

*The*  
**BIG  
EDUCATION**

*Journey so far*

**2018 - 2022**

# CONTENTS

» Welcome from the CEO

---

» The Problem

---

» Our Vision

---

» Our Schools

---

» Rethinking Community: Old Kent Road Family Zone

---

» Rethinking Practice: Supporting more schools to change

---

» Rethinking Assessment

---

» Writing and sharing our work

---

» What's next?

---

» With thanks to our supporters

---

# Welcome

FROM THE CEO



Liz Robinson, Big Education

## Our values shape the way we work:

**BE authentic** as practitioners rooted in our schools, we live the day to day joys and challenges of frontline work in complex, under-served contexts.

**BE brave** as changemakers, we are willing to challenge and stick up for what we really believe in.

**BE curious** as deep thinkers, we are challenging and questioning approaches, pushing ourselves to ask 'bigger' questions about education and learning, and seeking to find better answers.

**BE connected** as system innovators, we work with others to learn, share and collaborate, achieving great things together.

In our first four years at Big Education we have achieved a lot, and I am delighted to share our work and how to play your part in creating change. We have an ambitious and challenging agenda for change, and bring both humility (we are always learning) and tenacity (we have a will to get things done) to our work.

We are ambitious for the change we want to see and the role we can play in that, and are excited for the future. Thank you for your interest in our work.

*L Robinson*



Education is a complex business. There is little consensus around what we should teach, how children should learn, where that learning should happen, or who should do the teaching. We debate how we should assess what children have learnt, and how best to support their personal growth.

## But there is one idea that enjoys near universal support; education is critical.

**Critical** in solving many of the wicked problems facing our communities and world.

**Critical** in rebuilding communities.

**Critical** in driving social mobility and aspiration.

**Critical** in shaping lives.

At Big Education, we seek to play our role in this complex system with practical action, deep thought and strong culture.



# THE PROBLEM

## Big Education exists because of a shared belief that school can and must be better. But why?

We believe that there is an excessive focus on one type of academic learning in most classrooms on most days, resulting in other critical aspects of school being minimised or omitted.

Exams and testing of children are seen to be the driving force behind the system, with schools designing their curriculum around what is tested rather than what young people need to learn.

Teachers and leaders in the system recognise the challenges and very many want change.



### 6 in 10 teachers

say they want mental health and wellbeing incorporated into the curriculum

50% of 15-16 year olds



find secondary school unenjoyable and unfulfilling

One third of children labelled as a failure each year in their GCSE's



70% decline in students taking design & technology



Times Education Commission, Edge Foundation, 2023 report







# OUR VISION

**A Big Education for every young person -** empowering positive change with their communities, for their future, and our world.



## What is a Big Education?

A meaningful education of the whole child - one that is balanced and broad.



## What does Big Education do?

We are **Rethinking Practice**, by running our own schools and supporting other schools to change

We are **Challenging Mindsets** by showing there is another way to 'do' school and pushing for change

We are **Shaping Futures** through the difference we make

# OUR SCHOOLS

Each continues to strive to find the best ways for their students to receive an expansive education and fulfil their potential in every way: from academic to critical thinking, creativity to community action, wellbeing to the world of work, and everything in between.



**school360**

Think differently, learn together, change the world

School 360 is a Primary School based in a newly built area within Newham and serves a very diverse and multicultural community.

The name represents two important goals. 1. We want to educate children in the round, as whole people. 2. We want to work in and with the community around us, drawing on their knowledge and skills and offering them the support they need. The school has a strong commitment to social justice, achieving this by supporting children and families to identify what matters to them, and to have the confidence, skills and knowledge to tackle those problems in a meaningful way.



**school21**

EMPOWERING ALL YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE ON THE WORLD

School 21 is a 4 to 18 school in Stratford. Founded in 2012, the school has a clear vision for an expansive education for children from all backgrounds.

We use the idea of an education of the Head, Heart and Hand; a broader educational experience which focuses on academic learning (head), as well as character and wellbeing (heart) and problem solving and practical action (hand).



**SSQ**  
More than a school.

Surrey Square Primary (SSQ) is one of the 9 schools that serve the Aylesbury Estate in South East London. SSQ school serves 'the global majority', since 90% of pupils are from non-white British heritages. We are 'more than a school', because we believe that schools should be about a much broader purpose than a pure focus on teaching young people academic skills such as reading and writing. We work together from the core, equipping our community to thrive and to build a better world for themselves and others.



# LIFE AT A BIG EDUCATION SCHOOL

Our children and young people receive an education that is broader and more meaningful than the National Curriculum, enabling them to reach their full potential. We are dedicated to developing approaches that align with our philosophy and convictions.

This results in some of our work appearing and feeling distinct from more conventional practices.

THINK  
idea

START



## PROJECT BASED LEARNING



At our schools, inquiry-based projects are a key mechanism for learning. Through such projects, students gain purposeful and meaningful experiences, as they attempt to answer a central question, solve a problem or meet a challenge.



The process of crafting, reflecting, critiquing and redrafting for authentic audiences fosters increased engagement, focus, independence and deep thinking skills in students. Our young people have produced impressive work; from Year 1s having their documentary screened at the Stratford Picturehouse on 'What was it like to live in Victorian London?' to Year 7s pondering the physics of 'How can we make our Go-Kart rule?'



Our School 21 students have also recently been involved in a project on Ofsted reform - leading with the student experience. The work was written up in a [guardian article](#) and also made into a film - [Breaking the Silence](#) - that premiered in a cinema in Hackney.



# REAL WORLD LEARNING



At School 21, students aged 14-18 participate in the Real World Learning Programme for half a day per week. This programme is an alternative to traditional work experience placements in schools and offers a more meaningful and authentic experience for both students and host workplaces. During the last academic year, our students had the opportunity to collaborate with over 50 employers from various sectors, including finance, health and social care, arts and culture, and technology.

So far, Fidelity has taught us about pensions, assets and liabilities, the economy, inflation and investments. Fidelity also invites different people who are part of the company to teach us about their jobs. I find this very useful because I have learnt about jobs which you wouldn't know are even a part of a company because in school we mostly get taught about the most popular jobs.

*Year 10 student, School 21.*

We really enjoyed working with School 21 as part of the Real World Learning Project. The students are all motivated, highly engaged, and curious - an absolute pleasure. But beyond the possible recruitment benefits, it's a really rewarding way to ensure we are contributing to the community we work in, and that opportunities in finance really are opened up to all. They yielded some really fantastic insights, which will definitely impact how the business communicates with young investors in the future.

*Early Careers Attraction, Diversity, Engagement Manager, Fidelity International*

# WELLBEING



Wellbeing is at the core of our work. We understand that children can only learn and develop when their basic needs are met, both mentally and physically. We measure children's wellbeing and anxiety levels as closely as we track academic progress. Support is provided for those who require it, in the same way that extra help would be given to a child with reading difficulties.



Wellbeing strategies are explicitly taught weekly so that children and staff have a bank of tools that they can use when needed. At Surrey Square, children complete reflective journals twice a week, identifying how they are feeling and if they need help. All children are provided with breakfast at the start of everyday and we have sports coaches in the playground to enhance children's physical health.

# PLAY BASED LEARNING



Play is widely recognised as a critical factor in learning and wellbeing. Evidence suggests that using play-based continuous provision at least until the end of Key Stage 1, in line with many of the world's top performing nations, can help improve learning and wellbeing. In classrooms, play activities are carefully planned to ensure progression and can take various forms including independent play, guided play, game playing and playful experiences.



One of the essential components of play is offering choices. To ensure all pupils are stretched and challenged, Year 1 pupils at School 360 are given a series of 'must do' tasks, but they are allowed to decide how and when to complete them during a given week. This model for challenging play-based provision has been used as a model by other schools who have visited to see us in action.



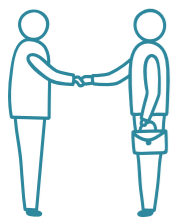
# OUTDOOR LEARNING



At School 360, a significant emphasis is placed on outdoor learning. The pandemic has highlighted the value of connecting with nature for mental health and wellbeing.

To facilitate this, we have cultivated a roof garden to grow vegetables, kept chickens, encouraged outdoor play in all weather conditions (there is no substitute for outdoor wet play!), organised an annual family camping trip and made every effort to get the children outside whenever possible.

# COMMUNITY CAMPAIGNING



Our young people are taught the principles of Community Organising to effect change within their community. Our students have participated in multiple campaigns that affect them. By concentrating on issues that directly influence the educational community, they are provided with the necessary resources and authority to identify what needs to be changed, how to use their voice, communicate with each other and make the change happen. At Surrey Square, 25% of children live in temporary housing. Last year, Year 3 children wrote persuasive letters to Southwark council about pest problems in their homes and how this was impacting their lives. They presented these letters to the Leader of Southwark Council at a Citizens UK event which led to promises being made around housing issues that directly impacted them.



The Surrey Square community also participated in and were successful in a campaign to guarantee that children whose parents do not have access to public funds can receive free school meals (this affects an estimated 150,000 people across the nation and a substantial number at Surrey Square). This campaign has earned considerable public recognition for the influence of young people in transforming and influencing the world through education.





# ORACY



The ability to speak and listen effectively is essential for success in life - this is known as Oracy. Research has demonstrated that good Oracy skills lead to higher order thinking and deeper understanding. Studies have found that students in disadvantaged areas typically only speak an average of four words per lesson. At School 21, we strive to provide every student (aged 4-18) with deliberate opportunities to talk and listen in each lesson through our Oracy Curriculum Roadmap. Recently, we held a 'whole school Oracy moment' where all students participated in a student-led discussion task for thirty minutes.



In 2014, School 21 established Voice 21, a charity dedicated to improving Oracy skills. Since its inception, Voice 21 has impacted more than 1000 schools.

# IDENTITY CURRICULUM



It is our conviction that teaching young people about Identity can have a significant effect on self-image, self-esteem, confidence, acceptance of diversity and a greater inquisitiveness regarding their own identity.

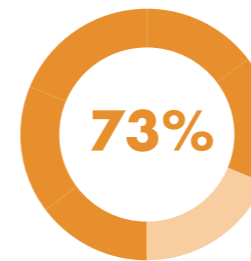
At Surrey Square, the Identity Curriculum captures and reflects the community and challenges it faces by covering topics such as stereotypes, microaggressions, unconscious bias and privilege. Identity is taught and explored for an afternoon each week across seven weeks, each year. We come together to celebrate this work at the end of the seven week teaching cycle, where each class performs a poem related to the theme of Identity that they have been working on and it is a moment that our children truly look forward to.

# ACADEMIC OUTCOMES 21/22



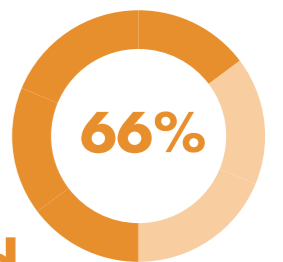
Our schools work in communities that are underserved and have a higher-than-average rate of eligibility for free school meals.

Despite these challenges, we strive to provide the best possible education, encompassing both academic success and a broader curriculum.



**73%** of School 360 children achieved a **Good Level of Development** in the first year of the school opening  
(35% were on track at the start of the year)

Surrey Square Year 6 students' attainment in reading, writing and maths results are well **above the national average at 66% combined**



**61% of students** at School 21 **achieved grade 5 or higher** in at least 5 subjects including English and Maths

(compared to 50% nationally)

School 21 Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores **(52.8)** are **above national average** (48.8)

(a score based on how well pupils have performed across 8 GCSE subjects)



# RETHINKING COMMUNITY: OLD KENT ROAD FAMILY ZONE

Doing things differently to change the story for our  
community and beyond





# THE STORY

**84%** of the Surrey Square community - based off of the Old Kent Road in London - are among the highest 20% of income-deprived families in the UK (judged by the IDACI). The Old Kent Road community faces many challenges as a result of this.

**25%** of people living in this area are occupying temporary housing.

**10%** have No Recourse to Public Funds which means they lack access to welfare entitlements.

Within wider society the Old Kent Road is portrayed as an area which is undesirable. Our listening shows that there are many positives that aren't seen, aren't known about or shouted about.

**The Old Kent Road Family Zone is working to change this!**

## WE WANT TO SHINE A LIGHT ON:

- › The untapped and unrecognised talent and capacity
- › A connected, supportive and close-knit community
- › A beautifully diverse and eclectic neighbourhood
- › The innate resilience of the people despite deep-rooted social issues.



Set-up in 2021, this initiative is formed of local people and organisations who are co-developing a shared and changed narrative and outcome for the community through a place based approach. This has been developed out of the ethos at Surrey Square - we put the community first.



The Old Kent Road Family Zone is working with the community to both celebrate and strengthen it, positively impacting the lives of children, young people and their families.



## WE ARE WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY BY...

- › Actively listening and building genuine relationships with and between different individuals, groups and organisations
- › Celebrating the great things and shining a light on these
- › Working together and co-creating solutions to make things even better



## GETTING INTO ACTION: THE MARKETPLACE

The Old Kent Road Family Zone Marketplace is held monthly on Saturdays at Surrey Square. This initiative was created in response to deep listening, and provides a secure and trustworthy space for families to connect, socialise and eat together, in addition to offering services such as a lovely hot meal.

Starting at 40 attendees, we now reach over 150 community members each month. If every person chatted to 3 people, that's 1500+ conversations!



I feel like we have a place where we can relax and feel like our children are safe. The food is so good too!



## WHAT'S NEXT?

The Old Kent Road Family Zone is the start of our journey! Our next venture is a youth club and a community cafe. We know that a truly place based approach takes time and we are only committed to the interventions that have been designed with and led by the community.



The Marketplace is great. I really like the community feel and the children love it. I love the different ages of the children interacting with each other.



We couldn't do The Marketplace without our growing number of delivery partners:

**magic  
breakfast**  
fuel for learning

**CHEFS IN SCHOOLS!**

**Felix** | THE FELIX PROJECT



# RETHINKING PRACTICE: SUPPORTING MORE SCHOOLS TO CHANGE

## **Big Leadership programmes**

developing innovative and  
empowering leaders across the  
system

## **Signature Practice programmes**

enabling educators to adopt Big  
Education practices





# BIG LEADERSHIP

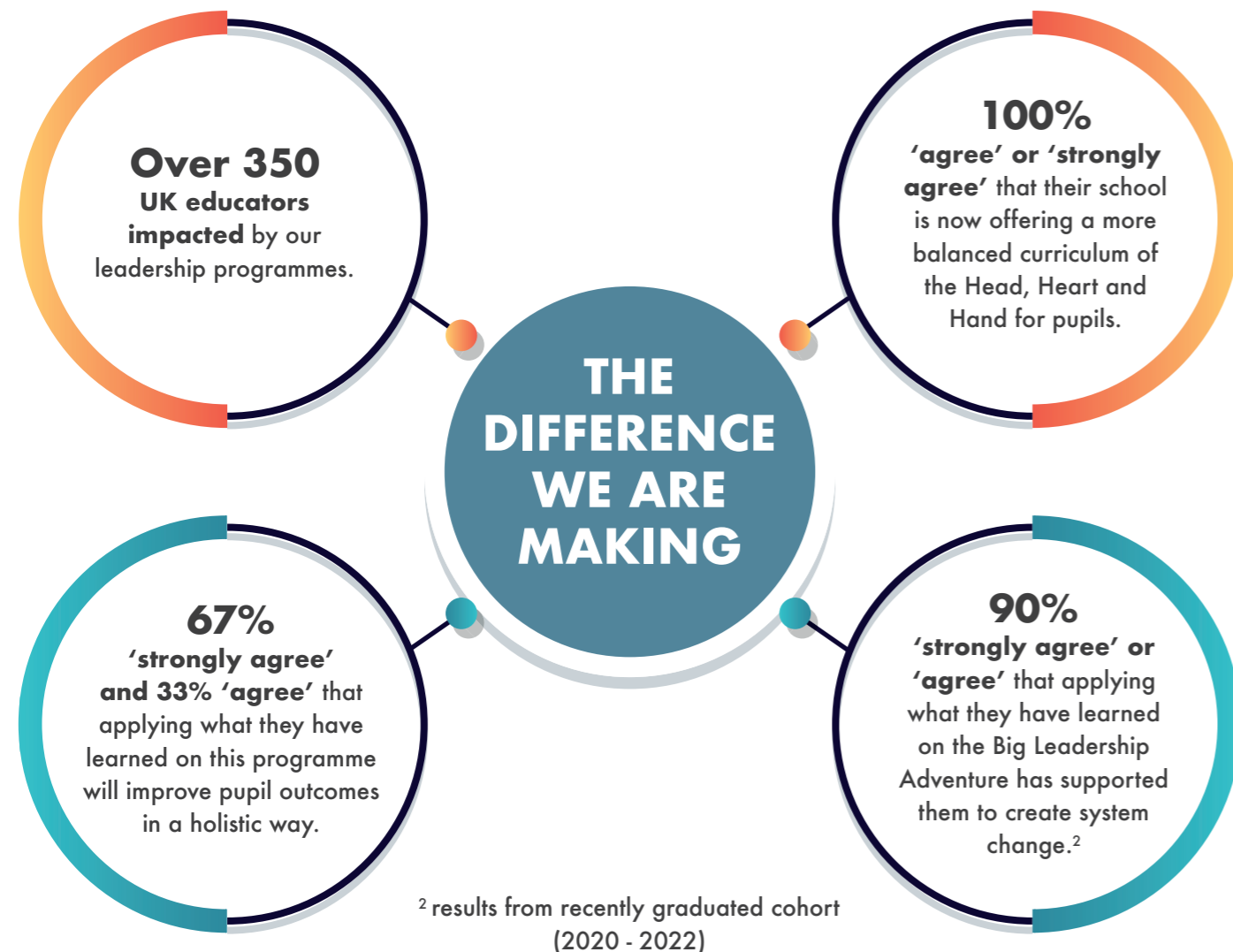
## OUR BIG LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMES:

**Big Leadership Adventure** (2 years, for individual educators)

**Big Team Adventure** (6 months, for senior leadership teams)

**Big 8** (2 days, for individual educators)

Leadership is a catalyst for the change we want to see in education! Our leadership programmes encourage leaders to BE brave and question the way things are normally done, develop new solutions and create safe environments to make these changes happen.



## EVIDENCE FROM THE EVALUATION OF THE BIG LEADERSHIP ADVENTURE PILOT, 2019 - 2021 SHOW THAT WE HAVE:

*(full report)*

Cultivated leaders' capacity to consider their own educational philosophy and understand how it could influence their behaviour

Enhanced leaders' capacity to provide support for others, foster growth, and give authority to those around them

Enabled leaders to innovate with precision and cultivate a culture of innovation within their organisations

## WHAT NEXT?

We are now working at national level with leadership providers to help influence provision more broadly in the sector, and 2022 will see the launch of a major paper we have written in partnership with NAHT and ASCL, two large education unions.

The Big Leadership Adventure has given me the confidence to lead and to enact change. My thinking has evolved in so many ways in the last two years. This has supported me in networking with so many inspiring leaders and people not just in the educational sector but more broadly. It has widened my horizons. I have learnt to read more widely and to look globally for innovation and ways that work and bring them back into my own setting. I have developed my vision of education and I have developed my purpose.

**Headteacher, South London**

Read full case studies of the difference our leadership programmes are making on [our website](#)



# SIGNATURE PRACTICE

Our signature practice programmes support teachers to redesign practices within their own schools, to ensure more children receive an expansive education.

## OUR SIGNATURE PRACTICE PROGRAMMES:

Designing an expansive curriculum of the head, heart and hand

Rethinking work experience

Rethinking top down accountability in school

Developing a culture of positive wellbeing

Supporting children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs

## THE DIFFERENCE WE ARE MAKING

**Over 250** educators impacted by our signature practices programmes

**70%** of those attending rated their satisfaction at 4/5 with 100% being 3/5 or above

'An excellent course that challenges the traditional view of work experience. Thank you for sharing your exciting and innovative ideas and practice. I'm certain these principles will be incorporated in future plans in my school.'

'I have really appreciated the effective toolkit to help reflect and review my (and others') leadership skills. The course was delivered in a welcoming and trusting environment and it was easy to share practice and ideas with new people. A great opportunity to expand a network of support.'

'When time always feels tight, this is a worthwhile use of time. It was a great way to get school leaders thinking outside of the box, and practical ideas for changing the culture around accountability. I loved hearing about the real school models in practice ... including what hasn't worked!'



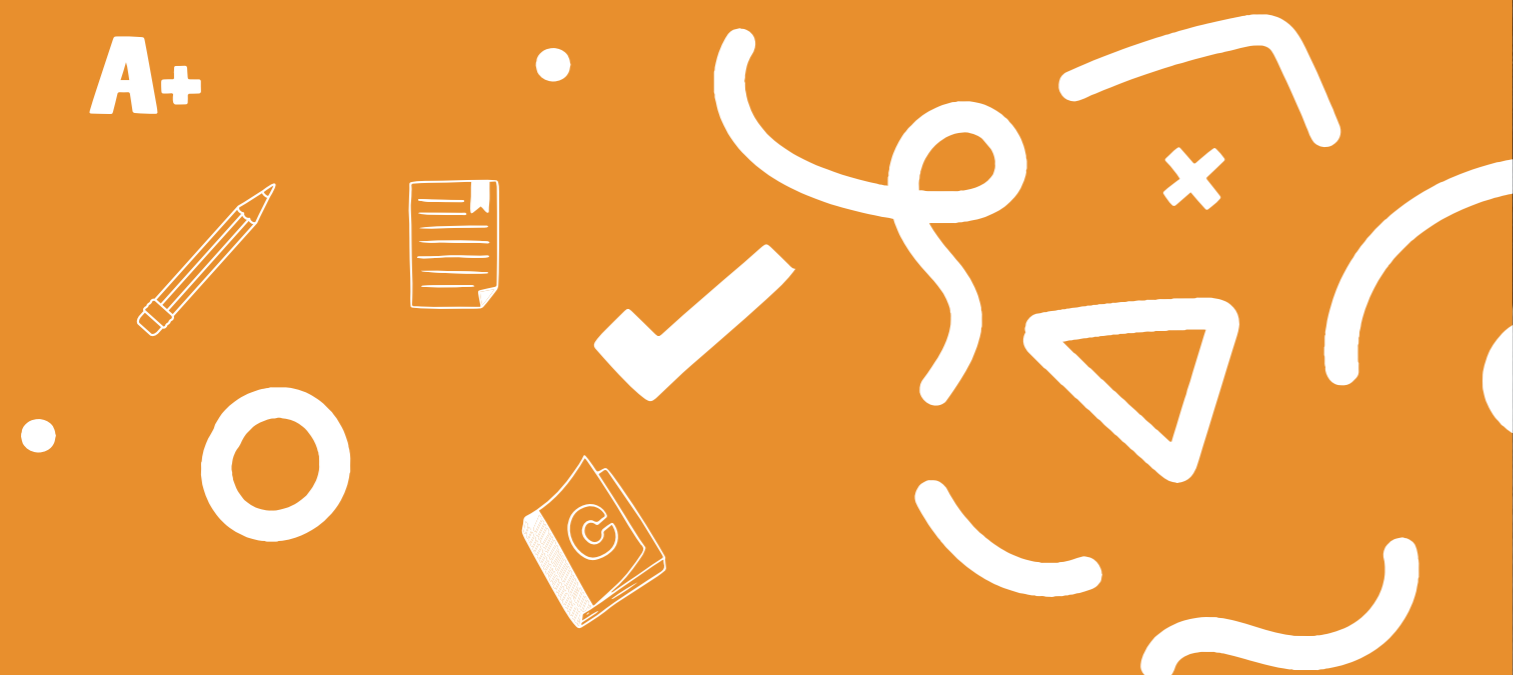


# RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

We are committed to the importance of transforming the assessment system and believe that young people should be assessed on a wider range of criteria. We are taking a leading role in Rethinking Assessment, a coalition of school leaders, researchers, policy-makers, employers, parents and student groups, focused on finding effective ways to show a learner's strengths, knowledge and skills.

Our goal is to have exams as just one of several meaningful assessment methods, within a balanced curriculum preparing students for lifelong learning.

A+

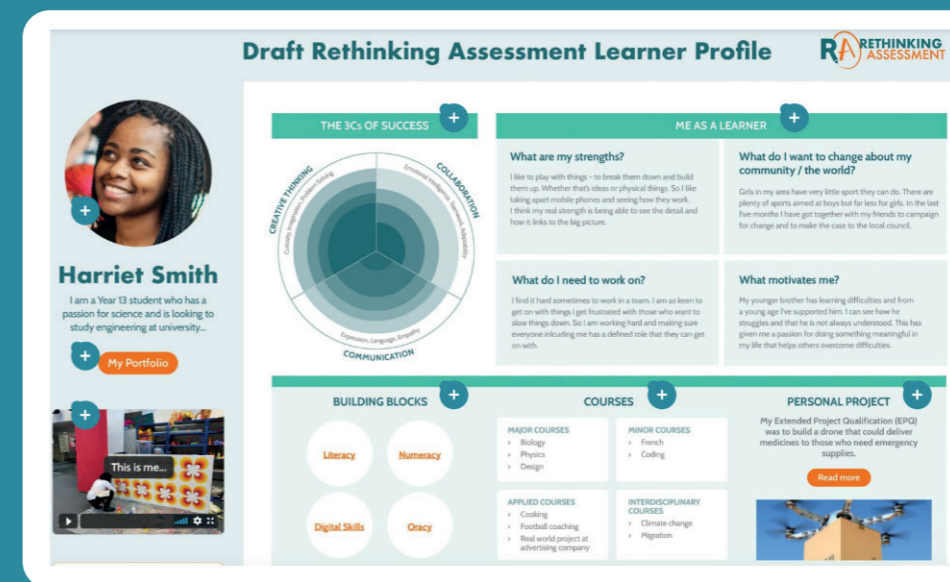
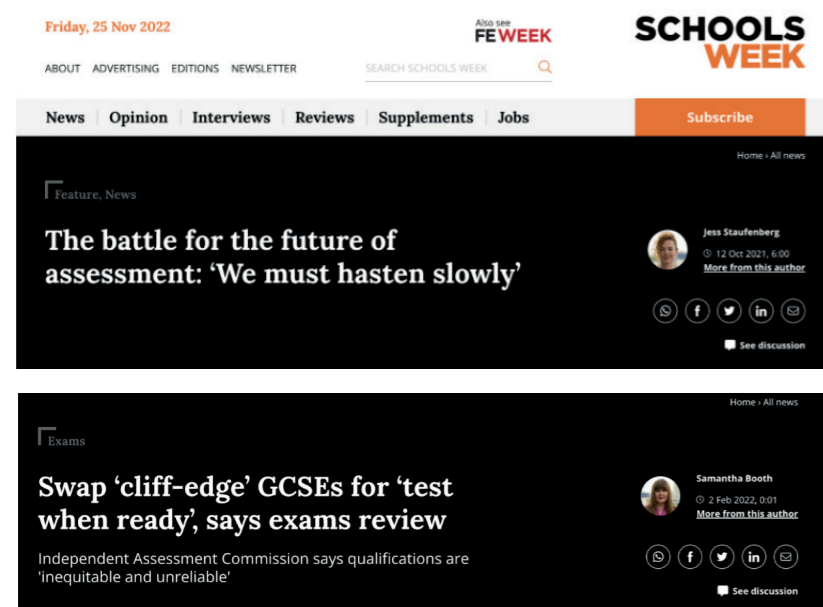




# TO FIX A FLAWED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM WE ARE...

## Making the case for change

- Through consultations, case studies, policy roundtables and papers, events, blogs and media pieces.



## Building a coalition of partners and stakeholders calling for change

- England, Scotland, Wales, international alliances
- Involvement in a number of commissions and papers (e.g. The Independent Commission on Assessment in Primary Education (ICAPE); Pearson's report into the Future of Assessment)
- All Party Parliamentary Group for Schools, Learning and Assessment

## Developing new assessment solutions and piloting

- Launched the first national framework for a Learner Profile, with a coalition statement signed by 32 leading figures from education, politics, policy, skills, industry and NGOs. This launch was widely covered in the media by outlets such as Schools Week and TES.
- Conducting Learner Profile pilots with networks of schools and local authorities
- Conducted creative thinking action research with 20 schools. Published Field Guide to assessing creative thinking
- Interdisciplinary learning and assessment pilot with 10 schools
- Working alongside Voice 21 (Oracy charity) to assess speaking skills
- Launched School Directed Courses Consortium
- Launched a working group to develop proposals for a new Baccalaureate style qualification for England



# WRITING AND SHARING OUR WORK

**Liz Robinson, CEO, featured as a case study in the book 'Imperfect leadership in action: A practical book for school leaders who know they don't know it all', Steve Munby and Marie-Claire Bretherton, 2022**

**Big Education wrote a chapter on 'Collaboration for change' in the new book 'The Power of Professional Learning Networks: Traversing the present; transforming the future', Graham Handscomb and Chris Brown, 2022**

## **RSA, Inclusive and Nurturing Schools Toolkit.**

Surrey Square featured as a case study demonstrating the approach to building a truly inclusive education

## **In it for the long haul: Building trusting relationships with parents**

Chartered College, Jean Gross, Nicola Noble and Liz Robinson, 2022

## **A Big Education for Leaders**

Chartered College, Ellie Lister and Liz Robinson, 2021

**Daring to be different and leading the change in the education sector – what's next?, Liz Robinson, 2022**

**Over 150 blogs on our site, gathering case studies of practices around the world from educators**

# WHAT'S NEXT?

## BIG 10

---

We have secured funding from Salesforce to bring together a group of 10 likeminded schools to support each other's work, to develop and test what we mean by 'A Big Education', and codify this to share with the system.

## PRIMARY ASSESSMENT PROJECT

---

In partnership with the Centre for Education & Youth, we are undertaking a pilot in primary assessment, to create a rigorous, flexible and scalable assessment instrument\* for eleven-year-olds that any primary school across the UK could use.

## ADDRESSING THE PERSISTENT ATTAINMENT GAP IN BATH

---

In partnership with St Johns Foundation, we will be working with Bath and North East Somerset schools to analyse local needs and to formulate a new strategy that will deliver best outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in the region.



# WITH THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

We couldn't have made this happen without you...

## Impact on Urban Health

"We are so excited to be able to support the powerful work Surrey Square is doing. The Old Kent Road Family Zone's aim of transforming the community so that all children and families can thrive - and doing this through co-creation with the community - is a much-needed way to ensure the wisdom and insight of experience shapes the future of the area. Impact on Urban Health's Children's Mental Health programme continues to learn a huge amount from the way the OKRFZ team builds trust with the community and focuses on strengthening relationships. It is a dynamic example of genuine co-creation, re-imagining local environments, ecosystems and solutions that are nurturing and work for and with families."

**Julika Niehaus, Portfolio Manager**



salesforce

"Salesforce is proud of 6 years of collaboration with Big Education. Through their innovative approach, they challenge the status quo by testing new ways to provide students with the resources and experiences they need to realize their full potential."

**Ron Smith, VP of Philanthropy**



LYFTA

"Lyfta are extremely proud of the ongoing partnership with Big Education. Their focus on expanding the horizons of the children in their care is perfectly aligned with what we are trying to achieve with Lyfta. Their approach to education and striving to offer an expansive education for all is truly inspiring."

**Serdar Ferit, CEO**



BIG  
CHANGE.

"Big Change has been proud to support Big Education's work, as they have big ambitions. They bring together an expansive way of looking at schools, and through community involvement, they deliver a bigger and bolder vision of what education can be about."

**Anne-Marie Twumasi, Impact Manager**



EDGE  
FOUNDATION

"We love working with colleagues at Big Education - they are always keen to think about the big picture and how we can change the system together, and yet also happy to roll up their sleeves to develop practical solutions and generously support others."

**Olly Newton, Executive Director**



THE  
LAUREL  
TRUST  
Leading Learning through  
Action-led Research and Innovation

"The research conducted by School 21, School 360 and their partner schools across Newham, Tower Hamlets and Lambeth has created rich insights and a valuable model for supporting children's mental health and well-being. Particularly distinctive is the growth of teacher researchers to ensure that the efficacy and impact is sustained and has longevity. The Laurel Trust congratulates them on the success of their research project which has supported children and young people in the particularly challenging times and will have a lasting impact on practice."

**Bill Goddard, Chair of Trustees**



# BE PART OF THE CHANGE

JOIN THE BIG EDUCATION COMMUNITY!



[bigeducation.org](http://bigeducation.org)



[@\\_BigEducation](https://www.instagram.com/_BigEducation)