



Summer 2025

Newsletter

Welcome to the Aspire Hub Newsletter!

Message from Senior Partners

Welcome to the Summer Term Aspire Hub Challenge Partners Newsletter.

As we reach the end of another successful year across the Aspire Hub, we wanted to take a moment to celebrate the achievements, collaboration, and vibrant culture that you—our partner schools—have created together. There is a great sense of purpose and responsibility that spans the Aspire Hub, as the largest and fastest growing Hub nationally, we are committed to ensuring our Hub adds value and impacts on each school, its people and most importantly the young people it serves.

This year has been defined by a shared commitment to connection and continuous improvement. From the development of our Knowledge Exchange Directory to our well-attended conference exploring Inclusion and AI in Education, your engagement has exemplified what's possible when schools come together to share expertise and challenge each other to grow. Alongside this, our school improvement programmes – Quality Assurance Review (QAR) and the SEND Developmental Review have pushed leaders beyond their comfort zones in order to strive and keep getting better.

A special congratulations goes to our colleagues from All Saints MAT, and Vantage MAT, who have all taken part in the Challenge Partners Trust Peer Review. Your reflections and learning from this process have been inspirational, and it's clear that the review has offered valuable insights and strengthened practice across your communities.

Looking ahead to the next academic year, we are excited to continue building on this momentum and working in partnership with you all. In the Autumn Term, we will be launching our Aspire Hub, Education Advisory Group – a new layer of governance to guide and inform the direction of the Hub, to ensure we serve each of you as well as we possibly can. Please look out for further details around this group.

Thank you for your dedication, your openness to collaboration, and your commitment to making a lasting impact for children and young people.

With best wishes for a restful summer break,

Karen Bramwell OBE, Elliot Costas-Walker, Simon Corner & Amanda Ryan

The Aspire Hub Senior Partners

A Summer Term message from Dame Sue John

Executive Director, Challenge Partners

Across the North West and across the Challenge Partners National Network, Aspire schools and trusts have exemplified what it means to lead excellence through collaboration — driving improvement, innovating with purpose, and putting children first.

I've seen first-hand how leaders in this hub support one another with ambition and humility, all in pursuit of better life chances for pupils, particularly those facing disadvantage. The contribution made to the national network by leaders from Aspire is prominent and invaluable. Elliot Costas-Walker sits on our Education Advisory Group, Emma Ford contributes to our Hub Advisory Board, Simon Corner is part of our Task and Finish group as well as representing Challenge Partners as a commissioner on the Impact Ed Engagement Group. Aspire Hub puts the North West firmly on the map.

Aspire is indeed one of our largest and most active hubs, but it's not just the scale that stands out — it's the quality. In 24/25 you achieved:

- 41 Quality Assurance Reviews and 4 QA Consultancies- average satisfaction score 4.9/5
- 8 Extending Leading Practice visits- average satisfaction score also 4.9/5
- 10 SEND Peer Review visits have taken place in 2024/25- average satisfaction score 4.8/5
- 2 Trust Peer Reviews with excellent informal feedback given and formal evaluations on the way

It's this spirit of excellence and collaboration that sits at the heart of Challenge Partners, and I couldn't be prouder of what Aspire has achieved this year.

Thank you to every headteacher, trust leader, reviewer, and colleague who has played a part in Aspire's success. You are living proof of the power of partnership.

With sincere thanks,

Dame Sue John

Executive Director, Challenge Partners



Aspire Autumn Conference

Fulfilment for All

Wednesday 24th September, 8:30am-3:30pm

Benchill Primary School, Benchill Road, Whythenshawe, Manchester M22

Keynote Speakers



David Bartram

David Bartram has led special educational needs and disability provision (SEND) in London schools for over 15 years. He was a member of the DfE's SEND Review steering group and an expert advisor to the Timpson Review on school exclusions. David has worked directly with over seven hundred school leadership teams across the UK to improve their SEND provision.



Lynsey Thorniley

Lynsey Thorniley is the director of Sycamore SEND Support Services, dedicated to providing school and pupil support for children with SEND. The service works across 15 local authorities, supporting at a pupil, school and MAT level to offer strategic, systemic and specialist support depending upon the needs of setting or family who are seeking support. She drives her mission 'to make a meaningful difference' and has real insight into the challenges faced in the classroom.

Agenda

Morning	Afternoon
SEND Horizon Scanning	Reflection & Review 2024-2025
Keynote Speaker: David Bartram (a national perspective)	Planning for 2025-2026
Keynote Speaker: Lynsey Thorniley (a solution focused school perspective)	Reflections & Close

[Click me to sign up!](#)

Knowledge Exchange

The Knowledge Hub section of our website continues to expand - <https://www.theaspirehub.com/knowledge-exchange>

You can find links to all our schools' areas of excellence and our directories of best practice. These directories are available to Hub schools only. The passcode for access is **CCC2019!**

Areas of Excellence

Areas of Excellence are accredited by peer and lead reviewers during the Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Reviews and programme visits. Once accredited, schools and trusts are expected and enabled to share their expertise with their peers. The process involves identifying why the theme is a school strength, but more importantly the actions taken by the school and the impact these actions have had on outcomes.

Please see our Hub Areas of Excellence below:

- **Archbishop Blanch CofE High School** - [CEIAG/Destinations](#)
- **Beacon Primary School** - [Early Reading Including Phonics](#)
- **Gorsefield Primary School** - [Connection Rich Curriculum](#)
- **Higher Lane Primary School** - [Nurture Provision](#)
- **Hillside High School** - [Whole School Reading Approaches](#)
- **Knowsley Lane Primary School** - [EYFS Learning Journey](#)
- **Parochial CofE Primary School** - [Digital Excellence in KS2](#)
- **Prescot Primary School** - [Technology Supporting Learning](#)
- **Prescot Primary School** - [Thriving Through Alternative Learning](#)
- **Ridgeway High School** - [Reading Progress and Enrichment](#)
- **St Chad's CofE Primary School** - [Prioritising Primary SEND](#)
- **St Paul's CofE Primary School** - [Pupil-Centred Education](#)
- **St Paul's CofE Primary School** - [The Early Reading Journey](#)
- **St Peter's SD Primary School** - [Enhancing Christian Distinction](#)
- **Sunnybank Primary School** - [Use of Technology](#)
- **Wade Deacon High School** - [Classroom Culture](#)

For our new members- The Aspire Hub Central Team

Our Senior Partners



Karen Bramwell OBE

BramwellK@fa1.uk



Amanda Ryan

A.Ryan@hillsidehigh.co.uk



Simon Corner

S.Corner@wadedeacon.co.uk



Elliot Costas-Walker

Costas-WalkerE@fa1.uk

Our Hub Managers



Emma Ford (Primary)

FordE@fa1.uk



Simon Goodwin (Secondary)

GoodwinS@fa1.uk

Resources from our Summer Conference

Thanks to everyone who attended our conference at Benchill in May and special thanks to Steven Rooney and all the Benchill staff for their hospitality. The feedback from the day as overwhelmingly positive.

Amjad Ali

The content from Amjad Ali's presentation and workshop can be found here - [Overcoming Barriers to Learning... – NewToThePost](#) and here [Try This Toolkit – Try This Teaching](#).



Mark Anderson

Mark Anderson's presentation can be found here - Leading AI with Clarity - [What Headteachers Need To Know.pdf - Google Drive](#)

Mark's website is - [ICT Evangelist: The Home of Mark Anderson](#)

The AI prizes were won by Belvedere Academy (Olex.AI), Archbishop Blanch (Teachmate.AI) and Red Lane Primary (SLT.AI).

All three providers offered a discount to members of the Aspire Hub. Just quote "Aspire Hub" when getting in touch.

The slides from Mark Enser's CPD can be found here- [Secondary](#) and [Primary](#).

Building on our conference presentation from Mark Anderson, and the recent DFE report on Artificial Intelligence, David Didau explores the dangers of misuse of AI : https://daviddidau.substack.com/p/chatgpt-can-plan-lessons-but-it-cant?r=18455&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&triedRedirect=true



Thanks to schools who have hosted Sharing Leading Practice days

Thanks to Hillside High, Wade Deacon, Knowsley Lane, High Lane and Prescott Primary.

We hope to host many more such days next year.

Alternative Provision report from “The Difference”

A report by the charity The Difference highlights four key elements of successful internal alternative provision.

Summarised here- <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/internal-ap-risks-becoming-costly-holding-pens-report-warns/>

The full report here - <https://the-difference.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/What-Works-Four-Tenets-of-Effective-Internal-Alternative-Provision.pdf>

TEP report - Mind the Engagement Gap

Impact Ed have published the largest national student on pupil engagement – [click here](#)

You can find a good summary here

Response from Becks Boomer-Clark in the TES - <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/curriculum-fuels-pupil-engagement-crisis-boomer-clark-lift-schools>

Response from David Didau – https://daviddidau.substack.com/p/is-the-curriculum-to-blame-for-plummeting?r=18455&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&triedRedirect=true

Directory of subject associations for CPD

Are your staff members of subject associations, that connect them to the body of professional pedagogical knowledge for their subject. The CfSA have a subject association handbook which gives details and contact information for all subject associations. [Click here](#)

Free School Meal Availability Expanded

The government has expanded free school meals to all children on Universal Credit, but the change will not be extended to Pupil Premium funding. The free school meals expansion will directly benefit 500,000 children when it comes into force in September 2026 – with an estimated 1.7 million children benefiting in the long term.

Further Reading: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-half-a-million-more-children-to-get-free-school-meals>

Annual Literacy Survey Findings 2024

The National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey has shown some interesting findings about children's reading and writing habits:

- Just 1 in 3 (32.7%) children aged 8 to 18 said that they enjoyed reading in their free time in 2025 (a 36% decrease in reading enjoyment levels since NLT started asking about this in 2005)
- Fewer than 1 in 5 (20.5%) 8 to 18 year olds told NLT that they read something daily in their free time in 2025 (again, the lowest levels NLT recorded, with daily reading levels decreasing by nearly 20 percentage points since 2005)
- Only 1 in 4 (26.6%) children aged 8 to 18 said they enjoy writing in their spare time, with 1 in 3 children saying they don't like it at all
- 1 in 10 children of the same age said they write something in their free time every day.

Further Reading: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/jun/11/children-reading-enjoyment-falls-national-literacy-trust>

Metacognition Strategies Boost Disadvantaged Pupils Progress

An Education Endowment Foundation update signposts the value of metacognition in their [Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#). Metacognition emerges as one of the top evidence-based strategies to boost disadvantaged pupils' progress. The average impact of metacognition and self regulation approaches is high (+8 months additional progress) with the most impact when teachers model metacognitive strategies in their teaching practice.

Research: Opportunity Index Interactive Map

The [Opportunity Index Interactive Map](#) allows you to explore the levels of access to opportunity for disadvantaged young people in different constituencies across England. The map is based on their Opportunity Index, which ranks constituencies according to a range of measures, including school attainment, access to higher education, employment status and earnings of young people eligible for free school meals (FSM) at secondary school. Comparing the highest ranked area of East Ham (London) to the lowest ranked area of Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West (North East) shows a 30 percentage point gap in achievement of GCSE grade 5 in English and mathematics between FSM pupils in both areas.

Ofsted updates:

[Updated its IDSR guide in May](#)

[“Strong foundations in the first years of school”](#)

NPQ Registrations are open!

If you're interested in starting an NPQ course, please register your interest here: <https://shorturl.at/3Pv7H>

For more information please contact rushs@fa1.uk



Latest updates from across the Hub





Latest updates from across the Hub

