



This month, in our ongoing feature highlighting the work of members of the UK education suppliers' trade body BESA, we hear from EXIMUS EDUCATION and RAZZAMATAZ THEATRE SCHOOLS.

The power of high-impact tutoring: Eximus Education with Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)

In the corridors of 24,000+ UK schools, over 10 million students embark on their educational journeys. As primary school draws to a close, nearly one-third of these students encounter disadvantages, with only 13% having access to crucial private tutoring (Sutton Trust, 2023).

The challenge

Amidst the educational landscape, Academies Enterprise Trust sought after-school support for one of its predominantly disadvantaged schools, grappling with attendance issues, concentration lapses, and academic pressure. These challenges had a substantial impact on both students, who struggled with distractions, and the school's staff, who faced increased administrative burdens in the aftermath of the 2023 post-pandemic period (University of Oxford).

How we made a difference

Eximus Education, an award-winning tutoring social enterprise, collaborates with schools to design personalised after-school tutoring programmes aimed at bridging the attainment gap. For Academies Enterprise Trust, we designed high-impact, high-dosage online lessons for Sixth Form students, addressing specific challenges while easing administrative pressures. The programme included:

- Bespoke scheduling of online lessons for subjects like English, Maths, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Psychology and Media Studies
- Carefully selected experienced teachers
- Integration of AI-powered lesson planning
- Lessons concentrated towards past paper practice and cementing the concepts learned in school
- Feedback and support

The impact

By the end of the term, Academies Enterprise Trust witnessed remarkable improvements in student achievement, particularly in core subjects, prompting the continuation of the programme. Dr. Lucas, Vice-Principal, attributed these gains to Eximus Education's premium tutoring lessons, commenting, "Excellent experience with Eximus. The students thoroughly enjoyed the sessions."

At Eximus Education, our commitment to accessible online tutoring is fuelled by 5-star reviews from 97% of our clients. Having delivered over 6,000 lesson hours, we are committed to leveling the playing field by offering subsidised rates up to 60% more affordable than the market with unmatched service quality.



Why teachers are the stars within Razzamataz Theatre Schools

In the exciting world of performing arts education, Razzamataz has carved a niche for itself by offering unparalleled opportunities for children to explore their creativity and curiosity. A key ingredient to the success of more than 60 Razzamataz schools throughout the UK, is the strong leadership.



While Principals come from various backgrounds, there is a strong precedent of teachers transitioning into the role of Razzamataz Principals. There are numerous reasons why teachers make exceptional Principals, and in turn, the franchise transforms their life, offering them financial freedom and flexibility which can be missing from traditional teaching roles.



Lauren Bill has been part of Razzamataz as a franchisee for the last 15 years, opening her first school in 2011 alongside teaching in a local college.

"It became apparent to me fairly quickly that I wanted to devote more time to running my business so I gradually transitioned to building up the school so I was financial stable and could leave my job in 2015," explains Lauren. "Since then, I've never looked back. I had my daughter Amelia in 2018 and a few years later I was planning on launching a second school. But when covid hit, I paused these plans to ensure my focus was on the students and staff at Razzamataz Weymouth."

Lauren has recently launched Razzamataz Dorchester and in less than a term, the school has already broken even, showing there is a huge demand for the services.

"Being a Razzamataz student gives young people so many transferable skills, but I think the most important thing is that it gives them the chance to find something that they are passionate about and allows them to commit to it and learn more. It doesn't matter if they don't go into performing arts as a career, it is the chance to find something they love and develop it, this will be so valuable throughout their lives."

Like many teachers, Lauren possess many skills for being an exceptional theatre school Principal. However, the lack of business experience means that a franchise is the ideal opportunity as she explains: "When I first became a franchisee, being part of the Razzamataz network was everything because they took me step by step through the whole process of setting up. I had no business experience so I was so grateful that they gave me a chance and trusted that I could do it with their support."

Teachers are adept at understanding the unique needs of each student. This makes them well-equipped to create an inclusive and supportive atmosphere. With excellent communication skills, teachers can engage with students, parents and staff, which is vital to build a vibrant community with everyone fully engaged with the growth and opportunities for everyone within the school. Being a business owner and a theatre school Principal requires adaptability and being able to handle diverse responsibilities. Teachers naturally do this day in and day out within their classrooms, and the support from Razzamataz allows them to understand how to use these skills to build a business that inspires young people in their community while building a business that aligns with their lifestyle choices.

"After 15 years of being a Principal, I can honestly say I still really love it," adds Lauren. "It all brings me so much joy and allows me to be creative, work with young people and work flexibly so I can be there for my daughter. I can do the school runs and be a successful business owner at the same time."

► <https://www.razzamataz.co.uk/franchise-opps/book-discovery-den/>

Changes to the flexible working regulations

In her column this month for Education Today, NAOMI HOWELLS, Managing Director at recruitment specialists Class People, looks at the changes to flexible working regulations and what it means for you.



Updates to the Flexible Working (Amendment) Regulations 2023 will come into force from 6 April 2024. They make changes to the rights that employees have to request flexible working, as well as the responsibilities of employers to meet those requests. The most significant changes are:

- the right for employees to make a flexible working request from day one, instead of having to wait 26 weeks
- the right for employees to make two formal requests in a twelve-month period, compared to the previous one request
- the removal of the requirement for employees to explain the effect their request might have, and how the impact can be minimised
- a reduction from three months to two months for employers to consider and respond to any requests
- the requirement for employers to consult with the employee, before approving or rejecting any request.

When considering flexible working in education many of the traditional options such as compressed hours or remote working are not immediately compatible with the realities of our working environment. It is this that school leaders must seek to address.

Education employment is traditionally viewed as simultaneously flexible and inflexible. Teachers benefit from long stints of mandated leave, are already working term-time only, with free periods in timetabled lessons, all of which are viewed favourably as flexible working solutions. In reality, these patterns simply serve to offset intensive working hours during term times, naturally compressing annual hours into just 39 weeks. Add to this the inflexibility of term time annual leave, the intensity of the role, the overtime hours during evenings and weekends, and the long lead time required to change roles or working patterns, and it is no surprise that teachers lament a lack of flexible working.

So, what is the compromise?

When it comes to "traditional" solutions such as home working or part-time hours, schools may struggle to deliver effective short-term change. It doesn't mean, however, that schools cannot meet the regulatory updates, nor garner a reputation for being a progressive, people-first employer. What it requires is innovation.

For other sectors, it can be relatively straightforward to approach flexible working on a case-by-case basis, working with each individual staff member to meet their needs. For teaching, the reality is much different, given our educational responsibilities to pupils. It is therefore recommended that schools publish a whole-school approach to flexible working, creating clarity around the opportunities open to employees.

Based on the government guidance, this approach can include:

- part-time hours or job share arrangements
- staggered hours, compressed hours or annualised hours
- personal or family days, lieu time, or home or remote working.

Practically, there are changes that schools can make to support flexible working. Adjusting timetabling to align free periods together can support home-working or reduced hours, without requiring supplementary staff. Meanwhile, having specific dates for flexible working requests to be submitted, and aligning these with term time planning can help improve approval rates. Finally, considering employing non-assigned teachers or utilising a planned budget of supply staff, can enable in-term flexibility without intensive timelines.



Making time for professional development

In her regular column this month, BlueSky Education's DENISE INWOOD argues that professional development and appraisal needn't be time hungry.



Time, like most of the resources in our modern education system, can be thin on the ground.

That matters when it comes to professional development. We all know that PD makes a huge difference to the professional growth of education professionals and the quality of teaching, but the perception is that it needs time – and resources – and can feel like one of a number of competing demands on already heavy workloads.

How, then, can we make professional development as time efficient as possible?

The key point to make is that PD doesn't have to consist of big blocks of professional programmes leading to qualifications at the end. PD could be reading a blog or an article or observing a lesson. It needs to become part of the texture of the working week.

Accounting for that development – linking it to PD objectives and school improvement plans and also ensuring that it feeds into the appraisal process – is where the time savings can really be made.

Moving away from a paper-based approach and towards an online platform in the management of professional development is a big fundamental change that delivered a lot of efficiencies at Watford Grammar School for Girls (WGGSS). The school, a well-renowned, partially selective academy with 1,400 students, introduced BlueSky in early 2022, with the aim of streamlining their appraisal processes. The move online also had a transformative effect on the way staff record their professional development.

"When deadlines for appraisal paperwork were approaching, people would say 'I'm not in today, so I can't sign it' and there were lots of pieces of paper floating around," says Deputy Headteacher Chris Wilshaw. "We realised it would be much better if it was all done online, so there were fewer delays and no signatures required."

The school has a fairly unique approach to people management, with around 35% of staff on part-time contracts, and a strong belief in autonomy. Chris explains: "We've worked hard to recruit and retain the best teachers, and that's partly why we have so many part-time staff. We are able to offer more flexibility and more autonomy than other schools where recruiting is difficult."

WGGSS has been rated outstanding by Ofsted for a significant period of time, which attests that teaching is already of a high standard. However, the school's existing process was limiting how staff approached their professional development. The old paper-based process required staff to write huge documents to evidence their achievements – a long process that had a questionable impact on teaching and learning. Part of the reason for implementing the system has been about changing the practice, so it's more focused on 'improve, not prove'."

Chris emphasises that when they rewrote their appraisal policy, they didn't want to bring in a "standard" performance management model that made staff feel that they were being monitored. "Staff don't want high levels of scrutiny; we aim to treat them as professionals because we know they are performing well – getting high GCSE and A-level results. We needed to design a system for our appraisal process that allowed for more autonomy than you might have in other schools."

Although the school is still training staff to use the system for appraisal, Chris has already seen improvements in the way professional development activity is recorded. "People have only just started drafting their objectives, but they are already logging CPD that they've done. That's great – the pandemic has really changed how they approach this, with more staff accessing CPD online, webinars etc. Previously we wouldn't have known about this, because there wasn't really anywhere for them to log or record it."

Using an online approach has also allowed school leaders to share key documents, such as the school development plan, in a central location where all staff have access. As staff have to base their individual targets, or year group or department targets, on the school development plan, it is now much easier for them to make that link with the plan now online. And because the school development plan is on a central system – with the logging CPD online done in a few clicks – their professional development reviews can be completed in far less time.