



School Partnerships Alliance

Maintained-independent school partnerships: case studies of best practice

*Evidence for Stephen Morgan, Minister of State at DfE with
responsibility for independent schools*

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Introduction

The **School Partnerships Alliance (S.P.A.)**; see <https://schoolpartnershipsalliance.org.uk>) is a cross-sector organization dedicated to the promotion of impactful partnership working between maintained and independent schools. It aims to ensure that all children benefit from what schools can achieve when they work collaboratively.

Our main purpose is to support partnerships which provide life changing opportunities and lasting impact for all children and school communities. To fulfil our purpose, we:

- incentivize engagement in partnership work across maintained and independent schools;
- encourage schools to undertake impactful and measurable partnership projects;
- look to convince politicians and policy makers, potential sponsors (e.g. trusts, businesses and livery companies) and the inspectorates (OFSTED and ISI) that *all* children benefit from such engagements.

The **S.P.A.** exists to encourage and support partnership networks and to broker partnerships between schools where they do not already exist. It also looks to build and support relationships between schools and third parties looking to support the educational and wider needs of all children, particularly the most disadvantaged and those in danger of being left behind in their school settings.

That is, our mission is to promote sustainable and mutually-beneficial cross-sector partnerships that are recognised as a force for school improvement and the strongest pupil outcomes. Our work is informed by objective research and professional training, and driven by impact analysis.

Our vision is that we will transform young lives (and teachers lives) through the creation of a strategy and framework for educational partnerships which will serve national educational needs.

In our *School Partnerships for Impact Guide*, the **S.P.A.** defines school partnerships as ‘an ongoing collaborative relationship between schools, aligning their interests around a common vision and combining their complementary resources and competencies, to deliver benefit to each of the partners’.

Strong relationships between partners facilitate genuine dialogue and the sharing of strengths and areas where support is beneficial:

Through open dialogue, trust, and commitment, Independent State School Partnerships challenge the limits of each sector’s boundaries and, while they cannot mitigate the inequalities between them, they facilitate valuable exchange and mutual growth.

Margaret Hunnaball, 2020

Dr Joe Spence

CEO, School Partnerships Alliance, July 2025

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Scope

This paper presents 34 best-case examples of how partnerships between state maintained and independent schools are helping to address major challenges facing the education sector.

We present evidence of the impact selected projects are having in relation to key issues, as identified by Stephen Morgan MP in conversation with the CEO of the Independent Schools Council, Julie Robinson:

- The progress of looked after children and the most deeply disadvantaged (or under-performing) children in the UK;
- The progress of children on the SEND register and neurodiverse children;
- Work to support particular needs in a given community;
- Teacher training and teacher retention and development;
- The application of AI in education;
- The successful application of state school pupils to competitive universities and measurable support with careers education;
- The promotion of the performing arts, notably in areas where there would be a dearth of engagement and a falling away of arts provision without your support;
- The provision of teaching and support in minority subjects.

In this paper we are focussing on the areas listed above. Other areas that benefit from widespread partnership engagement include STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) projects, sports activities and literacy and numeracy initiatives. Since the COVID pandemic, there has also been an increase in wellbeing programmes.

The breadth, depth and reach of cross-sector partnerships is best evidenced via the **Schools Together** website (see <https://www.schoolstogether.org/>), presently hosted by the **Independent Schools Council** but likely to be taken up and run by the **S.P.A.** in the course of the 2025-26 academic year.

The **S.P.A.** acknowledges that, as these case studies reveal, at present a great deal of partnership work is led by independent schools and tends to focus on activities. Part of our work from September 2025 will be to encourage greater volition within the maintained sector in partnership projects and to have maintained and independent schools working together on policies and programmes (e.g. drawing up EDI, SEND or AI policies together). It is also our intention to ensure that smaller independent schools realize the important role they can play with their local state schools and in their communities.

[We are working on a separate document that will highlight best practice in partnerships that promote sporting engagement and sporting excellence and, working with the Schools Enterprise Association, we are commissioning a national audit of schools' provision of swimming lessons and achievement of water proficiency to support the national aim of ensuring that all children can swim 25m unaided by the age of 11.]



We are pleased to believe that there is an openness within Government to thinking creatively around maintained-independent school partnerships and to seeing that, at their best and when based on mutual respect, they can benefit whole communities. We were pleased to see the **OPEN Learning Partnership** [Oundle, Peterborough and East Northants] receive unabashed support from Lee Barron, Labour MP for Corby, in his maiden speech on 10 October 2024:

Oundle School and Prince William School are two of three schools in an OPEN education partnership, which I am delighted to be able to support and facilitate, which sees independent and state schools coming together to share their facilities and best practices.

1. The progress of looked after children and the most deeply disadvantaged (or under-performing) children in the UK

We acknowledge that a great deal of partnership work enhances the experiences of students from all backgrounds, however, a key focus of our work needs to be on work that can be transformative for the most disadvantaged. The five projects highlighted below in this first and longest section of our paper show the potential for transformative partnership work. We believe the projects referenced can be replicated in other settings and scaled up.

Case Study I:

The progress of Looked After Children: Lumina Tutoring administered by Harrow School

Lumina Tutoring is an innovative national programme aimed at closing the persistent attainment gap for looked-after children. It is a not-for-profit partnership between independent and state schools, delivering free, one-to-one online tutoring to care-experienced young people. It aims to improve life chances for some of the UK's most vulnerable students.

The initiative responds directly to longstanding challenges that place care-experienced young people at increased risk of poor life outcomes without targeted support:

- In 2022, only 14% of looked-after children achieved a grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSE, compared to 52% of all pupils (DfE, 2023).
- In 2023, 53% of care leavers aged 19–21 were not in education, employment or training (NEET) (DfE, 2023).
- Only 7% of looked-after children progressed to university by age 19, compared to 53% of their peers (DfE, 2023).

Lumina Tutoring mobilises the expertise of over 100 volunteer teachers each week from 32 partner schools (independent and maintained) to provide personalised academic support. The programme features one-to-one 45-minute weekly online sessions in core subjects (Maths, English, Science), delivered by volunteers, at no cost to schools, students, carers or local authorities. The programme is coordinated with administrative and training support through funding provided by Harrow School.

Participating schools typically pledge 2–3 teachers to tutor weekly during term time, reaching care-experienced young people identified through Virtual School Heads and local authorities.

Lumina Tutoring is achieving measurable, transformational results:

- An average uplift of +2 GCSE grades for participating students.

- Over 100 looked-after children supported in the last academic year, with growing demand.
- 60 active tutoring pairings per week, providing consistent, relational learning.
- Feedback shows students are more confident, motivated, and academically resilient.
- 100 teachers volunteering weekly, with 32 schools and 10 local authorities engaged.

These outcomes align directly with Government priorities to improve educational attainment, reduce NEET rates, and increase social mobility for care-experienced young people (Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy, 2023).

Lumina Tutoring represents a proven, no-cost to the public purse, high-impact intervention tackling one of the most entrenched educational inequalities in England. Lumina embodies the power of partnership, volunteerism, and targeted support to transform life chances for care-experienced young people, unlocking brighter futures for those who need it most.

Case Study II:

Academic Progress and Social Capital: King Edward VI Foundation – an integrated partnership

King Edward VI Foundation is the name given to the integrated partnership between a MAT of twelve schools (King Edward VI Academy Trust, Birmingham) and a foundation charity of two independent schools and an endowment (the Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham).

While retaining their distinct legal status and accountabilities, both organisations, under the title of 'the Foundation', work strategically and operationally as one. They share expertise and resources in order to support a wide range of pupils within the city of Birmingham and are particularly committed to improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

On average, disadvantaged students in the Foundation's academies make better progress than their non-disadvantaged peers nationally in terms of FSM, SEND and Low Prior Attainers.

Progress 8	All academies (12)	Comprehensive academies (6)	Selective (grammar) academies (6)
KEVI overall P8 2024	+0.44	+0.14	+0.75
National overall P8 2024	-0.04	-0.23	+0.67
KEVI difference	+0.48	+0.37	+0.08
KEVI FSM6 P8 2024	+0.2	-0.07	+0.48

National FSM6 P8 2024	-0.55	-0.58	+0.29
KEVI difference	+0.75	+0.51	+0.19
KEVI LPA P8 2024	+0.3	+0.3	n/a
National LPA P8 2024	-0.12	-0.12	n/a
KEVI difference	+0.42	+0.42	n/a

The Foundation is an example of accessibility to selective schools, with at least 25% of places at the Foundation's six grammar schools made available to Pupil Premium students, compared to a national average of 8%. Around 15% of pupils at the Foundation's two independent schools receive Assisted Places (means-tested bursaries), compared to the national average of 8%.

Collaboration between state and independent schools works for the benefit of pupils and staff in all schools. By way of example, **King Edward VI Balaam Wood Academy** is the second most deprived mainstream school in the country and rated 'inadequate' when it joined the Foundation in 2019. Last year, the school received a full suite of 'good' ratings from Ofsted, giving its community its first good school in 18 years. School improvement and a cultural capital programme *Enquiring Minds* involving staff and pupils from the Foundation's two independent schools and featuring debating, philosophy, maths, sport and wellbeing activities, have changed pupils' overarching experience of education.

Case Study III:

Attendance and Attainment: The Habs partnership model

The **Haberdashers' Elstree Schools (Habs)** partnership work is built around a weekly schedule of sessions which aim to support and enhance curriculum learning for partner schools. Habs has been working with **London Academy (LA)**, one of its five local partner schools, in a specific project to impact the attendance and attainment of Year 6 students, over 50% of whom are eligible for free school meals.

Every Thursday Habs runs a carousel of partnerships sessions for the whole of LA's Year 6, in swimming, sports and outdoor education. All these sessions are run by a Habs teacher working in partnership with LA staff, and activities are led by a group of 16 trained Habs sixth formers.

In order to qualify for the sessions, LA students have to receive a 'golden ticket': they have to have had 100% attendance in the previous week, completed their homework, and had no negative behaviour points. It is clear to everyone involved how much all the students and staff from both schools have enjoyed sessions, learnt new skills, and built tremendous relationships. Statistical evidence for their impact is compelling: LA have studied their attendance data for

Thursdays, comparing their data for Year 6 before and since running sessions, and also comparing attendance for Year 6 against other year groups. This has revealed that Habs' work in partnership has raised LA's average school attendance (not just attendance at partnerships sessions, but at school overall) by 9.2%. For disadvantaged pupils this figure rises to 10.1%: equivalent to a full extra day of school every two weeks. This is supported by similar evidence from other projects with other partner schools, such as a climbing session which has raised average attendance among disadvantaged students by 4.6%.

Raising attendance is one of the key challenges for state schools; given that attendance is the most powerful predictor of school outcomes for young people, we are delighted to be making such a difference for the children of London Academy. We are now clear that a regular programme of partnerships work is a powerful tool for tackling this challenge. Partnerships is proving itself a force for school improvement: there is no other intervention that I know of which has demonstrated such a major impact on attendance.
Director of Partnerships, Habs

Case Study IV:

A Saturday School model: Caterham School's Saturday Plus

Saturday Plus is a social mobility initiative supporting high-potential pupils from state primaries, particularly those receiving Pupil Premium or Free School Meals. It offers monthly in-person sessions led by Caterham Prep teachers and access to the school's Century Tech online platform.

The programme targets pupils nominated by their primary schools who show potential but face barriers such as financial limitations, and cultural unfamiliarity with selective education. Sessions focus on academic readiness (English, maths, verbal and non-verbal reasoning), confidence building, and enrichment activities, including sports, drama, and outdoor learning. Pupils receive reading books, regular assessments, and parental engagement opportunities through meetings and social events.

Survey data showed an 11% increase in pupils' preparedness for selective school applications and a nearly 20% above-average self-efficacy score.

Case Study V:

Combatting Exclusion: Radley College's Countryside Centre Capstone programme

The young people involved in **Radley College's** Countryside Centre Capstone programme are some of the most at-risk children in Oxfordshire. Their experience at the farm contributes to making them happy and successful. Where there have been difficulties with individuals or poor choices by students, the centre has helped offer alternatives and encouraged them to think things through.



For those children, coming to the farm means that I'm able to keep them in school and keep them learning. Their attendance rates have improved by an average of 50% across their whole schooling. I've no doubt that going to Radley and having those opportunities in the Countryside Centre is part of what is making those children feel happier, more willing to come to school, and more willing to engage. I know this because their parents are saying it—parents whose relationship with the school has been incredibly challenging. Secondary school headteacher

These children were at risk of not achieving any qualifications and also being permanently excluded from school. For their parents to be able to say this programme is giving them what they need is significant.

2. The progress of children on the SEND register and neurodiverse children

*Perhaps harder to measure and less well-developed at present than schemes to support LACs and socially disadvantaged pupils, there has been a growth of partnership projects looking to support schools' understanding of the needs of neurodiverse children and those on the SEND register. This is an area for growth and one for the government to promote. **S.P.A.** will encourage schools to work collaboratively on long-term programmes and policies in relation to SEND.*

Case Study I:

Pupil Voice and Neurodiversity

The **Southwark Schools' Learning Partnership**, a partnership of fourteen maintained schools and five independent schools, has an annual Pupil Voice project. It has been sponsored for many years now by the parents of children at Dulwich College. Themes the pupils have explored in inter-school groups have included Race Equity (producing films which became part of the Year 8 PHSCE curriculum), Sustainability, and the applications of AI in schools. In 2023-24, students across SSLP schools collaborated on projects related to neurodiversity, with a focus on helping to raise awareness and support for neurodiverse pupils. To launch the project, SSLP organized a Neurodiversity Conference for students, featuring guest speakers.

This event made me more aware of the struggles of neurodivergent people in schools, because of the talks delivered by people who have experienced this. State school pupil

Students across the partnership were invited to enter competitions to express their neurodiversity through art or the written word.



Alongside the Pupil Voice project, SSLP teachers were offered training to raise their awareness of the impact of neurodiversity in schools. This included an interactive workshop specialising in the application of AI in the classroom to support neurodivergent learners. Colleagues were able to try out a range of AI-powered apps designed to support specific functioning needs, such as time management, organisation, and task initiation.

Case Study II:

Working with special schools

King's College School, Wimbledon has been working in partnership with special schools in the Boroughs of Merton and Wandsworth for the past 25 years and as a result has long established projects with three schools: **Cricket Green School, Perseid School and Linden Lodge**. Every Friday afternoon groups of King's pupils accompanied by their teachers visit these schools to provide support in the classroom. Their role is to build relationships with the children, to help them to learn and play; to support art, swimming and computing; and to help with the development of social skills.

Case Study III:

Sports Partnership with a Special School

The Clifton Hill Sports Partnership is a long-running sports initiative between **Caterham School** and **Clifton Hill School**, a specialist institution for young people with severe and profound learning difficulties and autism. Every Friday, Clifton Hill pupils participate in structured sporting activities at Caterham's Sports Hall, led by Caterham's Lower Sixth students. Additionally, Caterham hosts the annual Clifton Hill Sports Days in the summer, where pupils engage in various sports alongside Caterham students, with parents and carers invited to participate.

The programme benefits both Clifton Hill and Caterham students. Clifton Hill pupils develop key skills such as following instructions, social interaction, motor coordination, and ball-handling abilities. They also gain confidence in navigating large spaces and engaging in structured activities. Meanwhile, Caterham students gain experience in leadership, patience, and inclusive education.

Case Study IV:

Working with disabled children

Phab Club, aimed at 11 to 18-year-olds, is **Yarm School's** fortnightly club where disabled and non-disabled children come together to socialise, have fun and build friendships. The club offers a range of activities such as arts and crafts, board games and table tennis, as well as seasonal parties and special visits. Parents and guardians are able to enjoy a coffee, while their children have fun with a group of 4th and 5th Year pupils and members of Yarm staff.

He [my son] has had lots of encouragement and support from the staff and pupils who have volunteered their time and effort to make sure [he] gets the best out of the time spent there. Phab Club have introduced so many new experiences to him. Parent of Phab attendee

3. Work to support particular needs in a given community

S.P.A. is in no doubt that the best partnerships can impact on their communities more broadly and not only on pupils and teachers in schools. “Place-based partnerships”, as defined by the Federation for Education Development, will be an increasingly important aspect of maintained-independent school partnerships in future years and **S.P.A.** will be promoting the models described below: involving councils, businesses and universities in supporting their communities through the lens of school partnership working.

Case Study I:

The Bolton 19,000 model

The **Bolton Learning Partnership** is an ambitious collaboration which consists of twenty-eight secondary schools and colleges working together, alongside Bolton Council to support educational improvement, teaching, learning, personal development and inclusion to provide the best opportunities for young people in the borough. Commonly known as the “BLP19K” the partnership supports over 19,000 students and over 3,000 teachers in achieving excellence through working together, professional development and access to expert resources. The idea of the Bolton 19,000 comes from the belief that every Headteacher in Bolton commits to the idea that they are responsible for all the school children of the town.

The Curriculum Executive Board provides curriculum development resources in its mission to develop the five pillars of effective curriculum design: subject expertise, quality of instruction, making knowledge stick, adaptive teaching and assessment and feedback. There are regular

hub meetings for the different areas of the curriculum and the MFL hub has just celebrated its tenth year. There is also a SEND hub which shares best practice and ensures consistency in the identification and support of students.

There is a Safety and Welfare Hub which plays a pivotal role in safeguarding students across Bolton and the new Inclusion Executive Board works to ensure that every student has the support they need to thrive. A key area of growth this year has been the development of trauma informed approaches aimed at supporting students with emotional and psychological challenges. A DEI Leadership programme was introduced last year, to raise awareness of inclusion practice at staff and pupil level, and was heavily subsidised by the BLP.

The Partnership also hosts a Student Leadership Conference, bringing together students from across the borough. The BLP Conference is always a superb event over the course of a couple of days in June and gives an opportunity for all of the partner schools and colleges within the partnership to come together. Understanding that every one of the 19,000 students in the partnership schools and colleges matters is always the focus of these conferences.

Collaboration at the conference allows school leaders to drive improvement and share best practice and keynote speakers are chosen to provide a variety of insights, not only into adaptive teaching, inclusion and current pedagogical research, but also into leadership skills and performance management.

Case Study II:

The Cheltenham town and gown model

Cheltenham Education Partnership (CEP) is a town-wide partnership of all the secondary schools in and around Cheltenham (8 state schools, 4 independent schools) with the University of Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire College as the 14 full stakeholders. But what makes this town partnership so effective is the support given by local town organisations (and some county too) to the secondary educational sector.

Examples of activities will give a flavour of the depth and breadth of collaboration in the town. The Cheltenham Festivals run a VoiceBox tent at the annual Literature Festival targeting 11-30 year olds. Students from across CEP schools have spoken in recent years on the challenges of mental health and their aspirations for the secondary education curriculum. Students have also interviewed guest speakers for a podcast.

Cheltenham Borough Council surveyed young people last summer about their sense of safety and well-being in the town and the findings were discussed by CEP students supported by guest facilitators including the Mayor, council members, members of the chamber of commerce and the local police at what was called an 'Horizons Council'. This is now an annual event.

The Borough Council also held a climate change conference in their council chamber where schools each represented a country in a COP style debate. Over 70 students from 14 schools took part to engage actively in the climate change debate.

Having a town-wide partnership of all the secondary schools has other important consequences. Town initiatives seeking the voice of young people approach CEP. For example, the new Cyber Park Developers for whom young pupil will be their future employees; the Cheltenham Culture Board promoting the arts, heritage and digital development in a specific youth strand; the Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce, seeking to engage with employability skills and careers advice, support and placements. In addition, close liaison takes place with the primary education and the aim in due course is to hold activities and events for the benefit of pupils from both sectors.

At the centre of CEP, of course, are the students themselves and this collaboration of schools and organisations is beginning to change the educational landscape of a whole town.

4. Teacher training, retention and development

S.P.A. is convinced that one of the major ways in which maintained-independent school partnerships can serve national educational needs is through working together in initial teacher training. We have seen few better examples of independent and maintained schools working on projects as equals than in the sphere of SCITT. We would suggest that if government encouraged good schools of all types to commit to teacher training great inroads into the teacher shortage would be made. This section of the paper also looks at other ways in which maintained and independent schools can support teacher training, retention and development.

Case Study I:

School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT)

A number of partnerships support SCITTs. Through its Hub for the National Maths and Physics SCITT and National Modern Languages SCITT **Dulwich College** has trained over 200 teachers of Maths, Physics and Modern Languages over seven years. Its provision has two main aims:

- To address the national shortage of teachers in specific subjects, and support teachers into the local network and beyond.
- To support a sustainable route into teaching.

Trainees have gone on to enrich the local educational community with an approximate 60/40 split of state/independent destination schools, and a retention rate of over 90%.

Through a partnership with Roehampton University, **Dulwich College** has increased its subject provision to include Biology, Business Studies with Economics, Chemistry and Computing, with Biology and Chemistry trainees the first to complete the course this year.

Case Study II:

The Funded-teacher initiative

At **Royal Grammar School Newcastle**, an innovative ‘funded-teacher’ model has shown proof of concept and continues to grow. Drawing on philanthropic funds from foundations, businesses and alumni, teachers are employed by RGS but dedicate most of their working week to delivering long-term projects with and alongside partner state schools. From September 2025, the team of Partnership Teachers will comprise eight dedicated members of staff: three in Maths, two Computer Science, one in Physics, Robotics, and Rugby. 2025 also introduces STEM Horizons, whereby five Computer Science teachers (funded by the Hg Foundation) will work out of a network of five independent schools across the country, raising attainment and uptake in the subject, especially among low-income groups and girls – both demographics under-

represented in tech careers. The 3-year project will be independently evaluated by NFER. **RGS Newcastle** is also committed to ITT in shortage subjects as the North-East hub of NMAPS, and in delivering a Computer Science ITT programme in partnership with Newcastle University.

Case Study III:

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Radley College runs a sports project with **St John Fisher School Catholic Primary School**. During sessions, St John Fisher staff are not just observers; they participate in training alongside the pupils. This joint CPD opportunity is rare in primary sport, allowing teachers to build confidence and competence in delivering high-quality PE, even in sports outside their expertise.

Fourteen members of staff at **Shrewsbury School** hold governor or trustee roles in primary, secondary and specialist maintained sector settings. Many more have taught students from these schools, supporting both where there is underperformance and more able students. Gaining experience from the maintained sector benefits the school in many ways; colleagues gain professional development from this work and are even better placed for the performance of their roles as teachers and leaders, to the benefit of other colleagues and pupils.

Case Study IV:

Support for teacher wellbeing

ACS International Schools recognise that supporting teachers is crucial, so offer their network of over 100 primary schools in Surrey and Hillingdon free counselling through an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). This gives colleagues access to comprehensive online learning, and, in collaboration with local authorities, free safeguarding resources.

Following a successful pastoral meeting of leads from across the **West London Partnership**, Supervision was offered by **St Paul's Girls' School** to all pastoral middle and senior leaders in

partner state schools. The SPGS inhouse expert is delivering a set of six supervision sessions at **Sacred Heart High School** and the feedback has been incredibly positive. This initiative has provided the opportunity for Heads of Year and pastoral leads in partner schools to have a safe space to share their concerns, as well as encouraging them to celebrate their successes.

Case study V:

Sharing technological resources

Caterham School's Partnerships Lending Library provides specialist equipment to local schools, addressing resource gaps and enhancing teaching experiences. The library has



facilitated 31 loans (125 items), benefiting five schools and 500 pupils. Equipment includes iPads, robotics kits, and other digital tools, with an emphasis on coding and problem solving. Requests for resources are coordinated through the **East Surrey Learning Partnership**. Beyond loans, there is a 'Service Library' (offering 3D printing) and a 'Skills Library' (providing teacher training). A notable milestone was a co-hosted workshop in 2023, where an ESLP school led training on robotics and electronics. Feedback underscores the library's impact on teacher confidence, student engagement, and curriculum creativity: one state school computing lead noted how borrowing equipment transformed the teaching of computing, maths, and English; another highlighted how struggling students excelled in video editing given access to better technology.

5. Applications of AI in education

These are inevitably at an embryonic stage, but the possibilities of maintained and independent schools sharing best practice and working on AI programmes and policies together is one the S.P.A. will look to promote.

Case Study I:

Shaping policy and best practice

Alleyn's School has been actively involved in shaping AI policy both within the school and in the broader community and has developed a comprehensive Artificial Intelligence Policy that outlines the ethical, safe, and effective use of AI and data technologies in the educational environment. This policy provides clear guidelines for all users, including students, teachers, leaders, governors, and administrators, on the appropriate use of AI and data technologies in the school. Alleyn's Digital Academy is an initiative designed to enhance digital skills and learning experiences for pupils in Years 9 and 10. The academy provides a dedicated platform for students to engage with technology and innovative hardware while testing their critical thinking and collaboration skills. The programme runs weekly and involves working in conjunction with pupils from local partner schools. It focuses on creative digital design, coding, and tech entrepreneurship, providing valuable skills such as problem-solving, logical thinking, and collaboration.

Case Study II:

Digital Initiatives

Caterham School is committed to social mobility and educational excellence extends beyond its own walls. Through strategic partnerships and innovative digital initiatives, the school is transforming learning experiences for local primary school pupils, equipping them with the tools and confidence to thrive in an ever-evolving world. One of Caterham's most impactful initiatives is the integration of Century Tech, an award-winning AI-powered learning platform, into our partner schools. With its ability to tailor learning pathways to individual students using AI, Century Tech is revolutionizing how young learners engage with core subjects. This initiative has particularly benefited **Furzefield** and **Audley Primary Schools**, where structured digital learning is now a core element of the curriculum, enhancing engagement and supporting SATs and 11+ preparation. The impact is undeniable: students across all schools have answered over 50,000 questions on the platform, demonstrating remarkable levels of participation and progress. Rileybot is Caterham School's AI-powered educational assistant, enhancing student learning through personalized support and critical thinking guidance. It supports more than fifty



languages, aids special needs learners, and in 2025 won an innovation award. **East Surrey Learning Partnership** schools have been given licences to use Rileybot in the classroom. This roll out was complemented with INSET sessions aimed at incorporating Rileybot into lesson planning and exploring how it might be used to individualise learning in the classroom.

Case Study III:

Pupil Voice and Teacher CPD

The Southwark Schools Learning Partnership (SSLP) is leveraging Artificial Intelligence in its partnership work through several key initiatives for its staff and students. SSLP hosted a conference for students to discuss AI's role in education and digital advancements. Year 10 student leaders are involved in the SSLP Student Council, which this year focuses on AI and Digital. This includes exploring AI ethics, digital wellbeing, AI in entrepreneurship, and AI in creativity. This initiative aims to develop leadership, communication, and teamwork skills. SSLP also has an ongoing student-voice project centred on AI, with students meeting online to develop their projects, discuss funding, and plan in-person training. SSLP held an Aspiring Educators Series on AI for teachers across the partnership focused on AI, including an in-person event with a workshop. It also organised a seminar featuring Priya Lakhani OBE, the Founder CEO of CENTURY, to share insights on AI in education.

6. The successful application of state school pupils to competitive universities and measurable support with careers education

*One of the traditional ways in which cross-sector partnerships have worked has been in ensuring that maintained school pupils are as well prepared as possible for applications to competitive universities (in this country and abroad) by benefitting from tutoring in UCAS Personal Statement writing or mock interview practice at independent schools, and this work goes on. More recently, it has become evident that another way in which independent schools can support state schools is in opening their alumni and parent networks to pupils from schools unlikely to have so many links with the traditional professions and with creative and entrepreneurial leaders. **S.P.A.** finds itself brokering relationships between independent schools and maintained schools looking to develop their careers functions and to establish Alumni offices. We are pleased to do this – but see the endgame as ensuring that such support will not be needed far into the future.*

Case study I:

Promoting STEM subjects

The Oundle, Peterborough and East Northants (OPEN) Learning Partnership offers a comprehensive and longitudinal support programme in STEM for North Cambridgeshire and East Northants providing opportunity, aspiration and support for all children, addressing need and provision gaps in this region which includes a rural constituency and opportunity cold spots in Kettering, Corby and Peterborough.

Inspiration and culture building begins at primary level, where family education events occur alongside a 5 lesson ‘Steps into STEM’ series for Year 5 children across 10 schools by a specialist science teacher, each lesson dedicated to addressing a fundamental scientific skill. Extension Mathematics events serve the brightest from Year 5 to Year 10, many of whom access additional support from OPEN online provision Midweek Maths and Family Science via ExpertEd (see <https://expertedlive.org/>).

More in-depth learning begins in secondary through STEM Residentials for Year 8 children from Kettering and Peterborough, a Girls in Engineering event, Cyber Girls, weekly after-school STEM clubs delivered by recent university graduates, termly visits from university faculty delivering workshops in all partner schools and expert speakers.

Many of those whose first experiences of the partnership come through these activities move on to join a university STEM access programme, targeting those with capability in STEM who face disadvantage. The vast majority of participants go on to STEM courses at high tariff universities and a particular highlight of this programme, now entering its 8th year, is seeing alumni return to

share their learning from university with the next cohort, a measure of the influence which the programme had on them.

Case Study II:

A longitudinal university access programme

The **Kent Academies Network (KAN)**, led by **Sevenoaks School**, is a four-year university access programme that aims to remove barriers to HE by developing pupils' confidence, knowledge and agency so that they can set and reach ambitious goals. Alumni believe that KAN equips them with leadership skills, has enabled them to develop both public speaking and time management skills, taught them to work effectively under pressure and encouraged them to pursue careers working with young people. The key to KAN's success is the relationships forged, both between KAN students but also between KAN students and mentors. There is a mutual understanding, respect and support; KAN provides a space for individuals to share their aspirations, lift each other up and champion each other's success. Inclusivity is a strategic pillar of Sevenoaks School's mission and strategy with an objective to 'work in partnership to nurture potential and build aspiration amongst diverse backgrounds'. KAN is now in its 11th year and, in the previous seven cohorts, 61 students have completed KAN. The destinations of the 53 alumni that are known, include 51 having received places for university degrees or high-level apprenticeships.

Case Study III:

Promoting Careers in the Arts

St Paul's Girls' School Saturday School (SPGSS) has been designed to bolster awareness of Careers in the Arts, which is especially pertinent at this time. The initiative is also supported by Old Paulinas who deliver lectures on pathways to a successful career in the arts. 32 students are involved from **Sacred Heart High School**, **Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School** and **SPGS** on the 10-week 'Youth Theatre' programme. SPGS alumna, Pippa Cleary is an award-winning British musical theatre composer, songwriter and lyricist. She is delivering a Masterclass and lecture on career pathways to musical theatre.

Case study IV:

Access to Medicine

The Wright Society is an academic initiative supporting aspiring medical students from **Caterham School, Oxted School, and Warlingham School**. It provides structured guidance, resources, and mentorship for students pursuing medical applications, including advice from experienced staff, medics, and Upper Sixth students. By fostering collaboration between local schools, the Wright Society strengthens opportunities for students pursuing medical careers.

The programme follows a structured pathway, covering key aspects of medical applications: aptitude test preparation (UCAT/BMAT), work experience planning, personal statement guidance, and interview practice. Live sessions, often featuring hands-on activities, help students build a strong peer support network while engaging with real-world medical scenarios. The society also taps into the Caterham Community to arrange mock interviews with medical professionals, ensuring students receive rigorous preparation. The 2024 cohort achieved outstanding results, with all participants securing medical school places. The success underscores the programme's impact in levelling the playing field for students from different schools, offering them access to expert guidance and structured preparation.

Case Study V:

A mentoring programme

City Scholars Science Partnerships and Research Collaborations (SPARC) is an innovative cross-school partnership programme, led jointly by **City of London School** and **City of London School for Girls**, jointly funded with the City of London Corporation. This is a significant partnership project, incorporating 80 pupils from six schools (three state and three independent) across an academic year. City SPARC has enabled City Scholars who are current PhD students to guide inter-school Year 12 pupil groups in conducting original research projects. Leveraging their academic expertise, the PhD mentors have developed pupils' skills in experimental design, data analysis, scientific communication and more, with the ultimate goal of CREST accreditation. City SPARC provides invaluable hands-on experience preparing pupils for STEM degrees and careers and has brought about hugely enriching opportunities for collaboration and academic development for pupils who have taken part. Across the yearlong project, participants attend in-person events and have online supervision sessions.

Case Study VI:

Careers in and for the community

Yarm School works with local secondary schools and local, regional and national business and education institutions to inspire young people from across the Tees Valley. All its career events are built on the desire to share the best information and guidance with the widest audience. The provision is continuously adapting to the demands of the education and training sectors, as well as the employment market. Yarm offers a large biennial Career Convention to all students 14-19, which in 2023 welcomed over 160 delegates from universities, training providers and workplaces and over 1000 young people. There are regular 'Career Cluster' events, which focus on particular career areas and involve discussions with experienced leaders, mid-level practitioners, and those who are training or just entering the career area. These events are attended by students throughout the region. In 2023 a new work experience programme was set up with HM Treasury and other government departments at the Darlington Economic Campus, which saw enthusiastic Sixth Form students from Yarm and its partner state school take part in a range of activities designed to prepare them for the workplace.

7. Promotion of the Performing Arts

S.P.A. sees one of its workstreams as the promotion of the Arts (and Languages and the Humanities) in the curriculum. Often these are areas where cuts are felt deeply in state schools – where subjects may no longer be taught or where single teachers are trying to support a subject on their own, and benefit greatly from engagement with other professionals.

Case Study I:

Music in the community

Music Flood is a partnership between 25 schools in Oxfordshire supported by **Radley College**, with Abingdon Music Centre and Oxfordshire Music Education Partnership. Music Flood has a single aim: to put music in every school, every day. With highly publicised inequalities in funding, training, confidence and provision for music in schools, this cross-sector partnership is a powerful tool to ensure every child benefits from an inspiring music education. During Music Flood, pupils participate in workshops, have guests visit their schools to lead singing assemblies, and then perform in the town's Market Square. One primary school teacher said that Music Flood has taught her warm-up techniques that she now uses in her assemblies. Schools report that Music Flood is one of the highlights in their year. It also opens music to pupils whose parents may otherwise not be able to afford it. Music Flood's Mighty Orchestra (of 250 players) was invited to perform at the National Music for Youth concert at Birmingham's Symphony Hall this Summer – the largest ensemble ever to perform at this event.

Case Study II:

Music in primary schools

The Jupiter Project is **St Paul's Girls' School's** large-scale music partnership project which widens access to musical tuition and ensemble playing for primary partner students. Student mentors from SPGS and **St Paul's Boys** are trained to teach Year 5 students who have had little to no access to instrumental tuition. The mentors work with primary music teachers on a variety of teaching techniques. This ensures engagement and quality. A range of mentoring and rehearsal sessions culminates in a joint concert performed in SPGS Great Hall. The independent schools provide all instruments for the primary students to take home so they can practise for the duration of the project.

Case Study III:

Music for the City

Portsmouth Grammar School collaborates with the Portsmouth Education Cultural Partnership, the Portsmouth Music Hub and Portsmouth Cathedral on a number of music events. St Cecilia's Day Evensong, at Portsmouth Cathedral, involves a local primary school and a local Church choir. Gabrieli Roar is a national project which brings together young singers to experience working on a programme of music which is performed in amazing venues with the world renowned Gabrieli consort and players.

Case Study IV:

A dance initiative

Dance students from **Shrewsbury School** regularly work with primary and special school partners working with young people with SEN and physical disability, learning much about inclusivity and the value of dance as expression and communication. Sixth form dancers contribute to the Darwin Day for Year 5 pupils, creatively exploring 'evolution through the medium of dance' and challenging them to communicate with young dancers across a wide range of abilities.

Case Study V:

Community Drama

The community production is performed in the **King's College School Wimbledon** theatre annually at the end of the spring term, following weekly rehearsals on Friday afternoons during the first half of the academic year. It showcases the very essence of the Partnerships Programme, with King's staff and pupils working collaboratively with staff and pupils from local, primary, secondary and special schools, to produce a show full of vibrancy, collaboration and fun. The 150-strong cast made up of pupils from KCS and partnership schools work together on every aspect of the production: designing the set and props, composing the music, devising the script, conducting and singing in the choir; as well as providing sound and lighting. A highlight is always when the full cast fill the stage to perform the final song accompanied by student musicians. It is extremely powerful to see pupils aged 9 to 18 from such a wide range of backgrounds working together to produce the show.



Case Study VI:

A West End experience

The **ACS International Schools** West End project exemplifies the schools' commitment to Arts education, involving the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and West End performers working intensively with primary schools through 'boot camps' culminating in performances. "A Night at the West End" is an extraordinary event uniting the talents of primary school children from partner schools and students from ACS Schools. This magical evening is a testament to the collaborative synergy when schools, industry partners, and remarkable organisations come together.

8. The provision of teaching and support in minority subjects

This is a traditional area of engagement that continues to deliver benefits. There are many such schemes across the country, but these case studies give a flavour of the work being undertaken.

Case Study I:

Classics

Classics for All research estimates that classics is taught in 25% of UK state schools compared with 75% of independent schools. Many partnership projects deliver classics to primary and secondary pupils in schools without the capacity to deliver them, such as the **York ISSP** Latin GCSE course for students from maintained schools where it is not on the curriculum. (**York ISSP** also runs a GCSE Astronomy course.) At **King's College School, Wimbledon**, King's pupils have been working with the Year 6 cohort from **Hollymount Primary School** for over 25 years teaching Latin through the Minimus course on Friday afternoons. King's pupils devise the sessions and deliver them in small groups under the supervision of a King's Classics teacher.

Case Study II:

Chinese

St Paul's Girls' School's Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) Club is making an impact through teaching Chinese to students from partner schools. Recognising Chinese as a desirable skill for future careers, the HSK Club has become a popular option for gifted and talented students from **Sacred Heart High School, Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, and Fulham Boys**. Every week, the Partnership and Chinese departments welcome students to SPGS for a one-hour session, with the first half of the session is run by Paulinas studying Chinese at school. The HSK Club has attracted the attention of the School of Oriental and African Studies, which has shown an interest in supporting the club and providing their expertise in teaching non-native speakers.

Case Study III:

Extending the Art curriculum: print making

The Print Pilgrimage project uses printmaking to make links between partners and to explore the diversity of students' backgrounds and histories. The project looks at the tradition of religious pilgrimages, the work of artists who have explored this theme, and questions that pilgrims may contemplate on their journeys. Secondary school students from across the **East Kent Schools Together** partnership made "pilgrimages" to other member schools to explore their personal journeys, learn from others, collaborate creatively, and hear from expert facilitators. EKST ran 20 collaborative, cross-school workshops giving students access to new techniques and facilities not available in many schools (monoprints, collagraphs, linocuts, photograms and mixed media pieces). The project at the Daphne Oram Gallery space at Canterbury Christ Church University gave EKST teaching and support staff CPD, upskilling departments across partner schools.

Historical context

Margaret Hunnaball, School Partnerships Alliance Director of Programmes and Research

In an **Excellence in Schools White Paper**, 1997, David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, charged independent schools with sharing their facilities and teachers with local schools. This was not only to help raise standards in state schools, but as a contributing factor in independent schools demonstrating public benefit, and so retaining charitable status. This introduction of cross-sector partnerships was matched by funding. Some of the partnerships funded in 1997 are still active today, illustrating how sustainable this work can be.

New Labour demonstrated its commitment to ISSPs through establishing the **Government Advisory Group on Independent/State School Partnerships** in 1997 with the ‘sole aim of... promoting genuine partnerships between maintained and independent schools to raise standards and enhance the educational opportunities of pupils involved’. This Advisory Group gave guidance to the Department for Education on ISSP matters and commissioned reviews of the early projects.

The effectiveness of the Advisory Group resulted in the introduction of a **Ministerial Independent State School Partnership Forum** in 2002. The forum was charged with using ‘its expertise and commitment in school collaboration to raise educational attainment, narrow the achievement gap and widen opportunities for children and staff’ (House of Commons, 2014). This Forum comprised Department for Education representatives, leaders from state-maintained and independent schools, alongside representatives of teaching unions and local education authority members. The ISSP forum advised ministers until the DfE’s **System Partnership Unit** was introduced in 2017 (DfE, 2017).

In its later years the forum also involved coordinators from some ISSPs, and it was these coordinators who collectively in 2016 founded the **Schools Together Group**, dedicated to promoting and celebrating cross-sector partnerships. The **School Partnerships Alliance** grew out of the work of the Schools Together Group.

What these developments illustrate is that the notion of partnership between state and independent schools had become established in education policy and that there was central government commitment towards sustaining networks and relations between the two sectors.

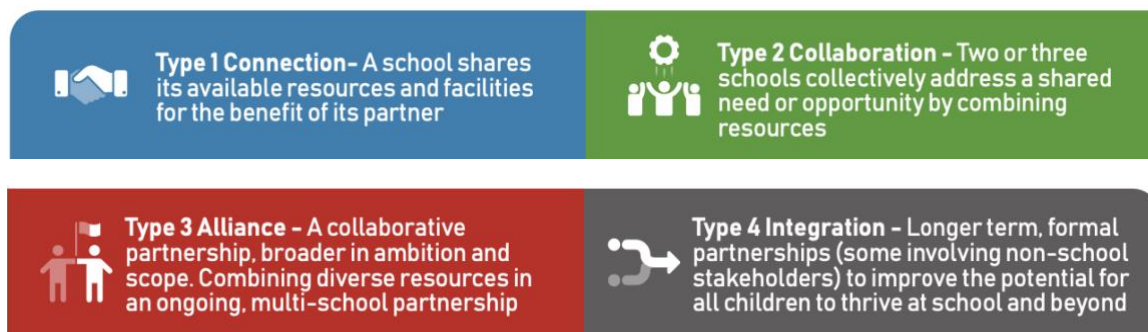
A clarion call to the DfE

The **S.P.A.** believes that a commitment to collaborative working in and between schools, and school sectors, can have a transformatory impact on the education of all children in the UK. To enjoy the full impact the partnerships movement could have, it will need the support of government. Partnership working is gaining greater traction than ever among leaders in both the maintained and independent sectors, as evidenced by a commitment to its work by the Heads of all the schools referenced in the evidence gathered in this paper and in the interest in the work of **S.P.A.** by CEOs of a number of major Multi-Academy Trusts.

The school partnerships movement began when New Labour (and Suzie Leather at the Charity Commission) started to look seriously at the question of the charitable status and public benefit credentials of independent schools, but since then – and successive political and economic challenges notwithstanding – a clear majority of independent schools have committed to partnership working and built personal and institutional relationships with their local state schools that are destined to make a difference to the destiny of every child in this country.

The S.P.A. in 2025-26

Civitas' report *The Future of Independent Schools* (January 2025) averred that an enhancing of partnerships with maintained schools and an agreed standard on the reporting of partnerships was essential to maintaining a successful independent school sector. A sector-wide adoption of **S.P.A.'s** categorisation of partnerships was recommended as the reporting framework:



To transform young lives, through the creation of a strategy for educational partnerships which will serve national educational needs, the **S.P.A.** has to:

- move from being an independent sector interest group to a cross-sector partnership organization which can prove the mutual benefit to maintained and independent schools of engagement in partnerships
- shift the focus of its work from proof of the public benefit of independent schools to proving school partnerships serve national educational needs
- show that independent schools are not part of the problem of UK education, but can be agents of a national system of education, addressing national educational problems
- help direct partnership resource and activity to where it can make most impact, in itself (and notably for the most disadvantaged) and in terms of political clout
- establish a framework for partnership activity that ensures its impact is great as possible and that it is understood as real not performative or tokenistic work.

With this in view, the **School Partnerships Alliance** has to:

- ensure success is weighed according to the resources of the school being assessed
- raise funds to ensure subscriptions remain modest
- encourage engagement on projects as well as activities
- find ways for the independent sector to engage in major educational projects being spearheaded by maintained school leaders and make the most of our advisers from the maintained sector



- work with development, admissions, marketing and enterprise professionals (SEA, IDPE, AMCIS, AGBIS, ISBA) on the external brief in schools
- explore integrated maintained-state school trust/foundation models of partnership

S.P.A. work streams for 2025-26

- Work with the **HMC public benefit committee** on a national strategy/framework for partnerships and with ISC to ensure **Schools Together** can gauge the impact of partnerships
- Work with **National Society of Education** to promote independent school engagement with the *Flourishing Leaders* programme
- Be an inaugural partner of **Federation for Education Development's** National Education Assembly
- Provide case studies of best practice re: **national educational priorities**, for **DfE** and of **sports partnerships** for Lord Moynihan [conduct swimming audit with **SEA**, Swim England, DCMS]
- Conduct an audit of maintained school views of partnerships with **Baines Cutler**, and with the **Confederation of School Trusts** and **Chartered College of Teachers**
- Support **Mission Accomplished** in their work on creative industry work placements for DCMS and in the promotion of the Arts more generally
- Explore opportunities for independent schools to work with **Association of Education Advisers**
- Advocate for the HMC/Oasis **mental health coalition**
- Work with the **English Speaking Union** to promote their Oracy competitions among state schools
- Work with **WoLLoW** on the promotion of languages in schools and with the National Modern Languages SCITT (and NMAPS) on teacher training, recruitment and retention.
- Encourage greater partnership working at Prep and Primary School level
- Establish an **APPG for School Partnerships**