of staff in their role as new subject leaders. From this, their confidence and understanding of their roles has grown, and again, we have seen positive impacts on our outcomes for pupils as a result of this.

We look forward to continuing with ECM in our school development journey.

Lyndsey Colman | Headteacher at Scholar Green Primary School

Lesley Else

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist & Early Years Consultant

ABOUT LESLEY

Lesley Else joined ECM Education Consultants as an Associate Adviser in November 2016. Lesley has extensive quality assurance experience in schools. She holds the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and the Professional Qualification for School Inspectors (PQSI).

Prior to working with ECM, and with over 20 years' experience as a primary teacher and senior leader, Lesley has supported improvement across four very different schools, building a deep understanding of the local context and the realities schools face. Over the past decade in senior leadership, she has played a central role in driving sustained improvement, raising standards through clear priorities, sharply focused planning and consistent follow-through. Lesley brings decisive, values-led leadership, strong communication and a practical, evidence-informed approach that helps teams translate strategy into impact. She sets high expectations, leads by example and uses time effectively, her own and others, to keep momentum and accountability high. Lesley values collaborative working and builds strong teams where professional dialogue is open, contributions are respected and decisions are made objectively in the best interests of pupils.

Since joining ECM, as a School Improvement Adviser, Lesley has partnered with over forty schools across Cheshire, Wirral, Staffordshire, Sheffield and Bolton. Her work spans whole-school improvement with particular expertise in leadership and management, improving teaching and learning, and Early Years. Lesley supports leaders and governors to evaluate effectiveness, strengthen improvement planning and build sustainable capacity within teams. She also delivers training for senior leaders and governing boards to ensure they are fully prepared for inspection under the current toolkit. Lesley is committed to providing high-quality, practical support through an inspector's lens, always keeping children and learning at the centre of every conversation. In addition, she facilitates Headteacher performance management, ensuring the process is robust, purposeful and aligned to strategic priorities.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- The Ofsted school inspection toolkit and preparing for inspection.
- The inspection process within the new toolkit.
- Making clear judgements about the quality of curriculum and teaching, including Early Years.
- Early Years pedagogy and practice.
- Supporting schools in working towards school improvement.
- Headteacher appraisal.

Lesley provides challenge and support at a strategic level. Her knowledge and understanding of current issues in schools and the Ofsted framework ensures that we are forever moving in the right direction and providing the very best education for the children in school. Lesley understands the challenges that leaders face and is pragmatic with the advice she gives. She will often provide school with documents to read, these further develop our thought processes and often confirm our approach to teaching and learning. Lesley checks through our documents and development plans to ensure that they are rigorous enough and ultimately ensure that we raise standards in school. Lesley is a critical friend for the school and her visits to school always impact school development.

Vicky Chaterjee | Headteacher at Clarendon Primary School

I cannot recommend working with ECM for HTPM highly enough. I have found Lesley to be a fantastic support over the last seven years. As a new head, she was an invaluable support and has helped me to develop in my role. She is a critical friend who leaves no stone unturned and has ensured that we feel ready for our upcoming OFSTED inspection. She has worked closely with myself and SLT and supported my wider staff in the development of our curriculum.

Jo Procter | Headteacher at Christ the King Primary School

John Evans

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT JOHN

John is one of the directors of ECM, which has been established for many years. He has 13 years' headship experience in two contrasting primary schools, where Ofsted identified him as an outstanding leader. John also has four years' experience as a local authority adviser and served as an inspector for Ofsted.

John has supported Multi-Academy Trusts, clusters and consortia of schools in achieving their goals, as well as individual schools as a School Improvement Partner across the country. He has a proven track record of contributing to sustained improvements in the schools he has worked with, many of which have successfully achieved extremely successful judgements during their inspection.

John also writes the ECM Headteacher and senior leader termly briefings, in addition to leading on school reviews.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- A supportive coaching style.
- Honest, trustworthy and experienced.
- Skilled at building confidence in colleagues in school, heads, subject leaders, class teachers and support staff.
- Up to date with all aspects of the new inspection framework and the inspection toolkits.
- Strengths in curriculum development, assessment, attendance, inclusion, target setting, Ofsted preparation and strategic school improvement through self-evaluation and school impact planning.

Four years ago, we made the decision to work with ECM for support for the school. The impact has been tremendous across many areas. John has been the epitome of a critical friend. He has been able to bring an expert outsider's eye to all aspects of the school. The fact that ECM operates in so many schools means that whatever issue you are facing, he is able to draw upon good examples from other schools that have proven effective elsewhere.

We have hosted a visit from John three times a year. Before these visits take place, we always discuss issues around the school and the next steps for our development. This ensures that when John arrives, we have a clear focus that will have maximum impact.

The biggest impact that we have seen through these support sessions has been in how well all of our subject leaders have developed. Through John's coaching, the subject leaders are now able to discuss the intentions, implementation, and impact of their subjects in more depth and much more confidently. This was clearly seen during our recent OFSTED inspection. The work that the subject leaders had done with John meant they knew what was required within a deep dive and knew how best to present their information. John led the leaders (often in pairs) through each stage of a deep dive – modelling the process and discussing how to share our information most effectively.

The SLT and subject leaders have worked alongside John to look at many areas including the most effective ways of monitoring books and lessons; how best to collect, interpret, and present national, core subject, and foundation subject data; and how to most effectively collect pupil voice and prepare them for talking to adults other than school staff.
John has worked with SLT, subject leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, governors, and children. The difference between our OFSTED inspection before we started working with ECM and the one after was like chalk and cheese. All staff and governors felt confident throughout the two days - as did the children, who were used to talking with a "stranger" who was asking about reading habits or geography knowledge, for example.

After each visit, a concise report with manageable targets is always created, which has been great to share with governors, has fed into our SEF, and was shared with OFSTED. John also made himself available to speak to inspectors during the visit.

John also oversees the Headteacher Performance Management process in our school. Because he knows the school so well and is aware of areas for development, the targets set are always relevant and supportive of the school's development.

Kevin Manning | Headteacher at Elton Primary School

Working closely with ECM over the last few years has supported leadership at all levels at Wolverham. The deep dive process we have followed in all subjects has helped leaders lead and monitor their subjects in a supportive way, ensuring the very best outcomes for pupils. John was available between visits to answer questions and provide ongoing support in the lead-up to our Ofsted inspection. Staff confidence has soared, and consequently, our inspection ran smoothly, with staff feeling prepared for the conversations and questions that came their way.

Jenni Ogden | Headteacher
Wolverham Primary and Nursery School

Abigail Fielden

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT ABIGAIL

Abigail Fielden is an experienced and highly respected Headteacher with over 20 years' experience in primary education, including more than 13 years in Headship. She is passionate about ensuring that every child, regardless of background or circumstance, receives a high-quality education within a safe, nurturing and inclusive environment where they can flourish academically, socially and personally.

Since becoming Headteacher of St Thomas' Halliwell CE Primary School in 2013, Abigail has successfully led sustained school improvement within a highly diverse community experiencing significant deprivation. Her leadership has established a culture of high expectations, ambition and collaboration, underpinned by a clear vision for developing the whole child. She leads with integrity, compassion and determination, ensuring that every child is known, valued and supported to achieve their potential.

Abigail has extensive experience of strategic leadership, school improvement, self-evaluation, curriculum development, teaching and learning, assessment, safeguarding and inclusion. As a Designated Safeguarding Lead, she has developed robust safeguarding systems and an inclusive culture, with particular expertise in supporting disadvantaged pupils and children with SEND and additional needs.

She has successfully led her school through four inspections under different inspection frameworks, developing extensive expertise in inspection preparation, school evaluation and leadership. Most recently, she led St Thomas' through the new Ofsted framework, achieving Strong in the majority of areas. Inspectors described the school as an "oasis", recognising the calm, purposeful and nurturing environment created for pupils, and commented that "leaders and governors know the school in forensic detail."

Developing others is central to Abigail's leadership. She has coached and mentored newly appointed Headteachers, supporting them to develop confidence and effectiveness in their roles. She also works closely with governing boards, helping governors understand their strategic responsibilities and provide effective challenge and support. Strong partnerships with parents, families, local organisations and external agencies are an important feature of her approach.

Having completed the National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership (NPQEL), Abigail continues to develop her expertise in executive and system leadership. She is reflective, evidence-informed and committed to sharing her experience to support leaders and schools to achieve sustainable improvement.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- School improvement & strategic leadership – evaluating effectiveness, identifying priorities and leading sustainable improvement.

- Ofsted & self-evaluation – extensive inspection experience, preparation, quality assurance and school evaluation.
- Curriculum, teaching & learning – curriculum design, implementation, coaching and professional development.
- Safeguarding & inclusion – robust safeguarding, SEND, disadvantaged pupils and removing barriers to learning.
- Leadership development – coaching and mentoring Headteachers, staff and emerging leaders.
- Governance – developing effective governing boards, strategic oversight, challenge and support.
- Assessment & pupil outcomes – data analysis, assessment, pupil progress and targeted intervention.
- Behaviour, attendance & wellbeing – pastoral provision, personal development and creating positive school cultures.
- Community & family engagement – building strong relationships with parents, families, external agencies and community partners.
- Executive & organisational leadership – leading change, developing leadership capacity and building sustainable systems.

Michael Gaskill

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT MICHAEL

Michael is uniquely positioned to support leaders. A headteacher and executive headteacher for 22 years, eight years with Ofsted and a SIP for 30 schools, Michael sees the best practice in all aspects of education. His areas of expertise include the impact of leadership, teaching, curriculum, and inclusion.

Michael is empathetic. He understands leaders and teachers. He provides supportive, actionable recommendations on every visit and has earned highly positive feedback from headteachers. He is a father of three, a music lover and an Evertonian - as such, he understands how to thrive in challenging circumstances!

Michael is knowledgeable and skilled in the use of the inspection toolkit and in preparing for inspections, including making clear judgements, securing evidence, and providing objective quality assurance.

Michael's passion is improving the life chances of children through school improvement. He has done much valuable work with schools in challenging circumstances. Michael is a skilled trainer and coach with a productive history in supporting leaders to generate strategy and improve teaching, pupils' behaviour, culture, and ethos.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Leadership.
- Teaching and learning.
- Delivering high-quality education for vulnerable pupils.
- Inspection toolkit and preparing for Inspection.
- Teamwork, training, and developing leadership across school.
- Curriculum

I have really appreciated the professional advice and support I have received from Michael Gaskill as our chosen School Improvement Partner. I have worked with Michael since October 2022 and I welcomed the time he took to understand the school context and life of the school. He has provided quality feedback and validated the work undertaken by the school and our progress towards whole school targets. His reports for governors were comprehensive and accurate whilst portraying the school in the best possible light. He has celebrated good practice and made recommendations in areas for development to ensure we challenge our pupils and offer a broad and a balanced curriculum that is fit for purpose backed up by concrete data.

He has supported myself as Headteacher through the performance management process to ensure targets are relevant, robust and appropriate and serve the specific needs of the school. This has had a direct impact on the leadership of the school and led to whole school improvement as reflected in the data for 2023. At the same time, Michael has been supportive and showed great empathy and understanding of the pressures that leadership entails and calls upon his vast experience of headship to develop good relationships with all the staff he has supported through the work undertaken during deep dive visits requested by the school.

Janet McKinlay | Headteacher at St Mary's Primary School, Middlewich

Vicki Guest

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT VICKI

Vicki is an experienced and highly effective school leader with over 20 years' experience working across a range of primary schools in Bolton. She is deeply committed to school improvement and leadership development at all levels, with a strong track record of securing sustained improvements in teaching, learning and outcomes.

As a School Improvement Partner (SIP) for ECM Education, Vicki works with a range of schools across the North West. Her work includes leading high-quality Teaching and Learning Reviews, facilitating strategic planning with senior leadership teams and conducting robust headteacher performance management on behalf of governing bodies. Her focus is always on developing leadership capacity, strengthening classroom practice and driving tangible improvement in pupil outcomes.

Alongside her ECM role, Vicki serves as Executive Headteacher at Lostock Primary School and Director of Primary Education for Leverhulme Multi-Academy Trust. Under her leadership, Lostock Primary, where she was Headteacher for 11 years, was judged Outstanding in all areas by Ofsted in May 2024.

As Vice Chair of the Bolton Primary School Improvement Group, Vicki collaborates closely with headteachers and SIPs across the borough, promoting collective efficacy and the power of school-to-school support. Her career has spanned schools serving diverse communities, giving her a deep understanding of the local context as well as the wider education system.

With her experience, strategic insight and proven impact, Vicki is well placed to offer flexible, tailored leadership and school improvement support, whether through short-term intervention, peer support or longer-term partnership work.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Leadership development and capacity building at all levels
- Diagnostic school improvement work
- Strategic planning and curriculum leadership
- Driving sustainable improvement in schools requiring rapid change
- Building collaborative partnerships and promoting collective efficacy

Katie Hague

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist & Early Years Consultant

ABOUT KATIE

Katie is currently the Executive Headteacher of a federation. She has worked in a range of school improvement roles across various contexts. She has particular expertise in the inspection process, framework and methodology.

During her 12 years of Headship, Katie has had a significant impact on school improvement and raising attainment. She works in an area of high deprivation and her previous school had a large majority of EAL learners. One of her current schools is a primary special school, serving the most complex children in Bolton. Her schools ensure that the culture of inclusion removes barriers to learning so that all children can thrive, both personally and academically.

Katie has developed a staff team who are now supporting other schools through SLE work, moderation work and secondments. She believes that collaboration across a range of schools is a powerful tool for staff development and school improvement.

Prior to Headship, Katie worked in schools in highly affluent areas, including the private sector. She also worked for the LA school improvement team, supporting a range of schools with curriculum development. She has continued to work in quality assurance roles, believing that a transparent inspection process can support school improvement.

Katie is passionate about the importance of Early Years education and has been instrumental in the creation of an Early Years Improvement Group in her local authority, which she also chairs. One of her current schools is a maintained nursery school which includes a SEND High Needs Base for nursery children.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Early Years, including nursery settings.
- Evaluating the quality of the curriculum offer and supporting EYFS leads in identifying strengths and areas of development for the whole staff team.
- Evaluating and improving the curriculum, with a particular focus on inclusion.
- The Ofsted inspection framework and preparing for inspection.

Donna Harris

Science Consultant

ABOUT DONNA

Throughout her career, Donna has been identified as a lead practitioner and an integral member of several senior leadership teams. She spent several years as a leading literacy teacher, deputy headteacher and as an acting headteacher. She has a proven track record in developing the role of subject leaders and is currently the Primaries Science Lead across a multi-academy trust in the North West.

As an accredited and experienced primary science consultant, Donna has provided support to teachers and science leaders across England, guiding them in developing and delivering their science curriculum as effectively as possible.

Donna is committed to her role as a coach and mentor for teacher colleagues. She has a particular interest in, and experience of, working with early career teachers across several local authorities.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Teaching and learning
- Subject leadership
- Science curriculum development and monitoring
- Bespoke science professional learning delivery for primary schools/trusts.

Lisa Hesmondhalgh

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT LISA

Lisa is the Director of English for the Aspire Educational Trust, has recent experience as a primary headteacher and holds the National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership. She has expertise in the inspection process, framework and methodology and is an Evidence Lead in Education for the Aspirer Research School, as well as a consultant for ECM.

Until recently, she was the Headteacher at Peover Superior in Cheshire East for 9 years, a small mixed-age rural school. Prior to this role, she was an Assistant Head at a large two-form-entry primary school in Wigan and has also worked in a special school for children with complex needs, as well as being an Advanced Skills Teacher.

As Director of English for the Aspire Educational Trust, she oversees the strategic direction of English for 13 primary schools across a range of different contexts. This involves working with headteachers, senior leaders and teachers to provide bespoke training and support in all areas of English, including early reading, phonics and oracy. In addition to this subject specialism, Lisa is an experienced teacher with 30 years of service and has a firm understanding of the DfE Reading and Writing Framework.

She strongly believes that the inspection process supports school improvement and helps bring about better learning and teaching for more children.

Ofsted (2017) recognised that at Lisa's school, "Excellent leadership and management are at the heart of the school's success. Leaders, governors and trust board members are very ambitious for the school and are highly committed to improving the life chances of pupils. As a result of their determination and drive, the school is a happy place where pupils make excellent progress in their learning and grow in confidence." Through rigorous and effective systems to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning, the school improved from Special Measures to Outstanding in four years and remains an outstanding school within the Aspire Educational Trust.

Working as an Evidence Lead in Education for the Aspirer Research School, she ensures she has an up-to-date knowledge of the most recent EEF guidance reports and has worked with schools from the primary and secondary sectors across the North West to ensure that systems and processes for the implementation of school improvement targets take account of research-informed practice. Much of this recent work has been to support the development of spoken language and oracy strategies in the classroom.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Inspection process, framework and methodology.
- Wider curriculum development and teaching pedagogy.
- English curriculum, teaching and assessment – reading, writing and spoken language, including phonics and EYFS.
- Evidence-informed practice from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

It has been a real privilege to work with Lisa across our Trust this year. Her depth of knowledge, particularly of the Ofsted framework, is second to none. She brings absolute clarity on what inspectors are looking for and how best to prepare, ensuring that we get the very best out of our leaders and, ultimately, the best outcomes for pupils.

What sets Lisa apart is her ability to coach staff at every level with warmth, empathy and insight. She has been instrumental in building the confidence of our leaders and teams, ensuring they are well-prepared to lead in their areas and are clear on the strategic actions needed for ongoing improvement.

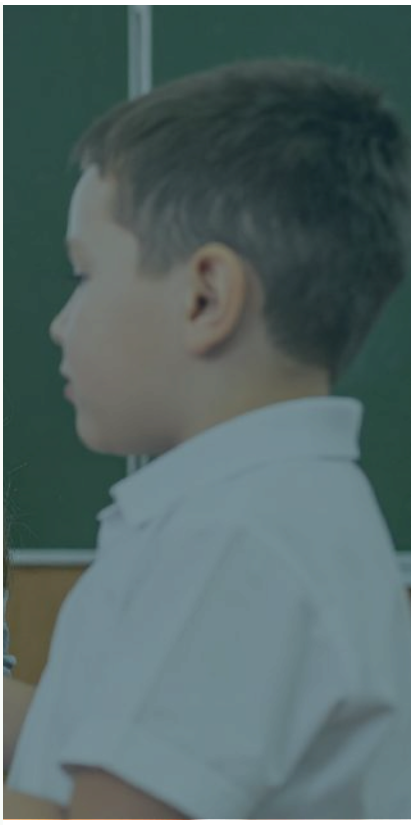
Her approach strikes the perfect balance between challenge and support. She holds leaders to account where needed, but always in a constructive and personable manner that brings people with her. Staff consistently comment on how much they value her input.

We are extremely grateful for the impact Lisa has made and would not hesitate to recommend her to other schools or trusts seeking expert guidance, genuine partnership and tangible improvement.

Nikki Patel, Deputy CEO, Archbishop Temple Trust, Bolton

Thank you so much for the time taken to get to know us on your visit and for your 'presence' - we really felt that you were with us and got under the bonnet of how our school works and what we need. It was so powerful to gain from your knowledge of literacy and specifically reading.

Karen Graham | Headteacher at St Catherine's Primary School, Bolton



Karen Hunter

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT KAREN

Karen is a former headteacher now working as an education consultant and School Improvement Partner. She was a headteacher for over 20 years in areas of significant disadvantage; her most recent school (until December 2024) had a high proportion of Pupil Premium students, a high proportion of pupils with EAL (specifically new to English and many different languages), and a high number of children with additional learning needs. She took the school into a Multi-Academy Trust, so has experience of working as an academy headteacher.

Karen works as a School Improvement and Leadership Partner with ECM, as well as supporting Headteacher Performance Management and leading training. She has supported schools in many different contexts and across a number of different local authorities. She also works with a local authority as an associate school adviser. She holds both the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and the National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership (NPQEL). She has a thorough understanding of the deep dive methodology and the expectations of the current Ofsted framework.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- The current Ofsted framework including preparing for inspection and deep dive methodology
- Leadership and Management, including subject leadership
- Monitoring, evaluating and improving teaching and learning
- Safeguarding
- SEND, adaptive teaching and inclusion for all.
- Pupil Premium

Kate Hurley

School Improvement Partner

Independent Specialist

ABOUT KATE

Kate is an experienced school leader, DSL and ISI Reporting Inspector, currently working within an independent online school alongside inspection work across the UK and British Schools Overseas. She also supports schools through consultancy focused on improvement and inspection readiness.

A former Assistant Headteacher in an IAPS preparatory school, Kate has worked across the maintained sector, alternative provision, HMC boarding and international settings. She holds the NPQH, a Diploma in Digital Learning and is currently undertaking an MSc in Psychology, underpinning her strong commitment to research-informed practice.

Kate has extensive expertise in safeguarding, SEND and operational compliance, including health and safety within the Independent School Standards Regulations. She has developed whole-school performance management systems and is highly skilled in creating robust school improvement cycles. She also designs and delivers both synchronous and asynchronous CPD, supporting effective professional learning.

Her curriculum strengths lie in Early Years, Music, Drama and Computing, with significant experience in curriculum design and progression. As a panel member for the DfE's Teaching Regulation Agency, she demonstrates strong evaluative judgement, objectivity and professionalism.

Kate brings a reflective, evidence-based approach to inspection and leadership, combining rigorous analysis with a collaborative ethos to support sustained school improvement.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Research-informed school improvement and strategic leadership
- Design of high-quality synchronous and asynchronous training
- Secure, evidence-based evaluation of teaching and outcomes
- Inspection preparation through self-evaluation and audit
- Safeguarding, compliance and health and safety leadership
- Team development and inclusive, values-driven leadership

Jude Lomas

School Improvement Partner

SEND Specialist

ABOUT JUDE

Jude Lomas brings over 30 years of experience in education, with a distinguished career spanning both mainstream and special schools in teaching and leadership roles. Most recently, Jude served for nine years as Headteacher of an outstanding special school and college, and she now works as an independent education consultant.

Throughout her career, Jude has championed inclusive education, ensuring that all pupils, regardless of need, have the opportunity to thrive and achieve their full potential. Her leadership experience across special schools in Bolton, Manchester, Stockport and Trafford has given her deep expertise in supporting students with a wide range of SEND, as well as those facing social and educational disadvantage.

Jude is particularly skilled in embedding consistent, relational approaches to behaviour and culture across school communities, ensuring a supportive environment for both pupils and staff. She values the development of staff at all levels, including induction and leadership programmes, and is committed to fostering collaborative leadership teams that share clear values and drive organisational culture.

Jude possesses comprehensive knowledge of the Ofsted inspection framework, school self-evaluation and strategic development planning. She draws on this expertise to support schools in improving teaching and learning, safeguarding, pupil outcomes and overall school effectiveness.

Jude's approach is grounded in collaboration, coaching and a commitment to inclusive, high-quality education, enabling schools to reach their full potential.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Developing effective and collaborative leadership teams
- Establishing and embedding school values and culture
- Self-evaluation and school development planning
- Special educational needs and inclusion
- Staff wellbeing and professional development
- Monitoring, evaluating and improving teaching and learning
- Safeguarding and pupil welfare
- Pupil Premium strategy and impact
- Behaviour management

Steve Lowe

School Improvement Partner

SEND Specialist

ABOUT STEVE

Steve has over 30 years' experience in education leadership. After a career in the mainstream, special and AP sectors, Steve is now an Independent Education Consultant; amongst his current work, he supports local authorities to quality assure Alternative Education Provision, provides SIP support to maintained special and mainstream schools, and works as a SIP for a large special school MAT.

Prior to his current role, Steve was a headteacher for 7 years at the Oxfordshire Hospital School, an all-through Special School providing education for young people with health conditions, including mental health, in hospitals and the community; the school taught over 800 young people each year. As headteacher at the OHS, Steve led the school to an outstanding Ofsted in 2023. Earlier in his career, Steve held various senior leadership positions in mainstream secondary schools in London and Reading, including over 10 years as a deputy headteacher in a large secondary comprehensive school in Swindon. Steve has also served as an associate headteacher in an EOTAS / PRU provision.

Embedded throughout Steve's approach to education are the principles of equity and equality. Steve is a strong advocate for inclusive learning environments that foster a sense of belonging and mattering, where diversity is valued and supported.

Steve continues to promote the importance of ethical leadership, thinking and decision-making in education, and constantly asks the question, "What positive difference will that make to all our learners?"

Steve's approach is highly collaborative and is designed to empower service leaders, headteachers, governors and senior leaders to build leadership capacity, deliver lasting improvement, and secure better outcomes for children and young people. Steve uses coaching methods that encourage reflection, helping staff identify areas for improvement, maximising strengths, and the self-discovery of authentic leadership styles.

Steve holds the National Professional Qualification for Headship, and in addition to his current role, Steve is also a Director at the National Association of Hospital Education and a member of the Health Conditions in Schools Alliance.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Establishing an effective & inclusive school culture
- Leadership and management including governor development
- Self-Evaluation & Strategic School Improvement Planning
- Teaching and Learning
- Special Educational Needs

James Marsh

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT JAMES

James has gained extensive leadership experience working as a senior leader and Headteacher in a range of primary schools across the North West. James has now left headship and works as a full-time Education Consultant and adviser to a range of schools in differing contexts.

James has significant experience in school improvement, including supporting schools causing concern. He has led schools through transitional periods of change from 'Requires Improvement' judgements to 'Good' and 'Outstanding'. He has particular expertise in the inspection process, framework, and methodology. James has extensive experience supporting schools in developing the school curriculum and the quality of teaching. He also provides leadership coaching for Headteachers across the North West. As well as providing in-school support, James works as an associate adviser with ECM and delivers sessions for Best Practice Network on the NPQH programme.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

- School Improvement
- Curriculum Development
- Teaching and Learning
- Developing Senior Leaders and Headteachers

Now in my second year of working with James as my SIP and although I had worked with an ECM SIP for two years before, I was naturally wary about working with a new person. I need not have worried, the rigour of the ECM systems meant that transition was seamless.

When James arrived it was very clear that not only did he know "his stuff" when it came to Ofsted and the official checks and challenges, but he also knew "our stuff." He had done his research: knew who we were and what we were all about. He listened and listened well. He saw where we were up to on our school improvement journey and where I was as a novice head in leading us. He "got us" and how we operate but most importantly, he "got me."

James' personable yet professional qualities provided me with a strong sense that this was a person with whom I could be honest without fear of an "agenda." That I would be able to capitalise not only on his knowledge of all things school improvement and "headteacherish", but also on his strength as a supportive and challenging expert.

As well as our termly visits, I contacted James to help prepare for our imminent Ofsted inspection. This was quickly arranged so that my Deputy and I met across Teams during the Easter break. We were put through our paces; grilled without intimidation. Questioned and prompted so that when the inevitable phone call came through in early May, we were fully prepared, match fit, battle ready and confident.

I look forward to my SIP visits - that's not something I would ever have said nor had I experienced prior to our ECM involvement! The visits give me an opportunity to show how far we have come; to demonstrate how we have implemented the recommendations and reflect on what would be "even better if." They have a positive impact on our school; our drive for improvement; our quality of teaching and learning, and the outcomes for our children. If I was to sum up working with James... he does what it says on the tin, he "gets the job done!

Becky Crossley | Headteacher of Johnson Fold Community Primary School

Collette Mather

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT COLLETTE

Collette is a highly experienced and respected school improvement adviser with over 20 years in education, including a decade as Headteacher of Ashdene Primary School, where she has led sustained and sector-leading improvement. Under her leadership, the school has maintained exceptionally high standards while fostering a culture of ambition, continuous improvement and excellence for every pupil.

Collette is recognised for her strategic vision, deep understanding of curriculum and pedagogy, and her ability to translate educational research into practical classroom improvement. She has a proven track record of helping schools strengthen teaching and learning, build leadership capacity and deliver sustainable whole-school improvement.

Her work is firmly centred on ensuring that every aspect of school improvement has a direct impact on pupils' learning and achievement. She works collaboratively with senior leaders, governors and teaching staff to develop ambitious yet manageable strategies that improve the quality of education, strengthen curriculum implementation and secure consistently effective classroom practice.

A particular area of expertise is establishing strong foundations for learning. Collette supports schools to identify and secure the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours that underpin future success, with a focus on early reading, phonics, writing, mathematics and curriculum progression. She also works closely with leaders to ensure that high-quality adaptive teaching enables all pupils, including those with SEND and those facing disadvantage, to access an ambitious curriculum and achieve well.

Collette has extensive experience supporting schools through periods of change and development, helping leaders refine self-evaluation, strengthen school improvement planning and build coherent systems that have a measurable impact on teaching and pupil outcomes. She is frequently called upon to support inspection readiness, curriculum reviews and leadership development.

Drawing on extensive experience as both a serving Headteacher and school improvement partner, Collette brings credibility, integrity and a relentless focus on what matters most: improving the quality of education that pupils experience every day. Her pragmatic, supportive and solutions-focused approach enables leaders to turn ambition into action and secure meaningful, lasting improvement for their school communities.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Whole-school improvement and strategic leadership
- Teaching and learning improvement
- Curriculum design, sequencing and implementation
- School self-evaluation and development planning
- Inspection readiness and quality assurance
- Foundational knowledge & curriculum progression
- Leadership development and coaching
- Assessment, monitoring and quality assurance
- Evidence-informed professional development
- Governance support and strategic challenge

As the Head Teacher, I am grateful for the invaluable support and guidance Collette Mather, (ECM Education Consultant) has offered. She has contributed significantly to our improving status in our recent OFSTED evaluation.

Collette demonstrated an unwavering commitment to our school's success, not only through on-site assessments but also through consistent telephone support. The availability and responsiveness displayed by Collette has been instrumental during times when quick decisions and guidance were paramount.

One of the most commendable aspects of Collette's support was the provision of sound and practical advice. Her deep understanding of educational leadership, combined with a keen insight into OFSTED requirements, helped me navigate the challenges of enhancing our school's performance. Collette was not only a consultant but a mentor, offering guidance on strategic planning, curriculum development, and effective leadership practices.

My leaders in school felt the EOSE was invaluable, as this process helped us understand the school's next steps in a non-judgmental way and offered us the outside validation we were hoping for. The teaching and non-teaching staff also agreed that this process was extremely helpful, and that Collette was so knowledgeable and that gave them confidence when OFSTED arrived.

I wholeheartedly recommend Collette to any school who is seeking a dedicated and knowledgeable advisor. Her expertise, coupled with a genuine passion for educational excellence, has left a lasting impact on our school's trajectory towards success. I am grateful for the positive influence Collette has had on Beaumont Primary, and I look forward to the continued collaboration in our pursuit of educational excellence.

Stacey Postle | Headteacher at Beaumont Primary School

Mylene McGuire

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT MYLENE

With over 35 years of experience working in challenging urban contexts, Mylene is an educational consultant specialising in the primary sector. She is a National Leader of Education (NLE) and former Executive Headteacher of a successful federation of two primary schools in Manchester.

Throughout her career, Mylene has held a wide range of leadership and school improvement roles, including Executive Headteacher, Headteacher, Primary Strategy Manager, Lead Consultant for the national pilot and rollout of the Improving Schools Programme, Primary Mathematics Adviser, Literacy Consultant, School Improvement Adviser, School Improvement Partner (SIP) and Senior Officer for Quality Assurance (3–19 Education and HOSI) for Manchester City Council.

Mylene served as a Headteacher for 13 years, initially at St Mary's RC Primary School in Levenshulme. In 2017, she was seconded to St Cuthbert's RC Primary School as an Executive Headteacher when the school was in an Ofsted category. She successfully led the school's improvement journey and subsequently oversaw the creation of a formal federation between St Mary's and St Cuthbert's in January 2021.

St Mary's achieved an Ofsted judgement of Outstanding in 2022. Inspectors recognised the school's highly effective curriculum and the exceptional outcomes achieved by pupils across all subjects. Earlier inspections also highlighted her clear and unequivocal leadership, noting that the school continued to go from strength to strength and that disadvantaged pupils often outperformed their peers.

At St Cuthbert's, Ofsted recognised the significant transformation achieved under her leadership, stating that the school had become "a very different school" from that inspected previously.
In 2023, St Mary's also received an Outstanding judgement in its Section 48 inspection. Inspectors praised the school's strong commitment to meeting the needs of all learners, its rigorous self-evaluation and monitoring systems and the excellent outcomes achieved across the school community.

Mylene has developed and implemented highly effective systems for monitoring, evaluation and school self-improvement, supporting numerous schools to strengthen their own practice. She has delivered leadership development programmes for headteachers and senior leaders, including governors, focusing on performance management, curriculum development, monitoring and evaluation and strategic school improvement.

Schools regularly visited the federation to learn from its approach to curriculum design, inclusion, wellbeing and outdoor learning. St Mary's was recognised as a national IQM Flagship School for Inclusion.

Mylene currently works as a quality assurance professional, serves as Lead Headteacher for the Manchester Schools Alliance and is a qualified Catholic Schools Inspector for Section 48.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- School improvement, self-evaluation and quality assurance
- Monitoring, evaluation and triangulation of teaching, learning and assessment
- Leadership development for middle and senior leaders
- Headteacher appraisal
- Section 48 inspection preparation and support
- Curriculum design and implementation
- Mathematics
- New Headteacher induction and mentoring
- Recruitment and leadership appointments

Mark Mullin

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist & ECM Director

ABOUT MARK

Mark is one of the Directors of ECM Education. He has extensive and current working experience as a Primary School Improvement Partner and Adviser. Mark was formerly headteacher of two very successful primary schools in Cheshire over a ten-year period, and prior to becoming an adviser, had 18 years of Senior Leadership Team experience. Mark has also served as an inspector for Ofsted.

As ECM Director and Education Adviser, Mark has supported a range of multi-academy trusts, teaching school alliances, local authorities and schools/academies of various sizes nationwide in devising leadership and management structures to secure significant improvements in outcomes for pupils. He has worked closely and strategically with CEOs, Local Authority Leaders, National and Local Leaders of Education and Executive Headteachers to define, co-design and deliver collaborative, effective and highly efficient strategies for school improvement – including 1-1 support, training and large conferences. Mark currently provides direct support for approximately 14 schools in a range of contexts as a Leadership Partner.

Mark works alongside his fellow directors, John Evans and Phil Choi, to develop an innovative and continually evolving educational school improvement offer to reflect schools' ongoing needs. Over time, ECM have recruited highly talented and experienced professionals who are the experts in their field. ECM provide highly effective, impactful support for educational settings, based on years of practical, first-hand and successful experience. Our aim at ECM Education is to inspire leaders to improve outcomes through a practical 'Get a Job Done' approach.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Leadership and management development through training and coaching
- Innovation through curriculum development
- Curriculum expectations linked to the Ofsted Research Reviews
- Quality of education
- Assessment, target setting and tracking
- Strategic school improvement through self-evaluation and impact planning
- Monitoring and evaluation for impact

The multitude of bespoke coaching and training offered by ECM, provides opportunities to further develop leaders of the future and ensure the outstanding work of the school is relentless. In addition, the validation role of ECM's Leadership Partner work has offered St Mary's CE Primary School the ongoing support and challenge required in ensuring the best outcomes for our pupils, resulting in our outstanding OFSTED judgement. I highly recommend ECM and have no reservation in urging all schools to take advantage of what this reputable educational training and consultancy company has to offer.

Diane Jeffries | Headteacher at St Mary's Primary School, Deane

I have worked with ECM on a professional basis for over a decade, initially as a founding director of REAch2 and more recently as Director of Education for Reach South Academy Trust.

ECM have become an outstanding provider of professional development with a national reach and reputation. ECM have co-designed bespoke professional development programmes for head teachers, producing excellent resources and materials. They have designed and delivered programmes to support a wide range of school development themes for both senior and middle leaders and have contributed to the success of many schools across the nation. Their bespoke approach ensures support is targeted to achieve maximum impact on outcomes for pupils. ECM's aim is to make certain that school leaders have the support and assistance to complete major tasks effectively and to a high standard, whilst providing excellent value for money. I can highly recommend ECM.

Mark Elms | Director of Education

Kevan Naughton

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT KEVAN

Kevan is a serving Headteacher with 20 years' headship experience (and 31 years of supporting schools) across different primary schools.

Kevan's schools have maintained consistently high performance and have been rated Outstanding by Ofsted. He also brings experience supporting educational standards and quality assurance at a national level. His school regularly appears in the top 500 performing schools nationally over the last 10 years.

Kevan brings a wealth of experience from his professional doctorate studies (including international perspectives) to support schools. The process of effectively implementing change, alongside pedagogical coaching and support, is a particular area of interest.

He has also worked as a National Leader of Education and School Improvement Partner within the local authority. Kevan has worked with schools to support schools to raise standards, develop greater consistency, effective assessment for learning and establish consistent teaching protocols.

Kevan has had five successful executive headships, alongside his role. He is described as being highly adept at supporting schools that lack leadership capacity.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Coaching and mentoring development
- Preparation for inspection and the inspection framework
- Supporting schools in looking for Good to Outstanding judgements
- Developing rigorous assessment and pupil progress meetings
- Developing sustainable practices to monitor effectively and consistently
- Curriculum design and quality assurance
- Teaching and learning "Theories of Action" and developing consistency across the school system

Tim Nelson

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT TIM

Tim Nelson is a former primary headteacher and now works as a consultant and author. During his teaching career, he taught every year group from Reception to Year 13, with most of this classroom experience being in KS1 and KS2. When he was a headteacher, his school was recognised for its innovative approaches to the curriculum, with his ideas shared at a European conference and featured on TV and other media.

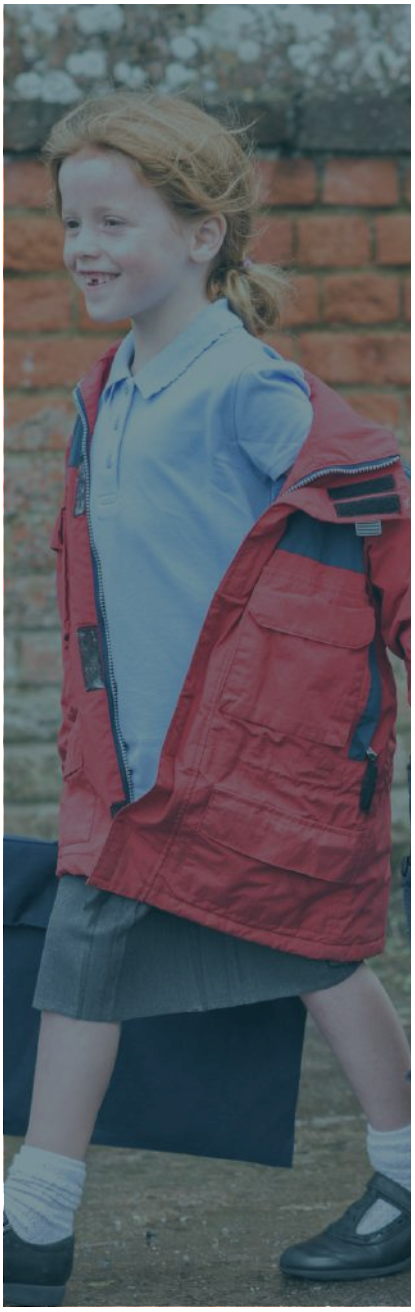
As a school leader, he worked as an LLE, a SIP and as an Ofsted inspector, a role that included mentoring trainee inspectors for several years. He has up-to-date knowledge of the 2026 Education Inspection Framework and leads numerous training courses across the country, helping school leaders understand the process and methodology of inspection.

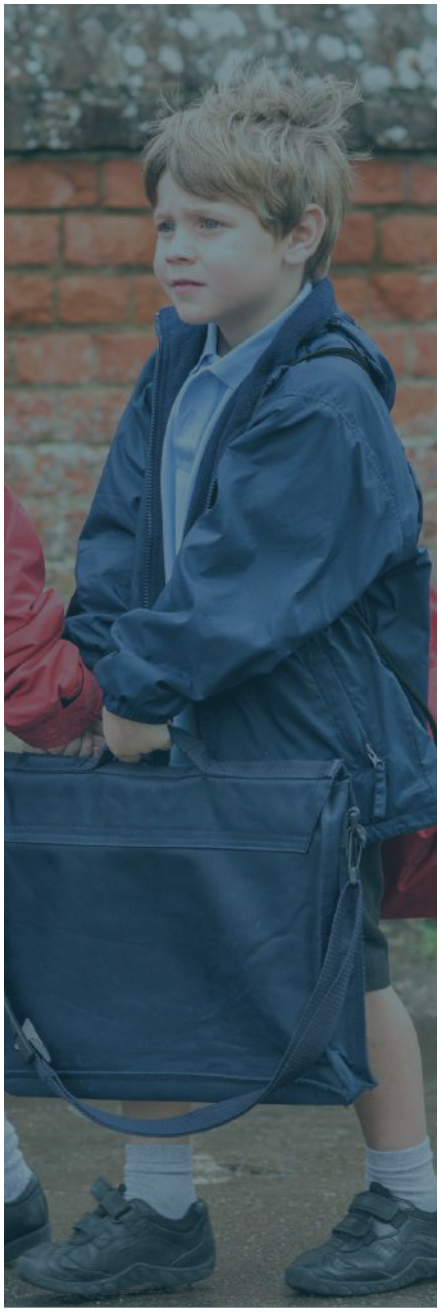
Over the last ten years, Tim has worked with over 450 schools across England and spoken at more than 150 conferences, including the Inspiring Leadership Conference at the NIA in Birmingham, where he spoke about the effective development of middle leadership. He was part of the expert panel discussing the curriculum at the annual Teach First conference alongside the deputy director of Ofsted. He has also worked with schools overseas, including in Kenya and Tanzania.

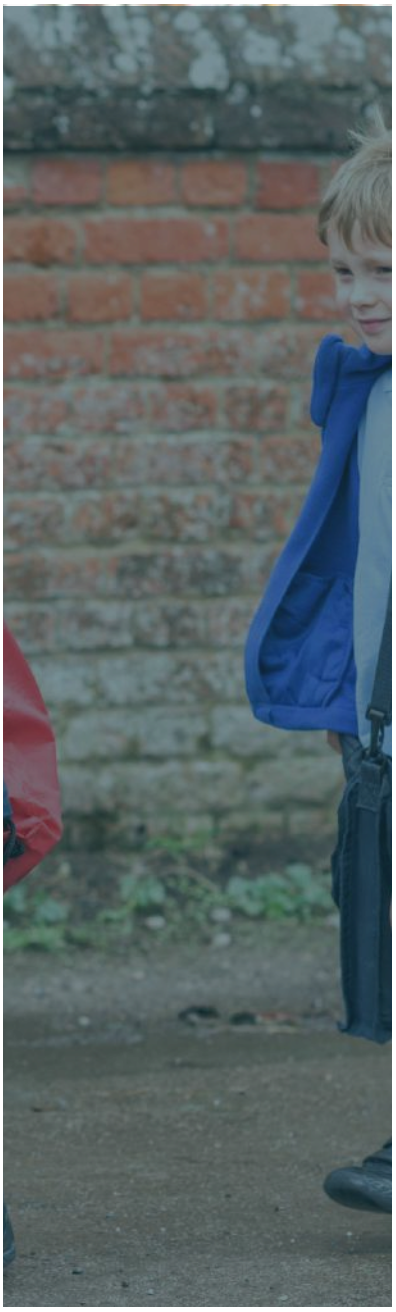
Tim is also part of Nottinghamshire's local authority school improvement team, enabling him to access the latest training for advisers on areas such as headteacher appraisal, as well as updates and briefings from HMI. Tim is the author of a wide range of books on school leadership and governance, teaching and learning, and the curriculum, with sales of over 12,000 copies.

ECM live by their mantra of getting a job done. They are individually purposefully driven to ensure all children receive a high quality education; working alongside you to identify specific points where systems, practices and procedures can be enhanced. They are knowledgeable about current educational policy and are committed to remaining relevant and professional in their fields of expertise. I have had an ECM consultant as my SIP for the last 8 years and have always felt confident that our conversations were focussed, detailed and specifically directed to examine the systematic practice in the school. Deep dives were being conducted long before the current trend. Consequently our school moved from good to outstanding through the partnership with ECM.

Lynn Williams | Headteacher, St. Peter's CE Primary, Farnworth, Bolton







Kathy Nichol

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT KATHY

Kathy has led her school through two very good Ofsted inspections, led the school through the process of conversion to academy status, has increased the age range of the school and has managed several large-scale premises development projects.

After 13 successful years as head at Puss Bank School & Nursery, Kathy became executive head in the Aspire Educational Trust. She is valued for her expertise in supporting schools to improve and is currently working across two schools. Prior to being a headteacher, Kathy held various leadership roles in schools in Cheshire, Singapore and London. She has been a teacher for over 30 years in both mainstream schools and a special school for pupils with complex needs. Through her work as a Local Leader in Education, she has developed a deep understanding of educational contexts and curriculum design and implementation.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Inspection Process, Framework and Methodology
- Teaching and Learning
- Subject Leadership
- Curriculum design and implementation
- Supporting pupils with SEND
- Pupil Premium
- Inspections and preparation

Dave Paton

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT DAVE

Dave Paton is an experienced and highly effective Headteacher with over 30 years of teaching experience across both primary and secondary education. He has a strong track record of leading school improvement, raising pupil outcomes and developing staff capacity, underpinned by a clear commitment to inclusive education, high expectations and evidence-informed practice.

Currently Headteacher of Lunt's Heath Primary School, Widnes, Dave has led the school to an Outstanding Ofsted judgement in all areas (October 2024), demonstrating his ability to secure sustained improvement and high standards across teaching, learning and leadership. His leadership is characterised by a focus on culture, curriculum quality, behaviour and safeguarding, alongside effective operational and financial management.

Dave brings significant system leadership experience beyond his own school. He serves as Area Lead for a Teaching School Hub, Chair of the Halton Association of Primary Headteachers and a governor across both primary and specialist secondary settings. Through this work, he has supported multiple schools with improvements in teaching, learning, assessment, adaptation and governance, demonstrating a strong commitment to collaboration and wider system impact. He also contributes to professional development at scale, including mentoring trainee teachers, facilitating early headship programmes and delivering CPD on areas such as curriculum development, cultural change and the use of emerging technologies.

Prior to his current role, Dave successfully led Little Digmoor Primary School, securing a move from Requires Improvement to Good at Ofsted and introducing a curriculum model that placed greater emphasis on personal development and wider outcomes.

Across all roles, Dave has demonstrated a consistent ability to improve outcomes for pupils, particularly through strengthening teaching and learning, embedding robust safeguarding systems and developing staff through coaching, appraisal and professional learning. He places strong emphasis on building collaborative relationships with schools, networks and wider partners, recognising the importance of collective expertise in driving improvement.

Dave's leadership is rooted in clarity of purpose, strong ethical values and a commitment to continuous improvement. He combines strategic thinking with practical implementation, ensuring that vision is translated into tangible impact for pupils, staff and the wider school community.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Extensive leadership experience.
- Securing and sustaining school improvement.
- Raising pupil outcomes through curriculum design.
- Developing staff capacity through coaching.
- Appraisal and professional development training.
- Subject reviews.
- Developing school culture, curriculum quality, behaviour and safeguarding.

Nikki Patel

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT NIKKI

Nikki is currently the School Improvement Director for the Bolton and Farnworth Church of England Primary Multi Academy Trust and a Specialist Leader of Education for CPD and ITT.

Nikki currently works in a multi-academy trust which includes five schools. Nikki has the responsibility of leading teaching and learning across the schools in the Trust.

As part of leading teaching and learning, Nikki conducts regular monitoring and consistency checks and feeds back to staff swiftly to impact on their practice in all schools in the MAT. Through effective systems and processes put into place, the teaching and learning profile across the MAT has strengthened, in particular in the school in which Nikki provides school-to-school support 1.5 days a week for. The school was graded Requires Improvement by Ofsted in Feb 2016, with 88% of teaching now good or better and 50% outstanding; previously this was only 44% good and 0% outstanding.

“The vision and drive of the Principal, together with support and joint working across the MAT, are bringing about ongoing school improvement… the school is clearly on its journey to becoming good.” (EOSE January 2018)

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is also on an upward trend in the school in which Nikki supports; predictions for 2018 are significantly improved from last year. “The vision of the headteacher remains strong and partnership working with Bishop Bridgeman continues to have a significant impact. Leaders are rightly proud of their achievements over the last year but are far from complacent and very clear about what still needs to be done.” (SIP report 2017)

During another teaching and learning review it was stated that “Throughout the review, leaders demonstrated a passion and total commitment to doing the very best for all the pupils at the school. This enthusiasm and determination is shared by governors, the executive principal, and staff at all levels within the school.” (TLR November 2017)

Through her role as School Improvement Director, Nikki has successfully supported a newly established Senior Leadership Team in further developing roles and responsibilities, data analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and has also supported through inspection and teaching and learning reviews. Nikki is a trained coach and uses her coaching skills to support colleagues to grow leadership capacity and sustain improvement.

Nikki is the Data Protection Officer (DPO) within the Multi Academy Trust and has delivered training to SLTs, governors and trustees and also produced documents, policies and data maps to ensure compliance under the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Nikki has an excellent understanding of the requirements and regulations coming into effect and how schools can ensure they are ready to meet these.

Ray Rudd

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT RAY

Ray is an education consultant and an experienced primary headteacher with an extensive background in driving school improvement, whole-school pedagogy and inclusive education, bringing a highly specialised focus to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Drawing on her previous roles as a Specialist Leader of Education (SLE), SENDCo, EYFS Lead Practitioner and Local Authority SEND Adviser, Ray offers an honest, trustworthy and highly supportive approach to school improvement. She is a skilled mentor and coach who works collaboratively alongside headteachers and leaders to build confidence and guide sustainable improvements. Ray has significant experience supporting schools with curriculum design, SEND audits, training and pupil achievement. She offers coaching-led guidance to support strategic development and preparation for school inspections, drawing on her deep understanding of the current Ofsted framework.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Early Years provision and outcomes
- SEND
- Inclusion
- Safeguarding
- Curriculum & Pedagogy Development
- Behaviour
- Attendance
- Disadvantaged outcomes
- The current Ofsted framework, including preparing for inspection
- Strategic school improvement and evaluation
- Data-driven improvement
- Staff development and CPD
- Leadership coaching & NPQ mentoring

Gillian Talbot

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT GILLIAN

Gillian has been a headteacher since 2007, with experience as an Executive Headteacher of two primary schools in an area of significant disadvantage. Her school has a high proportion of Pupil Premium pupils and pupils with SEND. She is also a lead headteacher for a large consortium of schools. As part of this role, she supports other schools with a range of school improvement work. Gillian is a Quality Education Partner for Bury Local Authority and facilitates on several of the NPQs with the Best Practice Network, including the NPQSENCO.

Gillian has many years of experience in raising standards across the curriculum through improving teaching and learning using an evidence-based approach. She has a forward-thinking approach and a strong belief in supporting staff to develop expertise and leadership to enable them to become highly effective practitioners and subject/area leaders. She has led her school through successful Ofsted and SIAMS inspections in the past 18 years in two schools and has a sound understanding of educational frameworks.

Gillian has an excellent understanding of the school improvement cycle and diagnostic processes used effectively at all levels to ensure great progress. She has completed numerous school diagnostic reviews to support schools to identify successes and precise areas for development and provides follow-up visits to work with each school to monitor progress effectively.

As a teacher and leader for over 33 years, Gillian has expertise in supporting pupils with SEND in the mainstream school and creating effective systems to develop and sustain inclusive practice. She has previous experience of working as a Pupil Premium Reviewer, so can support schools to track, monitor and identify areas of strength and for development using the IDSR and through in-school reviews.

Gillian's approach is collaborative and intended to empower leaders and staff to build capacity and develop approaches which will be effective term after term, year after year. She aims to strike the perfect balance between support and challenge and to impact on outcomes.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Teaching and learning reviews
- SEND and inclusion
- Diagnostic assessment and pupil progress meetings
- Pupil Premium
- School improvement planning
- HTPM
- Supporting phase leaders/subject leaders – subject/area reviews
- New headteacher mentoring

Colin Watson

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT COLIN

Colin believes that culture and relationships are the key to ensuring that all members of the school community are engaged and play an active role in the school and education of children.

Colin leads a strong team of committed and driven staff. Ofsted (2022) reported that, 'Leaders have high expectations of all pupils. Teaching staff do not accept second best. Pupils and children strive to achieve highly in lessons.'

His leadership style is a democratic and consultative one, which puts relationships, openness and trust at the heart. This has resulted in creating a positive, supportive and accountable culture. This 'togetherness' is evident at celebratory times as well as during more challenging moments – staff pull together, not apart. His favourite quote, by Martin Luther King, is something that he stands by: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Colin has undertaken personalised work with individual headteachers throughout Bolton, including monitoring and self-evaluation activities, such as data analysis, pupil voice, staff discussions and document scrutiny, as well as discussions about organisation and wellbeing.

The Personal Development aspect of his school is a strength, as evidenced in the most recent Ofsted report: 'Pupils are proud to belong to this school. They develop confidence in their own capabilities. They enjoy offering each other support and guidance. Pupils develop strong leadership skills in the many roles that they carry out on the playground and around the school. They demonstrate respect and maturity in the way that they listen to and consider different points of view'.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Creating innovative solutions to improve efficiencies across school
- Distributed leadership, staff development, recruitment and retention
- Data Analysis
- Working with Governors
- Pupil behaviour and personal development

Jeanette Westhead

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist

ABOUT JEANETTE

Jeanette was the headteacher of a large two-form entry school in Wigan for eighteen years (2008–2026) during which time she led the school through three successful Ofsted inspections. Prior to that, she held two Deputy Headteacher posts, both in large primary schools. Jeanette has a significant amount of teaching experience across KS1 and KS2, including experience as a Primary Strategy Leading Teacher in Maths and English. She holds the National Professional Qualification for Headship.

Jeanette has particular expertise in the inspection process, framework and methodology.

During her headship, Jeanette was also a Lead Headteacher for a large consortium of 25 schools. Within this role, she supported other schools with a range of school improvement. She has a sound understanding of educational frameworks, and her proven track record in school improvement positions her as a valuable asset to the schools she supports. She has supported schools with curriculum development, preparation for inspection, school self-evaluation, governance, safeguarding and provision for pupils with SEND.

Currently, Jeanette is a School Improvement Partner for several schools and she offers support through teaching and learning reviews, coaching staff and leading a range of professional development, including support with self-evaluation and school improvement planning as well as leading staff meetings and headteacher performance management. She also leads and produces a range of training courses for ECM.

In her role as a headteacher, Jeanette developed rigorous and effective systems to monitor and evaluate the school's performance, leading to accurate and well-informed school self-evaluation. She worked with staff and governors to ensure that school improvement planning was sharply focused, with clear priorities and measurable success criteria. This resulted in sustained high standards across the curriculum.

She is experienced in developing the expertise of subject leaders/senior leaders so that they are confident in monitoring their subjects and identifying strengths and areas for development. She is also experienced in undertaking curriculum reviews and subject-specific monitoring and evaluation, including alongside senior leaders, subject leaders, external consultants and governors.

Jeanette believes that a broad curriculum should reflect the school's unique context, and she has worked alongside leaders to produce an ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum. Her work ensures that a fully inclusive curriculum is in place for all pupils, with a well-considered range of trips, visitors and extra-curricular opportunities. She has worked with staff on adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. During the most recent Ofsted inspection (November 2022), it was recognised that "Teachers identify the needs of pupils with SEND effectively. They make sure that these pupils follow the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. Teachers provide pupils with SEND with valuable opportunities to apply their learning in different ways. This helps pupils to know and remember more. Pupils with SEND achieve well. They participate fully in school life."

Jeanette has a proven track record in leading and facilitating high-quality CPD for a range of audiences, including headteachers, deputy heads, staff and governors, both in her own school and for groups of schools. More recently, she led and facilitated a SEND/Inclusion conference for a group of 25 schools (headteachers and SENCOs). She is an experienced music subject leader, performing arts leader and ECT mentor. During her many years of headship, she has dealt with a range of HR issues, maintained a balanced budget, developed distributed leadership, reviewed the staffing structure to meet the school's needs, and been responsible for Health and Safety, GDPR and safeguarding. She readily embraces new evidence-based pedagogy and is very experienced in leading change, developing new initiatives and ensuring a whole-school consistent approach, whilst also considering the work–life balance of staff.

Jeanette also has extensive experience of working alongside Governors, including working with key governors to prepare Governor Strategic Days and leading training on the Ofsted inspection process for a group of Local Authority Governors.

She is passionate about improving the life chances for all pupils.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Inspections and preparation
- Subject deep dives
- School self-evaluation
- School improvement planning
- Developing subject leaders/ senior leaders
- Working with governors
- Teaching and Learning
- Curriculum development and monitoring
- Teaching of Reading, Maths and Music
- Pastoral/ Safeguarding (including behaviour and attendance)
- Provision for pupils with SEND
- Inclusion

Wendy Wheldon

School Improvement Partner

Primary Specialist & Early Years Consultant

ABOUT WENDY

Wendy's great passion is Early Years and the difference that can make to children's life chances. She leads on EYFS training for ECM and has huge experience and expertise in the area.

Wendy has been teaching for over 30 years and has experience in a wide range of settings with widely differing catchment areas: infant and nursery, primary and first schools, Pupil Referral Unit (EBD), Home Education and Higher Education. She had four very successful headships with several 'Outstanding' judgements.

Wendy became one of the first Local Leaders of Education in 2010 and then a National Leader of Education in 2015. In this role, she supported a range of schools in challenging circumstances, and her school ran a whole range of training for schools in the local area. She was an Achievement for All national ambassador and spoke at several national conferences and wrote articles for national publications, sharing the strategies which enabled her schools to become so successful.

Since 2017, Wendy has worked as an independent consultant for a number of LAs and Academy Trusts in Yorkshire and the East Midlands. She led a DFE SSIF project on Oracy for 20 schools. She has particular experience and expertise in the areas of strategic leadership, improving the quality of teaching and learning, reading, curriculum, SEND, vulnerable groups and Early Years.

★ AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Supporting schools and raising standards through school improvement partner type support.
- Monitoring and supporting schools to help improvement, particularly in EYFS.
- Completing supportive monitoring and reviews of school effectiveness alongside school leaders.
- Supporting schools with strategic leadership.
- Mentoring headteachers.