



Autumn 2025

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Aspire Hub Newsletter!

Message from Senior Partners

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our Autumn Term Newsletter and to reflect on what has already been an exceptional start to the 2025/26 Partnership Year. Our SEND and Inclusion-focused Conference set a powerful tone for the year ahead, bringing together leaders from across our 64 schools to strengthen our collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities within this vital area.

Over the early weeks of the partnership year, we have worked closely with school leaders, carefully reviewed the school information-gathering templates, and listened deeply to the priorities emerging from our Primaries, Secondaries and Special schools. These insights have shaped a purposeful and ambitious Aspire Hub Action Plan for 2025/26. You'll find further details in this newsletter, including an overview of the professional development opportunities available this year—each designed to support excellence in classroom practice, leadership development, and sector-wide collaboration.

This term also saw the inaugural meeting of the Aspire Hub Education Advisory Group. This new body will guide and challenge our strategic direction, helping ensure that we continue to look up, out and beyond—bringing fresh perspectives, sector expertise and forward-thinking leadership to the heart of our Hub's development.

It is also a privilege to share an important leadership update. From January 2026, **Michelle Ridsdale (Director of Leadership at Forward As One)** will step into the role of Senior Partner for The Aspire Hub. Michelle brings a wealth of experience, deep sector insight and a proven commitment to collaborative school improvement. I know she will lead the Hub with both vision and integrity.

For me and colleague Senior Partners, this transition marks the end of a remarkable chapter. Since we established the Aspire Hub in 2019 with just 16 schools across the North West, we have had the honour of seeing our community grow to become the largest regional hub within Challenge Partners—now 64 strong. It has been a privilege for us to serve as Senior Partners throughout this journey. From January 2026, I will begin a new role with Ofsted as one of His Majesty's Inspectors, and while I look forward to this next step, I will always remain immensely proud of the work we have built together. Simon will focus his time on being Director of Secondary Education for Wade Deacon Trust and Karen is focussing on her DfE role as a RISE Adviser. We are fortunate to still have Amanda's expertise on our Aspire Hub EAG.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to fellow Senior Partners **Simon Corner, Amanda Ryan and Karen Bramwell**, whose expertise and support have been instrumental in shaping Aspire's success. My sincere thanks also go to our exceptional Hub Managers—**Emma Ford (Primary)** and **Simon Goodwin (Secondary)**—who have driven many of our most impactful developments and ensured our offer remains both relevant and ambitious. Their work has been brilliantly complemented by **Lucy Jackson**, whose skill has significantly enhanced our website, social media presence and communications, ensuring our growing community remains well-connected and well-informed.

Thank you for your continued commitment, your collaboration and your belief in what we can achieve together. I hope you enjoy this newsletter and the opportunities it highlights for another inspiring year ahead!

Continue to look up, out & beyond and invest in what we believe in... Culture, Connectedness & Collaboration.

With all my best wishes,



Elliot Costas-Walker
Senior Partner

Upcoming Diary Dates

Autumn 2- Remote meeting- Monday 1st
December 1:30pm

Spring 1- Remote meeting- Monday
26th January

Spring 2- Remote Meeting- Tuesday
10th March 1:30pm

Summer 1- Remote Meeting- Monday
18th May 1:30pm

Summer 2- Full day face to face conference- Monday
22nd June

Leadership Residency Programme

Would you like to give one of your senior leaders or aspiring senior leaders the opportunity to spend 2 days immersed in school leadership at another Aspire Hub School, at no cost?

This is essentially a leadership shadowing event, initially for senior leaders. It will provide an opportunity for focussed leadership development through purposeful immersion in another school, over 2 days. In essence – shadowing senior leadership in another school.

The Aspire Hub managers will facilitate the matching of host schools and participant schools.

The host school can determine how many guests can be accommodated. We suggest 1-3 guests.

The guest(s) will spend 2 days immersed in the practices of the host school, learning about their ways of working and exploring a specific area of interest for school improvement. Guest(s) will shadow meetings, observe lessons review practice and use the time out of their own school to reflect upon their own development and goals. At the end of the two days, guests will (a) provide feedback to the host school on what they observed and learned and (b) present their learning with their own line manager.

Note – leadership residencies can be cross-phase

The Aspire Hub will send out post-residency survey to hosts and guests to measure impact.

The full Challenge Partners documentation for this initiative can be found [here](#).

If you are interested in this, either as a host or a guest, please complete [this expression of interest](#) form for hosts.

We are introducing this initiative after consulting with other Hubs that have already introduced it. Here is some participant feedback -

"The residency was an opportunity for me to spend consecutive days fully immersed within the Senior Leadership Team at an unfamiliar school. One of the key aspects was shadowing all members of the team across a range of areas of responsibility. This enabled me to gain a broader knowledge of how they worked as a team, and where responsibility lay. I fed back verbally to the Head teacher - he really interviewed me in some depth about what I had learned and really pushed on what I thought were areas to improve and focus on. I also compiled a written report around a set of questions and fed this back to the Deputy Head at my host school as she was my link.

"I was a middle leader when I participated in the residency. I am now an Assistant Headteacher. It gave me a unique opportunity as a middle leader to fully immerse myself in another school with a focus that hopefully benefitted both schools. The host school were superb at providing the meetings/observations etc to give me a real insight into their systems etc which I was able to consider for our setting."

Subject CPD

We are in the process of arranging subject CPD for Modern Languages and for Design Technology. We have an expression of interest form for all 3 subject areas [here](#).

Primary MFL (French and Spanish)- Tuesday 13th January, 2-5pm

Building Blocks for Confident Language Learning: Phonics, Vocabulary and Grammar Made Simple Teaching a foreign language doesn't have to feel daunting! This practical session unpacks the three key building blocks of language learning – phonics, vocabulary, and grammar – and shows how they work together to help pupils become confident communicators.

Drawing on insights from the Teaching Schools Council MFL Pedagogy Review (2016) and Ofsted's Languages Curriculum Research Review (2021), we'll explore simple, effective ways to teach and reinforce these core elements, so they stick in pupils' long-term memory. Discover how to plan purposeful practice, integrate language learning into your daily routines, and give your pupils (and yourself!) the tools to build real confidence and independence in language learning.

Secondary MFL (French and Spanish)- Wednesday 21st January, 2-5pm

Part 1: Building Confidence and Competence: Strategies for the New GCSE Speaking Exam

Get your students ready to shine in the new 2026 GCSE speaking exam with practical, classroom-tested strategies that build confidence, fluency, and accuracy. This session explores effective approaches to developing spontaneous speaking, pronunciation, and communication skills, while making preparation engaging and purposeful.

We'll also look at how AI-powered tools can provide personalised feedback, pronunciation practice, and low-stakes opportunities for speaking - helping learners to feel more confident and better prepared for success.

Part 2: Less, Done Well: Rethinking KS3 Languages for Enjoyment and Success

With the new GCSE placing greater emphasis on depth over breadth, now is the perfect time to streamline your KS3 language curriculum. This session explores how a 'less, done well, is more' approach can help pupils make stronger progress, build confidence, and experience genuine success in language learning.

We'll look at how to design a curriculum that focuses on high-frequency vocabulary, meaningful practice, and clear progression - all while keeping lessons enjoyable and achievable for every learner. Leave with practical ideas and renewed confidence that less content, taught better, really can mean more success.



Wendy Adeniji

Wendy Adeniji is a consultant and author of MFL resources and the co-author of "Tried and tested – the ultimate guide to teaching primary languages". Most recently she was headteacher of two secondary schools in Bradford and Doncaster and she has previously inspected for Ofsted.

Subject CPD

Both sessions will be delivered by one of the trainers from the Design Technology Association.

Primary Design Technology- Wednesday 28th January, 2-5pm

Part 1- How to be an effective leader of Design Technology in a primary school

Part 2- How to design an exciting and effective Design Technology curriculum in a primary school.

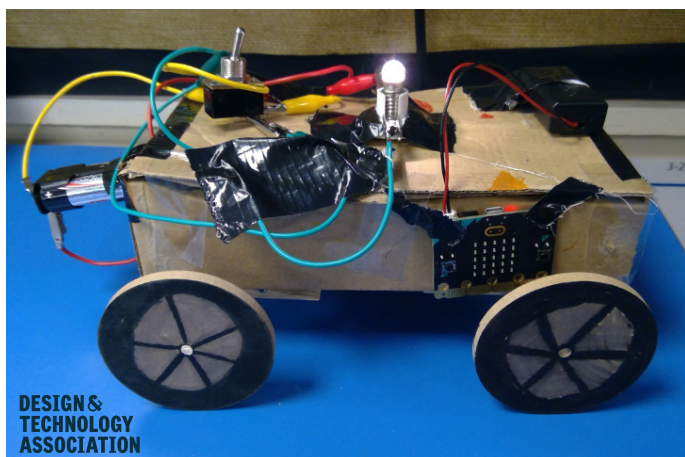
Part 3- Signposting to further support available from the DT Association – including Health and Safety Training, online webinars and further support.

Secondary Design Technology- Wednesday 4th February, 2-5pm

Part 1- How to transform the KS3 Design Technology Curriculum, with authentic industry links, to prepare more effectively for KS4

Part 2- How to raise attainment in your current year 11

Part 3- Signposting to further support available from the DT Association – including Health and Safety Training, online webinars and further support.



Professional Development Programme for Teaching Assistants

Make an expression of interest [here](#).

Louise Thompson, Headteacher of Parochial CE Primary School has been trained to facilitate this Ambition Institute programme and has kindly offered to run this for all Aspire Hub schools. There will be no cost to participants.

This programme would be ideal for level 3 TAs or HLTAs, or TA's who aspire to those roles.

Initially there will be 2 places per school – equally applicable to primary, secondary or special. More available on request.

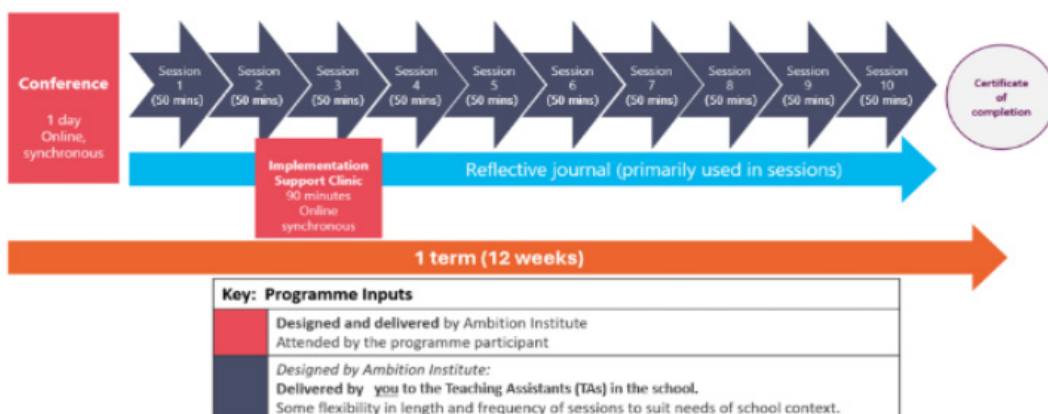
It would consist of a programme of 10 x 50-minute remote sessions taking place at 2pm/3pm in the afternoon. Note – this is a coherent programme that requires participation throughout. Each session will have pre-session and post-session tasks.

Provisionally we are looking to start this in January.

Programme aims and structure

To enable you to provide effective professional development to the TAs in your school.

What it aims to do...	What it does <u>not</u> aim to do....
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Introduce TAs to a greater range of evidence-based strategies to support <i>all</i> pupils' learning > If TAs already use these strategies, then help them make better use of them to have greater impact > Improve support for pupils' learning > Improve support for teachers > Help TAs feel more valued and improve recruitment and retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The aim is <u>not</u> to replace teachers with TAs > The aim is <u>not</u> to promote the idea that only TAs should support pupils with SEND



List of the 10 sessions

1. Working memory
2. Pupil attention in the classroom
3. Giving instructions
4. Effective questioning
5. How to check for understanding
6. Giving effective feedback
7. Pupil motivation
8. Giving meaningful praise
9. Building & maintaining positive relationships
10. Pupil independence

Middle Leadership Quality Assurance Review (MLQAR)

Would you like one of your subject leaders to participate in a collaborative peer review of that subject in a group of Aspire Hub Schools?

Alternatively, would you like to nominate a senior leader to be trained to facilitate and participating one of these events?

This is a unique development opportunity for middle leaders to develop peer review and evaluation skills, while sharing good practice and establishing a local network of subject leaders.

It also offers two Aspire Hub senior leaders the opportunity to be trained as facilitators for the programme. Ideal candidates would be Assistant Heads or Deputy Heads with responsibility for curriculum or teaching or with oversight of English or Maths or Science.

This programme is described in depth here - <https://challengepartners.org/middle-leader-quality-assurance-review> and here - [Copy of MLQAR Information Webinar 3rd June.](#)

We propose to run two MLQAR events this year – one in Primary and one in Secondary

For this, we need to train one secondary senior leader and one primary senior leader. The training session is on Monday 8th December.

The Aspire Hub will fund the cost of the training for the 2 senior leaders (£500 per person).

This person would then co-ordinate an MLQAR focussing on either Maths, English or Science in each the primary or secondary phase.

Each MLQAR event would ideally consist of 3 or 4 schools.

Each school will host a one-day review in their school.

In total there will be 3 or 4 reviews, with each school participating in each review. The MLQAR process will take place over 2 terms, between January and July.

If you would like to nominate a senior leader to become a trained facilitator, please contact Simon Goodwin – goodwins@fa1.uk

If you are interested in participating in a MLQAR please complete [this expression of interest.](#)

Updates from across the sector

EEF updates guidance on how to recruit and retain teachers

The [Education Endowment Foundation](#) has updated its latest research and guidance for supporting teacher retention and recruitment. While there is a clear evidence gap, several promising approaches emerge. The EEF found four areas with high potential to improve teacher recruitment and retention: making teacher workload more manageable; improving access to flexible working; strengthening school leadership and supporting positive school climates and effective use of financial incentives and other benefits.

Source: [Recruiting, retaining, and supporting teachers](#)

Closing the gap with effective use of the Pupil Premium

The EEF recently updated their [guide to the Pupil Premium](#), offering a clear, evidence-based guide to help schools use Pupil Premium funding effectively to close the attainment gap. Their five-step approach focuses on identifying needs, using evidence, planning strategically, monitoring impact, and sustaining success. The London South Research School have created a useful summary, helping school leaders to structure for an assess, plan, do, review cycle akin to SEND best practice.

Source: [London South Research School](#)

2.2m

The number of pupils attracting funding in the 2025-26 financial year.

£1,515

Available in funding to schools per eligible primary-aged pupil.

£1,075

Available in funding to schools per eligible secondary-aged pupil.

19.2 months

Gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers by the end of secondary school.

Becky Francis on some the key features of the Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report

Professor Becky Francis has published her [final curriculum and assessment review report](#). She spoke to Schools Week about some of its key recommendations and the thinking behind them, including what she thinks are the most important recommendations and why there hasn't been any recommendations to attainment 8. For a quick overview, you can read the [14 key points summarised by TES](#).

Source: [Becky Francis on the big ideas in her curriculum review](#)



Becky Francis

Professor Becky Francis CBE (FBA, FAcSS, PhD) is Chief Executive Officer of the Education Endowment Foundation, and retains a fractional association at UCL. She was previously Director of the UCL Institute of Education (IOE). Her prior roles include Professor of Education and Social Justice at King's College London, Director of Education at the RSA and Standing Advisor to the Parliamentary Education Select Committee.

Ofsted Inspection Toolkit Published

Guidance for inspectors and schools on inspecting maintained schools and academies in England under the renewed education inspection framework, available for use from **10th November 2025**. The [new toolkit](#) includes the following grades and a 'gathering evidence' framework:

Urgent Improvement	Needs Attention	Expected Standard	Strong Standard	Exceptional
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GCSE gender gap narrows

Girls still outperform boys overall at GCSE, but their overall pass rate has dropped while boys' results edged up; raising concerns about a shift in performance trends.

Source: [Are girls being left behind in school? \(BBC\)](#)

More Parents Access Childcare Funding

Thousands of working parents [can now access 30 hours of government-funded childcare](#) per week for children in the largest-ever expansion of publicly funded childcare since support began in England, as thousands of working parents receive more help with their nursery costs.

From September, working parents can get:

- 30 hours of funded childcare for children aged between nine months and four years old
- To qualify for the hours, [the majority of parents must earn more than £9,518, external](#), but less than £100,000 per year.
- Those on certain benefits can get 15 hours of free childcare for two-year-olds
- Parents who do not work might still be eligible for 30 hours of free childcare if their partner works, or they receive some benefits - for example if they are on maternity or paternity leave.

Free Chickenpox Vaccine for Young Children

The NHS will provide two doses of [the chickenpox vaccine at 12 and 18 months](#), alongside the MMR jab, with a catch-up campaign for older children.

Source: [NHS Chickenpox Vaccine](#)

Free Anti-Bullying Week Packs

These packs are worth sharing with all your schools as we head towards the annual anti-bullying week from **Monday 10th November**:

Source: [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#)

Phonics scores for disadvantaged pupils show slight decline

Disadvantaged pupils performed less well in the phonics screening check than other pupils, and the gap has increased this year by 1 percentage point. 67% of disadvantaged pupils met the expected standard in the phonics screening check in year 1, down from 68% in 2024.



London is the highest performing region, where 82% of pupils met the expected standard in the phonics screening check in year 1; the lowest performing regions were the North East and North West with 78%. The gap between the highest and lowest attaining region is 4 percentage points.

'Best practice' guidance pledge for SEN school units

[National Children's Bureau](#) will deliver review on how mainstream schools can set up SEN units as part of government's inclusion push. The government will publish "best practice" guidance to help mainstream schools set up and run SEN and pupil support units as part of their inclusion push.

Source: [Schools Week](#)

Unleashing the Power Of Multilingualism in School

[The Bell Foundation's](#) EAL trainer Glynis Lloyd highlights how the growing number of multilingual pupils offers schools a powerful, yet underused, resource, and urges schools to embrace their languages to boost learning and inclusion.

Source: [Power Of Multilingualism in School](#)

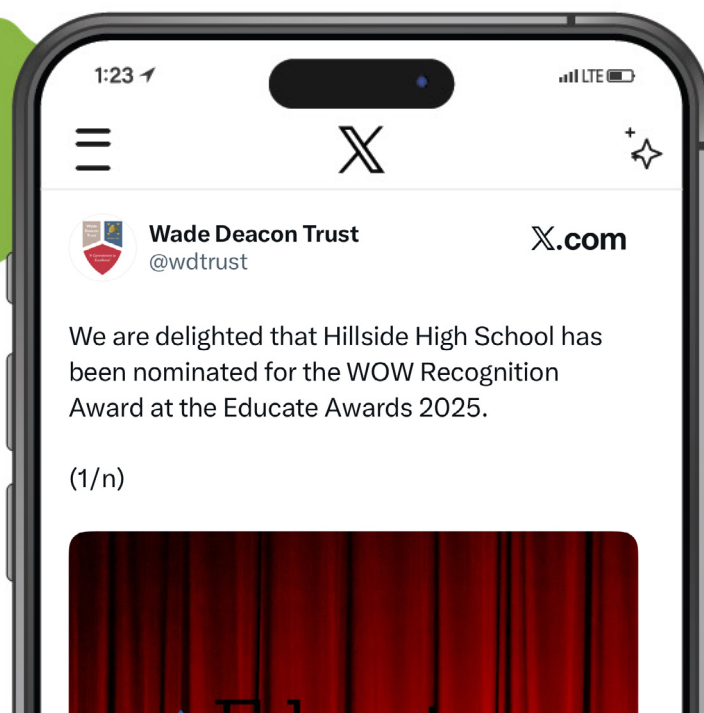
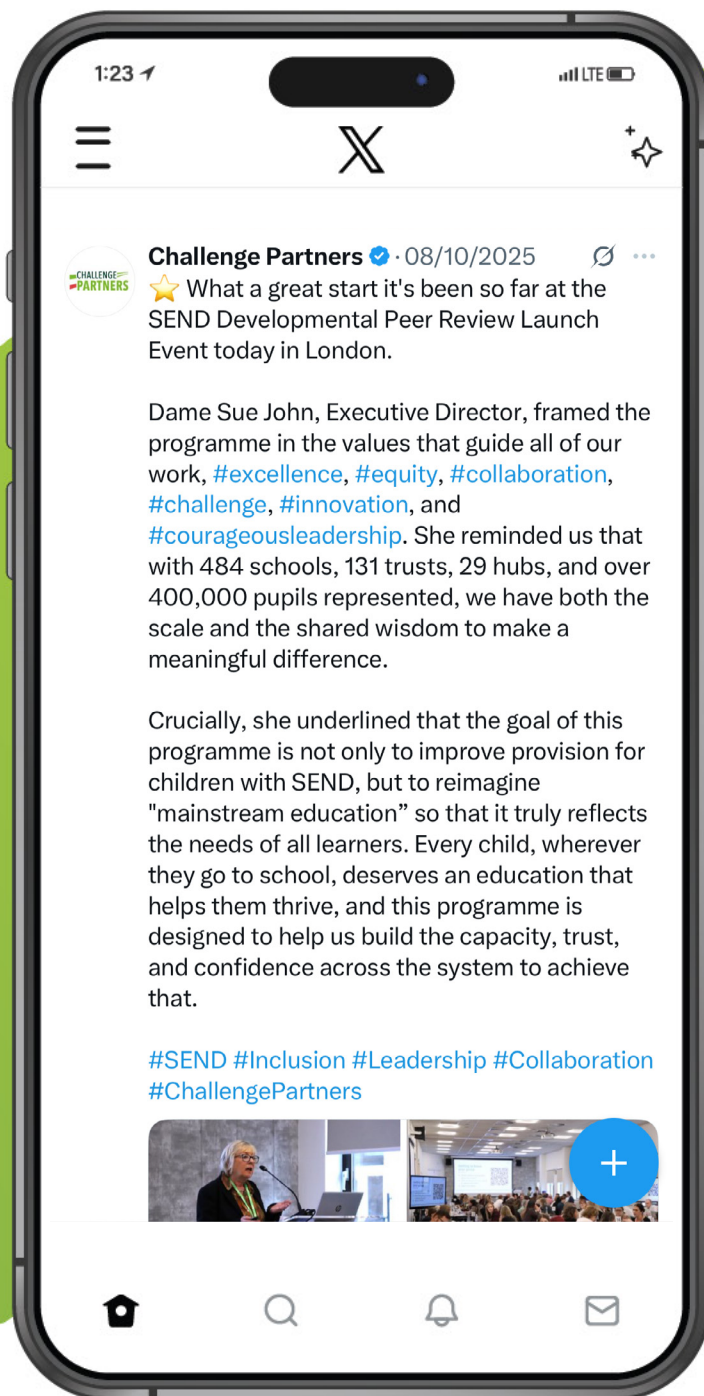
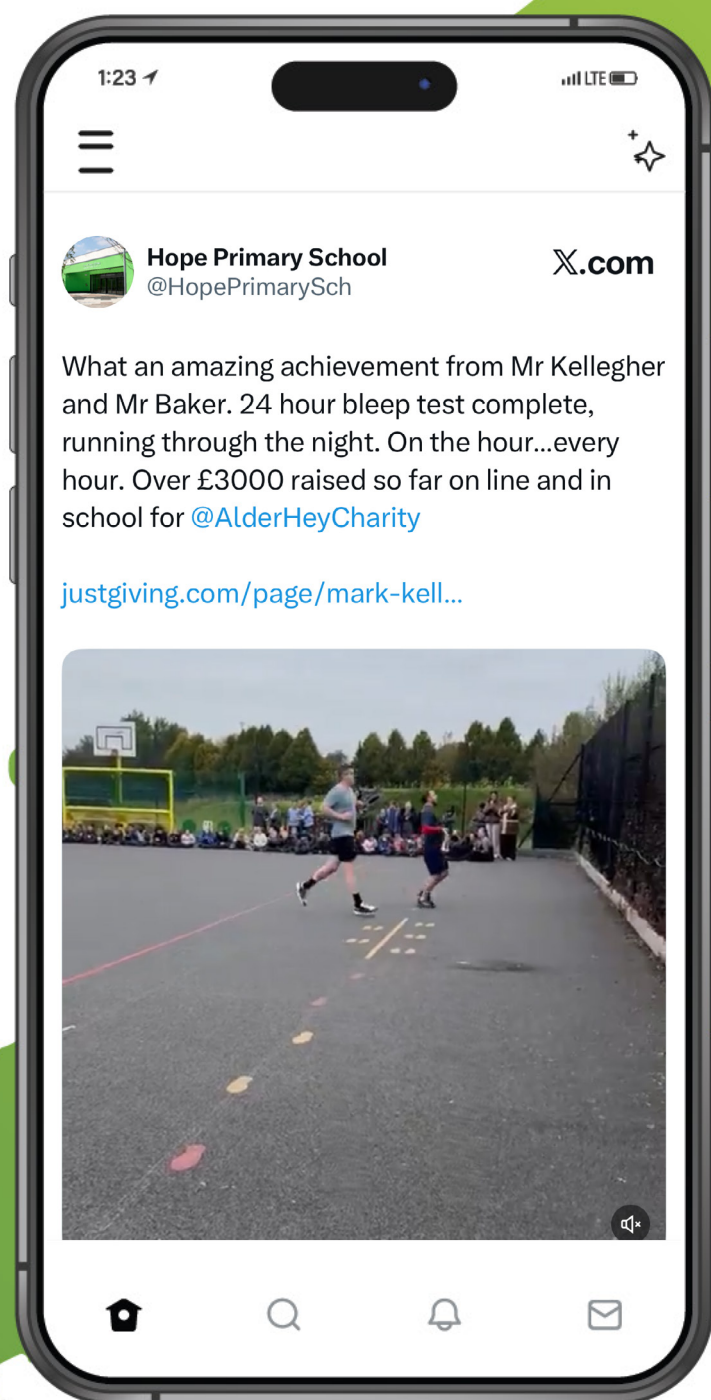
Back to School But Blocked from Learning Research

The Child Poverty Action Group have published research which indicates that secondary school children from low-income families are starting the new school year bounced out of some subjects and learning by costs, including geography field trips, food technology, music and wider PE.

Source: [Child Poverty Action Group](#)



Latest updates from across the Hub





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