

Teaching and Learning Monthly Newsletter

SHARPLES
SCHOOL



April 2026



The Exams are Upon Us!

Welcome back! I hope you all had a restful Easter break and managed to find some time away from the revision guides and mark schemes before the chaos of exam season unravels!

As we move into April, the "countdown" in our Year 11 classrooms has shifted from weeks to days. It is natural for the atmosphere to feel more charged, I have definitely noticed Y11 students stepping up and evidence of this can be seen in the library every night when pupils are staying behind and talking about work, discussing their revision and trying to do the best they can.

You'll notice a heavy focus in this month's newsletter on Attendance and Belonging.

With the government's new 95% targets and our own "1% Challenge" in full swing, we are reminded that the best adaptive teaching in the world only works if the students are in their seats. If we see attendance as a whole school responsibility, we can change students' lives tremendously.

The newsletter also features some brilliant shoutouts this month, with TAs going above and beyond and Owain sharing best practise for running a classroom and also a department, it's a great month to showcase the brilliance of our staff.

Enjoy the newsletter!

In this newsletter you can expect:

Article on Attendance

Sharples Shoutouts and Celebrations!

Sharples Staff Section

CPD Book Recommendations

X / Twitter Shoutouts



Attendance: More Than Just a Number

Following the recent government announcement regarding the national 95% attendance target, it is easy to view attendance as a purely administrative battle. However, at Sharples, we know that attendance is the "front line" of inclusion. If a student isn't in the room, we can't scaffold their learning, we can't check their understanding, and we can't build the relationships that make them feel successful.



Inclusion is often discussed in terms of how we teach, but it is equally defined by who is in the room to hear us. If a student does not feel a deep sense of **belonging**, no amount of adaptive scaffolding can reach them. Attendance is the physical manifestation of that belonging; it is the "pulse" of our inclusive culture. When a student feels seen, valued, and missed when they are absent, the "barrier" to coming through the gates begins to lower. Therefore, it's important to note that inclusion isn't just adaptation in the classroom, we adapt our culture to ensure they feel safe and motivated to be at school firstly.

From the "warm welcome" at the door to the way we manage the "return anxiety" of our most vulnerable learners, every interaction is an act of inclusion and every single staff member is responsible for making sure all students feel valued, heard and respected.

Creating a Sense of Belonging

Persistent absentees are constantly being mentioned recently, but how do students end up in this category? Unfortunately, Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is on the rise nationally. For many students, the barrier isn't a lack of desire to learn, but a lack of belonging. EBSA creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: the student stays home to reduce immediate panic, but the longer they are away, the more they fear the "gap" in their learning and social circles, making the eventual return feel impossible.

So how can we tackle this? It's a joint effort, but at the end of the day, it comes down to routines, consistency and creating a warm and welcoming environment. We should be trying to make our classrooms a place they want to be, even when things are tough at home.



Attendance: More Than Just a Number

One of the new routines that have been introduced this year is the greeting at the door, a positive greeting and specifically acknowledging a student's return without attendance shaming can be a way to reduce the anxiety of coming back after an absence. I know that since I have become a form tutor since January to my Y10 group, attendance has been a huge conversation point with a lot of my students. I took the time to make a display board where students can update their weekly attendance as they go for 100% each week. It has created a really motivated atmosphere and it has definitely improved the attendance of some of the pupils in my form. It's all about showing them we are all doing it together, if they can see that you care, they will want to do it not only for themselves, but for you too!



Cognitive Overload

Imagine you walk into a movie half way through. Shrek has just found his new best friend Donkey and there is a dragon chasing them both - it doesn't really make sense does it? For a student who has missed a few days, walking into a lesson midway through a unit, it may feel like walking into a movie an hour late!

We definitely don't want to drive students further from the classroom by creating a barrier between themselves and the idea of achievement. The "cognitive load" of trying to catch up while also trying to do the new work is a major driver for future absence. That's why we've introduced the use of retrieval for all silent starters - this is another core routine at Sharples and needs to be consistent across all classrooms. By including questions or activities that cover previous learning, hopefully all students will be able to access something on the starter and feel involved. It might also be an opportunity to settle the class down and spend 5 minutes catching the student up and clearing any confusion they may have.

The Drifters

Attendance is a huge push at Sharples at the minute; you would have to be living under a rock not to have noticed that! The attendance tracker coordinated by Claire Wood is fantastic; all pupils fall into particular stages, meaning we can celebrate our 100% "Ever-presents" while also intervening early with those whose attendance is dipping.



Attendance: More Than Just a Number

But are we sometimes guilty of noticing the students who are 100% and the students who are 50% but ignoring the "Drifters"? These are the students sitting at 96%—a figure that might feel "okay" but actually equates to missing nearly four full weeks of school a year. These are the ones who miss one Monday every so often, quietly slipping under the radar while the "Grade Gap" slowly widens. In a busy town like ours, many of our students have "hidden" responsibilities—helping with younger siblings or navigating complex transport issues. As classroom teachers and form tutors, we are the early warning system; we are the ones who can spot the pattern. If you notice a specific trend (e.g., "they always miss my Period 1 on a Tuesday"), a quick, low-stakes chat can often uncover a barrier—be it anxiety, a lack of resources, or a morning responsibility—that we can help solve before the 95% threshold becomes an unreachable mountain for them.

The 1% Club

While we celebrate our 100% students regularly, it is equally important that we recognise resilience through our new 1% Challenge. This initiative is built on the principle of marginal gains; for a student moving from 82% to 83%, that single percent represents a significant shift in habit and a step away from the "Persistent Absence" bracket.



ELT have done a tremendous amount of work in identifying persistently absent students and trying to shift those pupils out of that bracket and our whole school efforts are working, attendance is continually going up and we are going to reach the 95% target very soon!

But for those pupils that are in the persistently absent column, the data is clear: 90% attendance actually means a student has missed 19 days of school—nearly an entire month of subject expertise—but students who improve their attendance by even a small margin in the Spring are more likely to sustain that momentum into their exams. Research shows that targeted verbal feedback for these "improved" students can increase their sense of belonging. It's all about being inclusive! Recognising the challenges and hardships that students face and making sure they feel resilient enough to get into school!

I hope you feel a little more motivated to ensure you're having the form tutor conversations to drive up attendance and check in with pupils and create a more inclusive environment for all our students.

SHARPLES CELEBRATES!



Each month we want to shout out teachers who want to share excellent practice! The first 3 teachers to email n.ayub@sharplesschool.co.uk with an example of brilliant practice will receive a box of celebrations delivered to their classroom!



Angela Goulden

I would love to nominate Angela Goulden for her dedication to creating student-friendly displays that actively support learning within her intervention classes. Angela consistently goes the extra mile to ensure her students feel supported and empowered, creating a positive environment for learning. She also creates quizzes for the end of extra course to recap all learning but also to reward students for their hard work.



Jessica Openshaw

Miss Openshaw is proving to be a wonderful Teaching Assistant who is the epitome of patience and inclusion. She is generous with her time in that she gets to know the students well, builds up a rapport with them, and offers advice in a way that is bespoke to them. She works with a multitude of students but has a knack for zooming in on pupils who need the extra help at the right time. She is particularly effective with working with SEND students who might need some gentle encouragement, some help with scribing, or just rephrasing a question in a way that they understand better.



Sophie Shawcross

Sophie's delivery is characterised by sharp, concise instructions and effective pacing, using strategic countdowns to maintain high lesson momentum. Her expert use of Mini Whiteboards allows for a "live" interrogation of student understanding, where she identifies and corrects misconceptions before they become embedded.

Sharples Staff Section

In this part of the newsletter, we want to discover more about the staff at Sharples and the incredible work they do on a daily basis.

Each month, one member of staff will feature and we will discover more about their background and how they ended up at Sharples.

This month, Owain Jenkins has kindly detailed more about his experience in leading a successful department and supporting younger teachers into fully qualified, experienced members of staff.

1. How long have you been working at Sharples?

I began working here at Sharples in 2013.

2. Why did you want to go into teaching?

I had to decide which direction to move in during my third year at university. Everyone around me was securing places on additional courses or employment so I thought I had better get a move on. I spoke with my family and my Dad suggested teaching. My uncle was a science teacher for many years and after speaking with him in detail I could tell he was passionate about what he did. He always had a story to tell. I came to the conclusion that this profession was never boring and I too could become passionate about doing something positive for society by helping young people become better versions of themselves. The pension plan looked pretty good too.

3. Where did you study and was there a module / topic that you were really passionate about during your time at university?

I studied Political and Religious Thought at Lancaster University and then went on to Trinity and All Saints in Leeds for my PGCE. I enjoyed most of the modules but I'll never forget the Buddhism unit when our tutor explained how she ended up becoming a fully practising nun at a remote monastery in Thailand because she was too polite to say she had only come on a research visit documenting the lives of practicing Mahayana Buddhist nuns. She was there for two and a half years until her sister came over from Japan and rescued her.

4. What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job has to be the bit in the classroom. I call it 'the show'. It is a performance. Kids live in a world of 4k screens, 60fps gaming and instant gratification at the touch of a button and I have to get them enthusiastic about curriculum content. You have to put a bit of passion into your performance. I am not suggesting you walk in with jazz hands every lesson and do a Liza Minnelli number but get up off that chair and throw yourself into it. Pupils respond to your energy and it is a great way of building loyalty.



Sharples Staff Section

In this part of the newsletter, we want to discover more about the staff at Sharples and the incredible work they do on a daily basis.

Each month, one member of staff will feature and we will discover more about their background and how they ended up at Sharples.

This month, Owain Jenkins has kindly detailed more about his experience in leading a successful department and supporting younger teachers into fully qualified, experienced members of staff.



5. What are you most passionate about in terms of teaching and learning?

This is an interesting question and I don't think I could pinpoint one element I am most passionate about. I do, however, adore it when all the elements come together forming a complete learning picture where my work ethic and commitment are matched with enthusiasm and effort from my pupils creating an environment where teaching and learning is intertwined rather than running parallel with each other. This symbiotic relationship ensures pupils walk away knowing more and better skilled and hopefully having enjoyed themselves.

6. What are the non-negotiables in your classroom and in your department?

The main non-negotiable in RE is that all pupils must keep a constant and full focus on their learning. Pupils are expected to subscribe to our ethos which is to work hard and succeed. We are aspirational and provide a space where everyone and anyone can achieve.

Another is our reflection and correction. Pupils must correct all assessment errors. Our knowledge based Pre-Teach, Mid-Unit and End of Unit assessments are peer assessed using a shared and guided markscheme. Once pupils have their paper returned they must correct their errors, in green pen of course. I always tell my pupils that it is ok to make a mistake, what is not ok is if you leave it broken.

They are also given the opportunity to reflect on their answers, so even if correct they can use the markscheme to add any additional information that would add value and strengthen their response.

7. If you could share one element of best practice with the rest of the staff, what would it be?

One thing I like to do which works well and which pupils really enjoy is getting them to peer assess as a class. Pupils get up and move around, share ideas and record their feedback. It gives them an opportunity to revisit the material, develop their social skills and reflect and correct their work.

Some teachers, especially those new to the role, might not feel brave enough getting them out of ordered rows sitting facing forward but you'll be surprised how quickly they adapt to expectations. Once it becomes second nature pupils get on with it smoothly and without incident.

Sharples Staff Section

In this part of the newsletter, we want to discover more about the staff at Sharples and the incredible work they do on a daily basis.

Each month, one member of staff will feature and we will discover more about their background and how they ended up at Sharples.

This month, Owain Jenkins has kindly detailed more about his experience in leading a successful department and supporting younger teachers into fully qualified, experienced members of staff.



8. How can all staff support new staff or trainees in the best way possible?

Helping staff to balance workload and to work smart. One way is top tips. Short and simple, but precise, pieces of advice to help staff streamline their practice and prioritise tasks. It's just the little things you have picked up over the years that have helped you be better and what you do. This way we can help staff get there quicker but without cutting corners and risk losing impact.

9. How do you ensure high expectations are consistent across the department?

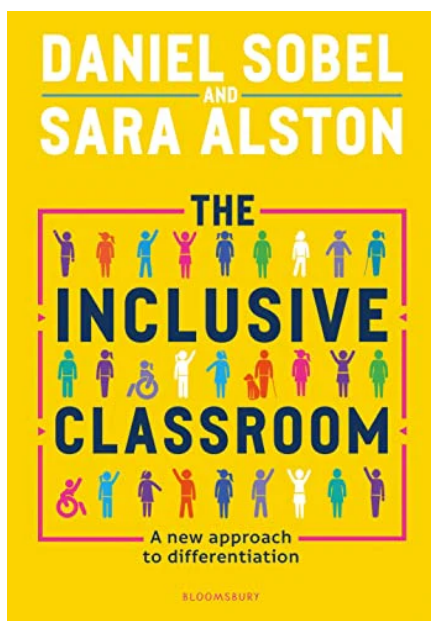
Leading by example is a very effective way to ensure high expectations are consistent across the department. We can't expect someone to do something if we wouldn't do it ourselves.

Expectations have to be high but clear also. This applies suitable pressure in a structured and safe way and embeds a buy-in so staff remain committed to the journey of our department and feel confident in their practice.

Open and transparent communication assists greatly when applying instruction and also supplies a forum for honest feedback and discussion where staff feel safe to communicate freely and feel heard.

Our department is inclusive, a place where all staff are supported and valued. Grade 7 and above boards feature in every RE classroom celebrating pupil success. They are used not just as a reminder to pupils of our focus on achievement and high expectations but also to staff as well. Our RE hub will always work hard and aim to help our learners achieve their true academic potential and beyond.

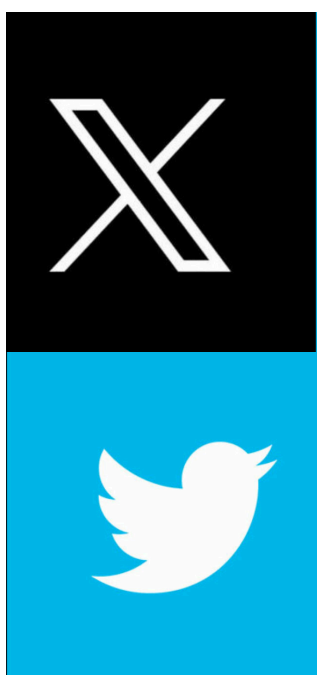
Book and Twitter (X) Recommendations



The Inclusive Classroom

In this innovative guide to supporting the most vulnerable students, experts Daniel Sobel and Sara Alston help primary and secondary teachers understand the barriers to children's learning. Emphasising the importance of meeting needs rather than focusing on diagnosis, they provide proven differentiation methods that maximise learning for the whole class, while reducing stress and saving time for the teacher.

Please email n.ayub@sharplesschool.co.uk if you would like to borrow!



'Scaffolding is not a synonym for support. It should be temporary, responsive, and designed to disappear.'

This link provides another link to a Substack on scaffolding and support in the classroom!

[Click here to view the thread](#)

