WE SOSI
Spotlights

What we’ve learned from 8 visits to see the signature practice of ‘stand out schools’

Collaborating with leaders at all levels to provide a high-quality, whole education
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Whole Education is first and foremost a network. We believe in the power of bringing people together, sharing great ideas and helping each other in our shared pursuit to deliver a high quality whole education for all learners in very different school contexts and communities.

Stand out school practice
What is it that makes a school ‘whole education’? What does ‘stand-out’ whole education practice look like? And, what are the conditions of success needed to deliver a truly high-quality whole education for all students, sustainably and over a prolonged period of time?

We set out to conduct a systematic evidence gathering through appreciative inquiry school visits to answer the above. 14 secondary schools were chosen based on the duration of their commitment to the Whole Education network and engagement over the past ten years. Each school visit was designed to help showcase:

- One area of stand-out whole education practice in the school
- Why do they do it and why does it work
- The principles underpinning the school’s whole education approach

How did it work
The visits used an Appreciative Inquiry framework. Appreciative inquiry is an approach which builds on positive psychology and storytelling to create an “alignment of strengths”. Instead of starting with a deficit model and asking ‘what is not working?’, appreciative inquiry is about identifying what is already working well and exploring how an organisation can build on these strengths.

Although originally 14 visits were planned, only 8 were able to take place due to extenuating circumstances in 2019-20. This think-piece collates our learning from these 8 visits. The other 6 visits will be taking place in 2020-21 alongside additional selected schools.

Our learnings
Our schools generously opened their doors to peers in the network (and beyond). Through appreciative inquiry, seekers (visitors) captured evidence from presentations, focus groups with staff and students, observations of lessons, mentoring sessions and tours of the school.

Below follows an extract from each of the case studies compiled after the visits, focusing on one of the features we think is ‘stand-out’ about the school’s practice. The full case studies, including additional details about the schools will be available at wholeeducation.org/spotlights

We hope that the learning captured from these visits will be an inspiration to other school leaders up and down the country who are committed to delivering a whole education for their students.
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An innovative approach to a Saturday school to improve outcomes and develop agency for disadvantaged students

Spotlight on Matthew Moss High School, Rochdale

What is it?

D6 (day 6) is an entirely voluntary, student-directed ‘Saturday school’ (a term the school avoids). It aims to improve outcomes for students, particularly focused on disadvantaged students, while developing their wider life skills like resilience and independence.

Key principles

It is designed so that it doesn’t feel like ‘just another school day’. There are no uniforms, no ‘curriculum’, and an emphasis on social learning. The school is open for four hours, and students choose what to focus on, helping them take ownership of their learning – some might work individually on homework, others revise with a friend, while other groups tackle difficult concepts together.

How does it work?

Other than one member of SLT, no school staff take part in D6. Instead, local sixth form college students are paid (a higher wage than the Saturday jobs they were previously doing) to act as coaches and mentors – supporting learners while developing their own skills in a meaningful setting.

What’s the impact?

It has high engagement, with 100-200 learners taking part every Saturday, entirely voluntarily.

Learners that attend on average achieve an entire grade higher than those that don’t. It has a particularly large impact on students in receipt of pupil premium.

The outcomes from D6 have been impressive: a year after leaving MMHS, only 1.1% of their 2016 Y11 cohort were NEET, compared with 2.5% national and 3.5% LEA averages.

Why WE loved it:

The visit to Matthew Moss was a real highlight of the year. What stood out was the thinking behind D6 - the school talks a lot about the idea that it’s ‘their’ school and they lived that out - giving the students the whole building on Saturday is a wonderful example!

Alex, WE Comms Lead

What you said about the school:

"Excellent practice which I'd like to take back to my school/students. I now feel I know what my/our next step should be. I want to share what I have seen/heard and make plans!"

"Accountability, involvement by all, positive learning environment, enhanced learning experience."

"Focusing on students as humans... they will 'succeed' academically if they are heard, cared for, challenged and supported."

It's delivering a whole education by...

Helping children and young people to develop the range of knowledge, skills and qualities they need to succeed and thrive in life, learning & work

Makes learning more relevant and engaging, with pupils and students taking ownership of their own learning

Supports learning across various settings (online, outside, at home and through volunteering and work) while engaging the wider community
Focusing on the craft of teaching: supporting teachers to develop their practice and delivering ‘HITs’ lessons to reintegrate struggling students

Spotlight on Wilmslow High School, Cheshire

Developing excellent teaching and learning is at the heart of Wilmslow, as they work hard to ensure all students benefit from the highest quality whole education. We have highlighted two examples of this below: their cross-school professional learning culture and their high-intensity teaching lessons for struggling students to improve, fast.

Incremental coaching

Incremental coaching involves short (15 minute), drop-in observations to watch a teacher in action, at the end of which the coach and the teacher have a 15 minute coaching conversation. Coaches have all been through the process themselves, and give the teacher some practical, specific areas to focus on developing in their practice over the next week (along with some resources or tips to get them started). These aren’t about subject expertise (staff are paired outside of their specialist area) but the craft of teaching - explanation, questioning and classroom management.

HITS - High-intensity teaching lessons

Another example of Wilmslow’s dedication to high-quality teaching and learning for all students is their model of high-intensity teaching (HITS lessons).

The HITS lessons aim to create rapid improvement in literacy and/or numeracy for specific students to develop the skills which will enable these students to work at the same level as their peers.

These smaller group lessons embed key knowledge for students who are struggling and need extra help. Through high-quality teaching and learning delivered by specialists they are caught up and supported to be reintegrated back into the main curriculum.

A seeker comments that the HIT lessons were an example of Wilmslow providing a high-quality, rigorous, whole education ‘by thinking about what is best for the student’.

Why WE loved it:

WE loved visiting Wilmslow. The school culture is palpable the moment you arrive, and the consequences of this shine through in every conversation with teachers and students. The visit was very, very special.”
Verity, WE Project Manager

What you said about the school:

“Staff from across faculties talking enthusiastically about T&L strategies.”

“Loved them bringing all members of the school team together, talking about and seeing the impact of work everyone across one school is doing.”

“A considered, careful approach, worked on as a consistent team.”

“The leadership team, and the way they work, really stood out. All practice and policies are grounded in real research”.

“Leaders dedicated to making relevant changes that will help give their pupils the best learning experiences.”

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Locally-informed curriculum: A curriculum blending vocational and academic learning to support personal excellence for all

Spotlight on Golborne High School, Wigan

Golborne has redesigned its curriculum to take account of their community, local needs and student destination data.

Amongst a range of changes, they now encourage all students to take a vocational qualification at KS4, to expose them to different types of learning in different contexts.

Locally-informed curriculum design

The school used the marketing database Acorn to find out more about the data profile of the families in the local area. They identified there was a lack of understanding on how to manage money in many local families, so introduced financial literacy qualifications in the curriculum for Year 9s.

The school took a nuanced view of destinations data: How many students are going on to vocational study and A-Level study? Are lots of students dropping out of college? Do they change courses after they arrive?

Golborne then used their curriculum to respond to these needs. This could be knowledge that students seemed to be missing, or developing some of the skills that would help them thrive in their next steps.

Valuing the vocational and the academic

Golborne believe a balanced curriculum diet means all students should experience a mix of academic and vocational learning.

They encourage almost all students to do the Ebacc as they recognise that lack of aspirations is a challenge for their students, so see the value subjects like MFL have in broadening their students’ horizons.

To compliment this, all students complete at least one vocational qualification alongside their GCSEs noting the benefit this different pedagogical approach makes for every student’s development.

Why WE loved it:

I absolutely love the story of the journey Golborne has been on. Their blend of a vocational subject for all students along with their high engagement with the Ebacc, is a wonderful example of the ‘both/and’, not the ‘either/or’. It refutes the idea that vocational study is somehow less valuable.”

Lisa, WE Secondaries Director

What you said about the school:

“When I go back to my school, I want to try to see how we can develop a vocational offer for all”

“I am excited about the vocational subject choices for all students. A new way of thinking about education.”

“After seeing this school, it makes me think about ensuring all students have equal access to a curriculum that challenges them and develops students because it’s something I never thought of before.”

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Makes learning more relevant and engaging

Supports learning across various settings (online, outside, at home and through volunteering and work)
Academic coaching: supporting student agency in learning and improving outcomes with group coaching sessions

Spotlight on Shevington High School, Wigan

What is it?

A teacher meets with each student once a week in a coaching session where students can set their academic goals and develop successful strategies to reach them.

How does it work?

All form teachers are trained and perform the role of a coach. Form groups are broken up into 5 small groups of 5-6, and they are each assigned one morning per week to come into school 15 minutes early and attend a group coaching session before form. The emphasis is on using coaching to support academic work to enable students to develop agency over their own learning.

What we saw?

The coach asked a mixture of probing, open-ended (“what was successful for you this week?”) and clarifying (“how did you organise your time?”) questions. These effectively supported the students to identify what was working and where they needed to make changes to meet their goals.

Small groups gave all students the opportunity to know and be known by an adult in the school. This ensured that no pupil fell through the cracks as part of a larger class.

What’s the impact?

One coach reflected “I know them all really well. There is a really strong culture of community now – they also support each other which is great to see, particularly for those more vulnerable students who might not usually do their homework or revise etc”

“There is also a significant impact on their academic performance. Students who were getting grades 2 and 3 have now improved to 4 and 5”.

Furthermore the >90% coaching attendance rate highlights how much the students value the sessions.

Why WE loved it:

“I was so impressed by the coaching we saw at Shevington - both for how the school had bought into it, and by the skill of the coaches that we saw. It was so clearly making a big difference.”

Rosie Leonard-Kane, Former WE Programmes Lead

What you said about the school:

On our visit, we saw coaching groups in session. Seekers were unanimously impressed by the quality of the coaching sessions which we observed.

“When I go back to my school, I want to try looking at how coaching could be used in form times because it could improve students ability to be independent learners.”

“The relationship between the coach and students was really lovely – she clearly cared a great deal about her students and they were all engaged in quality reflection and goal setting related to their learning... and all before 9am!”

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Making learning more relevant and engaging, with pupils and students taking ownership of their own learning
Supporting inclusion through the Belong, Believe, Become (BBB) model

Spotlight on Shenley Brook End school, Milton Keynes

Shenley Brook End use their BBB model to underpin everything they do: belonging to the school community, belief in students and a focus on who they become as adults.

This is expressed in a variety of ways, from opportunities to experience belonging through expressive arts or sports clubs to the new inclusion centre which offers bespoke support to vulnerable students so that they have a space in the school where they belong and get the support they need to achieve.

The new inclusion centre:

The new inclusion centre was opened by Director of Inclusion, Sam Southwell, last year. It is a space in the school which is open all day, every day to work with those learners who need some additional support. It runs a variety of interventions including adapted timetables, mentoring, form time and parental engagement.

Behaviour coaching

Behaviour Coaches were introduced to the school in September 2019. This diverse team of coaches, sourced through organisation Sport & Thought, work one to one with learners in lessons, through mentoring sessions and in small group work.

The investment in behaviour coaches by the school was lauded as “a clear demonstration of the schools’ commitment to supporting all learners and using a positive approach rather than punishment which we know doesn’t work”.

In lessons we observed students looking to their behaviour coach for encouragement before offering an idea to the class discussion. This was highlighted as a big success for the particular student who often disengaged in learning. The behaviour coach was subtle but clearly a supportive figure for the student in the classroom.

Why WE loved it:

I really enjoyed our visit to Shenley Brook End. The school has been a member of the Whole Education network since we began 2010. Despite weathering changes in the education sector, inspections, changes of leadership and a school expansion, it’s so reassuring to see that their commitment to the principles and values of a whole education have never swayed.

Lisa, WE Secondaries Director

What you said about the school:

“The atmosphere in the inclusion centre was the opposite of what I expected! Every student I spoke to was using the space as a quiet respite from main lessons, a space where they could focus on their work without distraction. The inclusion team had clearly worked hard to create this culture - a wonderful resource for students who need it”.

“All students and staff we spoke to today echoed each other that they felt connected to the school community. In other words, for such a large school, it feels very intimate”

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Cross-curricular expeditions to provide real world, engaging learning and develop students knowledge, skills and qualities

**Spotlight on XP school, Doncaster**

**What is it?**

XP’s curriculum is delivered through cross-subject learning projects (learning expeditions) that last one school term and are rigorously mapped against the National Curriculum. Projects are designed around real-world issues to encourage students to make positive contributions and initiate change in their communities.

**How does it work?**

The clearest evidence of the success of XP’s real world learning expeditions was in the “beautiful work” created at the end of expeditions- and the students’ clear pride and ownership of this work. They present this work at “Passage”: public presentations that Y9 students make of their work to staff, governors and family, as they transition to the GCSEs.

These presentations act as proof that they are ready to graduate to the next stage and are key moments in building real-world skills. Students said this process worked because there was an authentic audience for the presentations; they held themselves to account to take the presentations very seriously and perform well.

**What’s the impact?**

Students made the following comments about their learning expeditions:

- “I can remember better what we did in class because every learning expedition is memorable”
- “We have so many opportunities and are always meeting experts. It feels more real than just being in a class”.
- “Meeting real people makes the learning more real…. You have more freedom in your learning [at XP]”

Because of this, students are not only enjoying their learning but making ‘outstanding progress’ academically, according to their latest Ofsted review.

**Why WE loved it:**

“XP was our first SOSI visit of the year and WE couldn’t have started with a better example of a whole education in action. The combination of a values-led approach but also a real rigour was fascinating and inspiring to unpick.”

James Pope, WE Exec Director

**What you said about the school:**

“Today made me feel hope! XP’s approach challenges students to take ownership of their learning. I saw students embracing the notion of being accountable for their work and understanding the processes that lead to that product”

“Relating learning expeditions to the community is giving it purpose beyond the qualifications”

**It’s delivering a whole education by..**

Makes learning more relevant and engaging, with pupils and students taking ownership of their own learning

Supports learning across various settings (online, outside, at home and through volunteering and work) while engaging the wider community
Taking an individualised approach to curriculum and teaching and learning for SEND learners

Spotlight on Oakfield High School and College, Wigan

Oakfield is a community special school that excels at providing an education that gives their learners the best possible life chances. It does this through creating a culture of high expectations combined with varied and rich opportunities.

Sensory Curriculum

During the visit we saw that learning environments and lessons at Oakfield were planned to avoid the sensory overload many learners risk experiencing at school. Sensory activities were built into lessons to stimulate learners, supported by clearly established routines for learning. For one class, this involved finding geography questions hidden in flour whilst another class prepared for learning using sensory bands.

It was clear throughout the visit that different sensory needs were catered for, and all activities and planned with the needs of individual learners in mind. Learners are allowed ‘to be’ at Oakfield; they are not challenged for fidgeting but are instead encouraged to understand and respond to their sensory needs. As a result, learners at Oakfield are better able to self-regulate and focus on their learning. This highly personalised approach demonstrates the thoughtful way that Oakfield nurtures each individual learner.

High Expectations

WE also saw the high expectations that staff evidently have of students at Oakfield. During one geography lesson we saw, learners were asked to recall knowledge of different countries including capitals and shapes by picking questions from ‘flour castles’. As well as meeting their sensory needs, the activity was challenging for the learners and showed the high expectations that their teacher has for them to retain and share knowledge. Learners are expected to fulfill their potential and the school is fully supportive in this process. For some, this means building valuable life skills such as travelling to school independently, whilst others take accredited courses such as GCSEs.

Why WE loved it:
I loved our visit to Oakfield this year. I was so impressed by the individualised approach the school is taking to ensure that every learner’s needs are catered for. Alongside this there were clearly high expectations and aspirations for all learners which gave a clear ‘can do’ attitude across the whole school body.

Verifier, WE Project Manager

What you said about the school:
“Each class demonstrated the sensory curriculum on different levels and in different ways.”

“Everything you do is designed for the learners.”

“I loved how the sensory elements of the learners were catered for, but the questions were difficult - I loved it!”

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Makes learning more relevant and engaging, with pupils and students taking ownership of their own learning
Using Outdoor Expeditions and CREW to improve the learning experiences and outcomes

Spotlight on Walsall Academy, Walsall

A richness of curriculum experiences and a commitment to a truly whole education lies at the heart of the Walsall values. The Arts, Sport and Outdoor Learning opportunities play an important part in the life of the academy and help their goal of providing a stimulating and enjoyable teaching and learning experience for all.

**WE Adventures at Walsall Academy - TO TRAVEL, TO RETURN, TO CHANGE**

Like many secondary schools across England the outcomes (both academic and on other measures) for white British boys can oftentimes fall short of their peers.

In addressing this issue Shadow Headteacher, Jon Clarke, personally and professionally, has been heavily influenced by expeditionary learning and the work of Ron Berger in the United States. This has had a huge impact on his curriculum visioning and implementation at Walsall.

What is strikingly different however, is how the Walsall team have managed to successfully implement this philosophy within a school - this ‘school in a school’ model is allowing them to practically share and embed the practice across a school system different to that of the USA. Schools can trial and pilot the approach - without changing their whole school and all of its systems and structures.

**What it looks like?**

Starting in Year 10, a group of academically underachieving students, as measured by aspirant target grades, are selected to join a special tutor group or CREW. These students, mainly white British boys, are then nurtured through the GCSE years and challenged to be the very best they can be. Starting with an outdoor expedition, the young people are immediately taken out of their respective comfort zones, forced to ‘survive’ and work as a team. This initiation and the lessons learned during this expedition influence the core learning when ‘back in the building’. If you can conquer all of your fears and climb the mountain, supported by your CREW then you can achieve anything.

**Why WE loved it:**

“We all seek for young people to make the most of all of their abilities, skills and attributes. Seldom do schools think as broadly and creatively about how this can be done with individual groups of students in a way that is as demonstrable and sustained at Walsall.”

Lisa, WE Secondaries Director

**What you said about the school:**

“What Walsall are doing is not easy. It is challenging, tough, highly skilled interventions. But, the team who passionately believe in it are transforming young people’s lives - amazing.”

“The young people in CREW and CREW alumni were so articulate and could clearly explain the impact being part of the programme had. The fact that the current Year 11 Head Boy is a former CREW student is testimony to all you are hoping to achieve.”

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Making learning more relevant and engaging

Supports learning across various settings (online, outside, at home and through volunteering and work)
Principles underlying the whole education signature practice of stand out schools

We anticipated that there would be some common elements of an effective whole education school. We were surprised to find that it had nothing to do with the practice itself; each school has their own unique approach, frameworks and language to describe their school vision, values, curriculum and teaching & learning priorities. What they had in common were three very simple but effective principles which were expressed in a variety of ways.

1. A commitment to positive relationships visible across the school

If one thing was clear across every ‘Stand Out School’, despite their different contexts and approaches, it was the sense of strong, positive relationships across the school community. These relationships were deliberate, developed and discussed.

Deliberate: We consistently saw evidence of deliberate, rigorous and evidence-informed approaches to building strong relationships being deployed across the schools we visited. These relationships were not accidental - they had been intentionally and deliberately curated and stewarded.

Discussed: Importantly we noticed that there was also a shared language around relationships in the school that meant they could be explicitly discussed. Whatever the framework or model - from transactional analysis at Matthew Moss, to BBB at Shenley Brook End - it gave a coherence and consistency to relationships, and gave a set of tools to improve them.

Developed: Building relationships were a key feature in school professional development calendars as well as an active focus in the day to day life of the schools. Schools invested time and money in actively increasing the ability of students and staff to build and maintain strong relationships.

2. Student engagement and ownership of learning

Learning was seen as a shared endeavour in all the schools we visited. In different ways - whether it be through deeply understanding students’ context and destinations, to giving them a sense of ownership of the school building, to a range of pedagogies designed to build agency - learning was done with, not done to.

XP’s learning expeditions started by engaging students’ passions in the projects. Students in the school reflected back how much the projects helped learning ‘stick’. Shevington’s academic coaching helped students set their own goals for learning. D6 was an entirely voluntary model for a Saturday school that saw two hundred students engaging on Saturdays. They understood their learning, why it mattered, and wanted to take take advantage of the support available.
3. Long term leadership of a vision shared at all levels of the school

We were struck in each school by the clarity of the school’s purpose and vision; the way staff and students at all levels bought into this vision; and the sustainable plan for achieving it over a number of years. The underpinning elements of this leadership that consistently emerged seemed to be...

**A strong guiding narrative:** A surprising theme that emerged, in part through SOSI visits’ short ‘Ignite speeches’, was the power of storytelling. Leaders without fail had a powerful narrative for why their community needed the whole education they were working to provide. Their vision was more than words on a website; it was a compelling story that took in past, present and future; the context and community the school operated in; and the ‘hopes’ and ‘ambitions’ of our appreciative inquiry model.

**Long term commitment to the vision:** SOSI participants had taken a sustainable, long-term approach to leading a whole education in their schools, and stuck with that through often significant challenges. They didn’t view it as a quick fix or look for overnight success. Many had faced setbacks or pressure to change course; all had been guided by their values and recommitted to their vision.

**The vision or approach wasn’t owned by one person, but distributed across empowered professionals throughout the school:** Leadership of the school’s vision was always distributed amongst multiple teachers and leaders - with complementary styles and approaches. This diversity meant there was open dialogue, challenge and robust decision making. Across very different schools, leaders created a culture that trusted, empowered and motivated staff to do a fantastic job for their students. This culture resulted in coherence, even in large and busy schools - students and staff were always able to articulate the shared vision of what made their school unique and distinctive.