



# nishkam school journal

The Journal of Nishkam Schools Trust

A MULTIFAITH SIKH ETHOS ACADEMY OF SCHOOLS FOR ALL

VOLUME SEVEN

# Nishkam Vision



At Nishkam Schools, our pupils explore the divine context of humanity and wonder of all creation. They not only learn about, but also learn from, the wisdom of religions and in so doing explore the infinite human potential to do good unconditionally. We support pupils to develop aspects of their own religious, spiritual or human identities. They learn about serenity through prayer and humility in service and in so doing, they deepen their own respective faith, and respect the common purpose of all religious traditions, as well as respecting the beliefs of those with no faith tradition. They explore the unique divinity of the individual, and our common humanity.

At Nishkam Schools, we believe that the fostering of human virtues forms the foundation of all goodness. Our curricula are carefully enriched to allow experiences where our pupils, teachers and parents alike learn to grow through a conscious focus on virtues. Our virtues-led education approach helps to provide guidance to enable pupils to understand their choices in order to help lead better lives. Our pupils become self-reflective and flourish; they are able to build strong, meaningful relationships and understand their responsibilities to the global family and all creation, founded in faith.

At Nishkam Schools, our pupils and staff alike aim to become the best human beings they can possibly be, in all aspects of spiritual, social and academic life. We foster a school culture which inspires optimism and hope, as well as determination and confidence, for all to achieve their best possible. This is accomplished through a rich and challenging curriculum, along with excellent teaching to nurture awe and wonder. Pupils gain a breadth and depth of knowledge and a love of learning to achieve their full potential.

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# Learning Outside of The Classroom - Coventry Cathedral Visit



By Catherine Prior  
Assistant Headteacher  
Nishkam Primary School Birmingham



Thinking back to our own school days, we often remember those unique, inspiring moments. The moments that left us in awe and with a fire of enjoyment flickering inside us.

At Nishkam Primary School Birmingham, we aim to bring excellence and enjoyment into children's education for them to grow a love of learning and to excel. This excellence and love of learning is fostered through these unique and inspiring moments. But how are these achieved?

One way in which our school provides for these moments is through educational visits; they invite pupils to discover new places, new people and new experiences in different and exciting ways. Ofsted states: 'Learning outside the classroom contributes significantly to raising standards and improving pupils personal, social and emotional development'. Why? Well, take a moment to consider the professional training we attend out of our own setting; going to new places to develop our practice and to see other professionals. This can help us to put things into context, be inspired and allows us the opportunity to 'take a step back' and reflect. It is the same for pupils: taking pupils out of their classroom setting provides them with the opportunity to see things in context, be inspired and gives them time to reflect.

In the Spring term, Year 6 visited Coventry Cathedral. The pupils learned about the effects 'The Blitz' had on the city of Coventry, especially the cathedral, and learned what it was like to live during those times. The pupils made links to their classroom learning and built on their knowledge through interactive activities, such as a wartime classroom, and were given chances to pose questions to the knowledgeable tour guides.

As part of the day, Year 6 had the privilege to view 'The Knife Angel' created by artist Alfie Bradley and the British Ironwork Centre. This monument is a status against violence, aggression

and knife crime. On initial viewing, a wave of excitement and amazement surged throughout the crowd. The sheer magnitude of the statue was breath-taking. Then, as pupils began to surround the figure, a silence fell. They just stared at the thousands of knives welded solidly together and at the carefully laid out tributes left to lost loved ones. This moment allowed the pupils to just think – reflect. Gradually, questions were asked, and thoughts shared. These questions and thoughts led to deep, meaningful conversations about knife crime, peace and reconciliation. The thoughts of the children flowed, their opinions expressed and in return their learning was enriched.

Throughout the day, the pupils' learning of World War II continued to be interwoven with the theme of 'peace and reconciliation': they visited the cathedral's Unity Chapel, where they discovered its hidden message of all continents uniting together as one; they explored the Reconciliation Statue in the old ruins to discuss the powerful message of reuniting people and countries after war; and they took part in the Litany of Reconciliation, which was a led prayer around peace and reconciliation. This prayer acted as a reminder that we must begin by reflecting on the wrongs in on our own lives if we are to pray for the problems of the world.

On the journey home, it was clear the pupils, and staff, left truly inspired. Pupils spoke freely with their friends and teachers about the day and left with an enriched learning experience.

As Coventry is the 'City of Peace and Reconciliation', NPSB will be looking at ways in which we can use the message of this city, and the visit to the cathedral, in the development of our curriculum; linking it closely to our virtues and the Charter of Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

# Vaisakhi Reception at 10 Downing Street

By Harnoor Kaur  
**Pupil**  
**Nishkam School West London**

Attending the Downing Street Vaisakhi Celebration was a privilege for all of us and an incredible experience that was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Pupils and staff from Nishkam High School Birmingham and Nishkam School West London attended. I saw things that I have never seen before in my life and I am sure all my peers will agree with me that this occasion was one of the most memorable moments in our lives. As soon as we left from our school an exhilarating and overwhelming feeling took control of my body. I was both nervous and excited for what was to come. We arrived at number 10 Downing Street and were greeted by staff and mentors. We walked up a red velvet staircase with gold plating and were ushered into a room where we saw photographs of all the previous Prime Ministers. Following this we entered a large dining room where all the important dinner meetings take place. A short while later, we awaited the Prime Minister who entered the room through a large white door and we presented her with gifts from the Nishkam School Trust. This included

a painting of the Five Beloved Ones to mark the birth of the Khalsa. Sometime later we performed our sacred music called Kirtan. We played traditional instruments and sang a melody in a traditional style. We sang our hearts out as we embraced the true meaning of Vaisakhi and shared it with the people of London. Afterwards the Prime Minister thanked us for coming and performing for all of the visitors as we celebrated this auspicious time of year together.

Just like my peers I will always remember this day and the special moments will forever stay in my heart.

We would like to thank everyone who made the Downing Street event possible and we hope to do more exciting things like this in the future.



# Nick Gibb MP Letter of Praise

Nishkam High School Birmingham



NISHKAM HIGH  
05 APR 2019  
SCHOOL

**Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP**  
Minister of State for School Standards

Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3BT  
tel: 0370 000 2288 [www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus)

Mr Damien Kearns  
Principal  
Nishkam High School  
Great King Street North  
Birmingham  
B19 2LF

29 March 2019

Dear Mr Kearns

I would like to congratulate you, your staff and pupils on the outstanding progress your pupils are making and your school's high level of EBacc entry in 2018.

Your school's Progress 8 score of 0.74 which is well above the national average, shows that you are amongst the top 6 per cent of state-funded mainstream schools in terms of the progress your pupils make between key stage 2 and the end of key stage 4.

With 93 per cent of your pupils entering the EBacc in 2018, your school is in the top 2 per cent of all state-funded mainstream secondary schools in the country. EBacc subjects provide a sound basis for careers beyond the age of 16 and can also enrich pupils' studies, giving them a broad general knowledge that will enable them to participate in and contribute to society.

We want to ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has the chance to study the EBacc at GCSE, which is why I was delighted to see your results.

Thank you for your work in continuing the drive towards higher academic standards, and congratulations again to you and your staff for your hard work and professionalism.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nick Gibb'.

**Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP**  
Minister of State for School Standards

# Summer GCSE Results 2019

Nishkam High School Birmingham



By Damien Kearns  
Principal  
Nishkam High School Birmingham

This year, Nishkam High School Birmingham (NHSB) celebrated its third set of GCSE examination results. The 2019 cohort achieved outcomes that further affirmed Nishkam School Trust's (NST), 'faith inspired, virtues led approach' to education.

A faith inspired, virtues led approach to education holds children in the centre of everything that the school does and their personal development is of paramount importance. Our children are not defined by the results that they achieve but rather by the virtues that they develop and the way in which those virtues allow them to serve humanity.

However, the 2019 GCSE outcomes do provide a three-year view of the school's academic performance that is of significance to students, their parents, the community and to both local and national audiences. There is a plethora of

educational data available through which GCSE outcomes can be assessed and this article concerns itself with the two principal measures – Attainment 8 (A8) and Progress 8 (P8).

Attainment 8 is a measure of a pupil's average grade across a set suite of eight subjects. Once calculated, this A8 score is compared to the average A8 score of all pupils nationally with the same prior attainment at KS2 in order to calculate a pupils Progress 8 score.

A school's P8 score is usually between -1 and +1. A score of +1 means that pupils in that school achieve one grade higher in each qualification than other similar pupils nationally. A score of -1 means they achieve one grade lower. The average P8 score of all secondary schools nationally is 0.

Progress 8	2019*	2018	2017
NHSB	+0.93*	+0.74	+0.97
National	-0.02*	-0.02	-0.03

Attainment 8	2019*	2018	2017
NHSB	55.5*	54.8	55.1
National	46.5*	46.5	46.3

\*2019 results are unvalidated

The significance of these 2019 outcomes are twofold:

They will place the school in the top quintile of all schools nationally for **both** progress and attainment;

They will also place the school in the top quintile of all schools nationally for **both** progress and attainment for **three consecutive years. That consistency in terms of quality is the confluence of outstanding staff and outstanding students.**

NST believes that 'all children can, and will, achieve.' The Trust is also unrelenting in its pursuit of 'excellence for all'. The 2019 examination results highlighted these commitments in several key ways:

Students with low prior attainment at Key Stage 2 achieved a P8 score of +0.90;

Students with middle prior attainment at Key Stage 2 achieved a P8 score of +1.20;

The most disadvantaged students, those with Pupil Premium (35% of our cohort), achieved an A8 score of 52.04; this is above the *national* A8 score for all non-Pupil Premium students of 49.89;

Almost 25% of all grades were top grades (9 – 7 and their equivalent);

Over 20% of the cohort achieved an A8 score of 70 points or more (equivalent to all 'A' grades);

More importantly, these school outcomes disseminate into individual student accomplishments. Whilst they do not define who are children are or who they will become, they do create options in terms of next steps. We are confident that imbued with our faith inspired, virtues led approach to life and education, equipped with the appropriate qualifications for the next stage of their life journey, our Nishkam children will be great ambassadors for all that we represent and will serve humanity well.

# Building a curriculum to transform... a curriculum 'Grand Design'



By Ela McSorley  
Director for Learning, Teaching  
and Curriculum

The curriculum is one of the most important aspects of any school: it is the map of learning, which details the educational journey our young learners will undertake through the rivers of geography, the kings and queens of history, the Gurus, saints and prophets of religious studies to the works of art and literature spanning from the ancient worlds of Greece, China and India to the modern day. It comprises of key concepts, powerful knowledge, mathematical and scientific equations, specialist vocabularies and universal truths; all of which help our learners to make sense of the world around them and their role within it.

Underpinning our curriculum at Nishkam School Trust is our mission statement:

To empower children with virtues that enable them to excel academically and spiritually inspiring them to serve humanity selflessly (Nishkam), with an abundance of love, compassion and forgiveness.

Our curriculum and schools are built around our vision to ensure we remain:

Faith-inspired: learning from the wisdom of religion

At Nishkam Schools, our pupils explore the divine context of humanity and wonder of all creation. They not only learn about, but also learn from, the wisdom of religions and in so doing explore the infinite human potential to do good unconditionally. We support pupils to develop aspects of their own religious, spiritual or human identities. They learn about serenity through prayer and humility in service and in so doing, they deepen their own respective faith, and respect the common purpose of all religious traditions, as well as respecting the beliefs of those with no faith tradition. They explore the unique divinity of the individual, and our common humanity.

Pupils are enabled to commit to and practise their faith/belief through knowledge, and experiential learning. Commitment in faith maybe demonstrated by pupils through faith initiation (e.g., Baptism/Amritdhari) and regular faith practice (prayer, service and understanding elements of scripture).

Virtues-led: nurturing compassionate, responsible human beings

At Nishkam Schools, we believe that the fostering of human virtues forms the foundation of all goodness. Our curricula are carefully enriched to allow experiences where our pupils, teachers and parents alike learn to grow through a conscious focus on virtues. Our virtues-led education approach helps to provide guidance to enable pupils to understand their choices in order to help lead better lives. Our pupils become self-reflective and flourish; they are able to build strong, meaningful relationships and understand their responsibilities to the global family and all creation, founded in faith.

Pupils learn to experience faith through lived out righteous living in thought, action and deed.

Aspiring for Excellence: in all that we do.

At Nishkam Schools, our pupils and staff alike aim to become the best human beings they can possibly be, in all aspects of spiritual, social and academic life. We foster a school culture which inspires optimism and confidence, hope and determination for all to achieve their possible best. This is accomplished through a rich and challenging curriculum, along with excellent teaching to nurture awe and wonder. Pupils gain a breadth and depth of knowledge and a love of learning to achieve their full potential.

Our curriculum is carefully considered and constructed by the trust, school and subject leaders to ensure sufficient challenge, to promote thinking and reflection and to support our learners to acquire the powerful knowledge they need in order to attain academic excellence. Reading and research has informed the work of the curriculum at every level in our schools, to secure the very best for our children and to provide access for all. Additional aims such as promoting social cohesion as well as working towards peace, tolerance and respect are at the forefront of any planning and thinking about our curriculum.

In order to evaluate the curriculum, leaders, directors and governors need to have a clear shared understanding of the purpose of education. As our patron, Bhai Sahib-Ji explains: 'Every human being carries the seeds of greatness within.' It is the job of our schools to find, cultivate and nurture these seeds:

'A parallel and broader approach to education emphasises the need to draw out, cultivate and sustain innate human values alongside the intellect in order to develop the whole individual and to enrich the way in which we coexist and move forward together. This approach has its roots in the Latin verb educare, which means 'to bring out that which is within'. The process of education is thus intended to draw out human characteristics, values and skills for living which are latent in every human being.'

Our trust offers a holistic approach to the curriculum with the aim of nurturing character through virtues and faith, building significant knowledge, cultivating critical thinking and nurturing leadership, in the widest sense, through communication, collaboration and community. The curriculum is necessarily aspirational, focused on excellence and on securing in all learners a love of learning through the acquisition of knowledge, the study and practice of faith, and an understanding of the world around them.

We might consider the following formula to express our curriculum:

Well Educated = Ethics (Knowledge + Thought + Leadership) (Barber et al., Oceans of Innovation).

Which shares much in common with ancient approaches to the curriculum, through the Trivium, with its blend of dialectics, grammar and rhetoric.

'the explicit combination of knowledge plus thinking and leadership, underpinned by ethics, is the combination most likely to unleash in young people the qualities which will enable them to be innovative in their work and life and constructive in their engagement with communities at every level from local to global...'

(Martin Robinson, Trivium 21c)

It is this conscious interleaving of faith, virtues and powerful knowledge that we believe works and helps to ensure all children can and will achieve. The curriculum is necessarily academic and rigorous, organised into separate subject disciplines, delivered by passionate subject experts and underpinned by our language of virtues.

In 2019 we are re-examining our curriculum, as we do routinely, to ensure we are building a 'grand design', a curriculum infused with quality, craftsmanship and excellence to secure engagement and passion from all our learners. In this process we use the national curriculum and our knowledge of the UK assessment system to prepare our learners well for the examinations they will sit. However, our curriculum goes far beyond this to consider a global outlook, spiritual fulfilment, dedicated time to practice and deepen faith and to consider our own personal development through practising living through virtues.

The review of the curriculum considers the following components:

Curriculum Intent: the framework for setting out the aims

of a programme for education, including the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage

Implementation of the Curriculum: translating that framework over time into a structure and a narrative, within an institutional context

Impact: evaluating what knowledge and understanding pupils have gained against expectations

In the implementation phase, within schools, leaders ask several important questions to support review and construction of the curriculum maps and narrative:

- What is the end point? What does excellence look like?
- What is the narrative for our curriculum? (The story which links together the different disciplines and helps make explicit the connections and learning for our students.)
- What is the threshold or substantive concepts for each subject?
- What is the key content (knowledge)?
- How does this link to knowledge in different subject areas?
- How are we creating coherence and emphasising connections?

As well as considering the knowledge and substantive concepts students need to acquire in each subject, we focus on how to develop skills and the following core attributes:

- Leadership
- Virtues
- Oracy
- Excellence

Our subject hubs and lead practitioners support the creation of resources to share this subject knowledge, from curriculum maps, topic or unit plans and knowledge organisers so that the content can be studied and considered in advance by students and parents alike.

So, how will we know whether our curriculum has been successful?

There is evidence already in the service and participation in civic engagement our students undertake and in the results, they achieve in their examinations. However, our curriculum prepares them for life beyond the school gates; we maintain the lofty aspiration to support our children to follow a virtuous path, contributing significantly and positively to society and within their own family lives, flourishing as good human beings. Time will tell whether we have achieved this, but the outlook is positive.

# Creating a CPD programme to impact on subject knowledge



By Andrew Brown  
**Assistant Principal**  
Nishkam High School Birmingham

## Why Focus on Professional Development?

The research evidence is clear that the most important action that schools can take to improve outcomes for students is supporting their teachers to be more effective, and the most reliable way to achieve this is to develop a professional culture where teachers are continually adapting and refining their skills and methods. A 2007 study of several randomised controlled trials of well-designed CPD (Continued Professional Development) suggested it had an average Effect Size of +0.56 which would put it in the 'High' effectiveness grouping in the Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit.

## Why did we adapt our CPD plan?

Schools cannot be the 'fountain of all knowledge', certainly not all on their own. However, schools can now benefit from the growth of learning communities such as 'ResearchED' and 'The Chartered College', the ever-increasing number of educational books being written, professional associations increasing their online presence to name but a few of the ways in which good practice is being shared; it would, therefore, be prudent to 'tap in' to these rich resources. This is one of the driving forces behind our CPD plan – to inform our staff with the best information, best evidence, best guidance that is available both within our school and beyond.

## What has changed?

Our previous model was dominated by whole school CPD, often covering core priorities of the school, with very similar training provided to all staff. Whole school CPD is a vital part

of professional learning. It has the staff together as a 'learning community' and it can impart key messages that need to be consistently followed by all staff. However, there is one slight weakness with CPD, it cannot always support the nuances of subject specific requirements, such as schemes of learning or assessment or teacher specific requirements, which include how to plan a 'reteach' lesson.

Our new approach has split CPD into three strands; one for whole school CPD, the second for faculty level CPD and the third for individual CPD. This kept the ability to drive whole school improvement whilst providing space for teachers and departments to take ownership of their own development in ways which relate to their own subject discipline.

## Why increase the amount of subject specific professional development?

An active decision has been made to try and increase the amount of subject specific CPD available to staff. This approach has been supported by The Wellcome Trust's 'Developing Great Teaching Report' that states: 'Schools that have the poorest academic or inspection results are the least likely to prioritise subject-specific professional development'; whilst CUREE's 2015 report articulates that, 'subject-specific Continuous Professional Development (CPD) – by which we mean programmes which enhance teachers' subject knowledge and/or their ability to teach in specific subjects – has a greater impact on pupil outcomes than generic pedagogic CPD'. Christine Counsell summarised this nicely when she argued, 'Where SLTs have tried to reach into pedagogy with generic strategies that fail to attend to subject distinctiveness, all manner of distortions have occurred'.

# Improving the teacher's knowledge of the subject and respecting the individual nature of the subjects through our CPD delivery will lead to better quality of lessons delivered to pupils in the classroom.

Improving the teacher's knowledge of the subject and respecting the individual nature of the subjects through our CPD delivery will lead to better quality of lessons delivered to pupils in the classroom. This mantra is the fundamental principle behind the CPD plan and future professional development that teachers receive.

## What does it look like?

At the time of writing, the current level of CPD being completed has surpassed expectation. Staff at the school have enjoyed the freedom to enhance subject knowledge, strengthen an area of previous uncertainty and reconnect their passion for their subject. We have staff who've attended an array of Saturday conferences, from 'ResearchED's National Conference' to the UCL's, 'Unpacking the Holocaust'. Teachers are engaging with subject associations knowledge enhancement looking at issues such as 'Marine debris and the impact on Iceland' and 'Presentation of the development of Shakespeare's rhetorical style from Plutarch and Ovid'. Language teachers are engaging with seminars from experts in their fields and mathematicians are attending twilight meetings labelled 'Thinking Hard about Algebra'. Teachers are reading articles about educational research, signing books out of the staff library and engaging in the latest blogs around their subject area. We live in a time where there is a wealth of information at our fingertips and this is no different for teachers. Maximising the opportunities to access information beyond the school gates, provides the opportunity to develop understanding of teaching beyond the limitations of a single school.

## What has been the outcome so far?

The depth and variety of CPD that has been received in the first half of the year has naturally increased due to the implementation of more faculty and individually tailored CPD.

However, more pleasing, is a culture of engagement with the subject discipline and latest evidence that has emerged. For example, 'ResearchED' sessions are finding their way into faculty meetings; 'Teach Meets' ideas are being trialled in lessons and academic curriculum thinkers are being quoted in faculty development plans. Internally, our first voluntary educational reading meeting had ten attendees, our latest one had twenty-one; teachers are buying in to the CPD vision and the school, as a whole, is more informed because of it.

## Final thoughts

I am extremely encouraged by the way the CPD plan has been embraced by the staff at Nishkam High School. Once we are able to review a whole year view, looking at the CPD received and impact that this has had on practice at Nishkam, we will be able to make informed judgements on its success and areas we would like to develop further. To use a phrase from the Educational Endowment Foundation - we are often making decisions about education by using 'best bets' based on the evidence we have. All the evidence points towards effective CPD being specific and closely related to the subject domain you teach; our 'best bet' has been placed and I am excited to review the impact of this.

# Echo Eternal - an Arts project to capture survivor testimony, which captured our hearts



Hannah Moody,  
**History Lead**  
**Nishkam High School Birmingham and**  
Ela McSorley  
**Director for Learning and Teaching**



In January 2018, Nishkam High School Birmingham became one of fourteen local schools involved in a once-in-a-lifetime project about the Holocaust entitled Echo Eternal. The project aims to preserve the memory of Holocaust survivors, using the arts to examine their testimony and to leave a legacy through educating young people about the Holocaust, and its contemporary relevance. When embarking on this project we could not have predicted the wonderful, thoughtful, mature and, at times, profound responses from the students who worked together on this project.

Each school involved in Echo Eternal was gifted one piece of survivor testimony, captured by Natasha Kaplinsky, for the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation. Nishkam High School was gifted the testimony of Zdenka Fantolva, a Czechoslovakian Holocaust survivor, now living in London. We have all received plenty of gifts in our lives, but this is one incredible, precious and extraordinary gift.

When the Nazi regime occupied her home town in Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Zdenka was a teenager and a keen pianist; she had no idea of what was about to happen. Within a short time, her family began to be subjected to the antisemitic persecution that was being enacted in Germany and Austria; Zdenka was forced to leave school and her father had to hand over his business. It was during this time that she met Arno, a Jewish man from the Sudetenland, who became her boyfriend. Under Nazi occupation, Zdenka, unable to go to school with her friends, but keen to learn, went to Prague where she was able to learn English. In 1942, her father was arrested, and later murdered by the Nazis. She never saw him again.

As Nazi persecution across Europe developed into mass murder, Zdenka, her family, and Arno's, were deported to Terezin, a concentration camp in northern Czechoslovakia. It was here, in June 1942, that Arno snuck into the female barracks one night to give Zdenka an engagement ring, she would treasure forever. Zdenka does not know how Arno managed to make this hand-crafted tin ring for her in such terrible circumstances, but it is beautifully engraved with the date 13-6-1942, the date of their final meeting.

When Zdenka showed this tin ring to our students on a

recent visit to her home in central London, she explained how she wished the ring could 'talk'. Arno was deported 'to the East' the next day, and almost certainly murdered upon arrival at his destination.

Zdenka remained at Terezin until 1944, when the camp was liquidated. She, her mother and sister were then deported to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. On arrival at Auschwitz, Zdenka bravely hid Arno's ring under her tongue – an act of resistance and love that could have cost her her life. Over the next months, Zdenka was moved across central Europe, mostly on foot in freezing conditions, to a further five concentration camps, wearing nothing but the green evening dress and men's shoes she had been given upon arrival at Auschwitz. Arno's engagement ring hung from a string, hidden under her dress and never left her possession through her remarkable journey.

In 1945, Zdenka was in Bergen Belsen concentration camp when it was liberated by British soldiers. Two weeks after the British had arrived, she was still at the far end of the camp in the appalling conditions, awaiting rescue. She was extremely sick as she had contracted typhus and felt sure she was at the end of her life. However, one evening, too weak to stand, she managed to crawl from her hut to a British Red Cross station. Here she was discovered by a British soldier who told her to go back to her hut. Using the English, she had learnt in Prague some years earlier; she spoke to the soldier. She told him that if he made her return then she would certainly die, but that he could save her life by leaving her there until morning. Zdenka described how, as she spoke to him, his 'military mask slipped to reveal a human face, full of compassion and understanding'. The next morning the soldier returned with a stretcher for Zdenka to be taken to hospital in the ambulance; he broke army orders to save her life. She survived but was never able to thank him for his selfless act. In later life she dedicated the book of her survival to him, the 'unknown soldier'.

After watching Zdenka's testimony, pupils and teachers at Nishkam High School Birmingham, worked with an artist in residence: Roz at Complex Simplicity, and a local film company, Vyka, to put together an incredibly moving film,



and beautiful artistic creations; these included lanterns, a patchwork quilt, canvas paintings, and written letters. The artistic 'Echo' they created aimed to preserve Zdenka's story and shine a spotlight on the values and virtues that the students have learnt from working with it. The film, encapsulating it all, will eventually be housed in a new Holocaust memorial exhibition in the gardens of Parliament.

In December, the students shared their completed 'Echo' with an audience of students from other schools, sixth form students, teachers, and parents. The atmosphere in the room was extremely emotional – as they 'echoed' the story to their audience, it was clear that they had learnt so much, not just about history but about the values of love, determination and compassion. Afterwards, they spoke confidently with their guests to answer their questions and share their experiences.

In January, students acted as young curators at an exhibition of 12 school's work in Birmingham Central library for the day. Here they guided members of the public around the exhibition and they met and talked to journalist Natasha Kaplinsky about their experiences. In the evening, to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, the Echo Eternal project held an evening celebration event at Birmingham Town Hall. 'Horizons' brought together the 'echoes' from all 12 schools, into a celebratory performance of theatre, music and dance to shine a light of civic optimism through the darkness of hate, prejudice and extremism. A number of the students, parents, and staff involved in the project attended this event; it was an inspirational evening in so many ways.

In February, the students wrote heartfelt letters of thanks to Zdenka for sharing her testimony and explained how much they had learnt from her. The students were delighted that Zdenka wrote back, inviting them to come to her home. On March 1st, we travelled to London to meet her. The experience was unforgettable; the students listened to her speak, they asked questions and she even allowed them to hold the engagement ring given to her by Arno. Returning home that evening, students made some moving comments:

'We are the last generation who will meet the survivors.'

'She gave us a duty – to fight against Holocaust denial, to keep going and share the stories and the truth.'

'She gave us advice: "every day is a gift... don't give up." "It's made us question the trivial things we complain about."'

As a result of our work on the Echo Eternal project, Nishkam High School Birmingham has committed to be a UCL Beacon school for Holocaust Education, reaching out not only to all schools in our trust, but to local schools, to help inform, educate and reflect on lessons learned. Zdenka's testimony has gone beyond NHSB and was shared with secondary teachers from across the trust during a Continued Professional Development (CPD) day at NSWL. It has begun to inspire staff to think about how they may

incorporate Holocaust education in their own subject areas, as we work towards a multi-disciplinary approach to Holocaust education. The History and Religious Studies departments at NHSB have also worked in conjunction with UCL to produce schemes of work which enable students to understand the Jewish faith and embrace the complexity of the Holocaust. The new schemes promote academic rigour, are driven by survivor testimony, and are underpinned by UCL research. Above all, they promote the values of tolerance and respect, and help students to reflect seriously on their own sense of moral purpose. It is through this that perhaps we can better understand how these atrocities might be avoided in the future.

Every pupil and teacher who has so far worked on the various parts of the project has been moved, but also incredibly interested – what is fascinating, is how little prior knowledge many people had; so for all these reasons the approaches we are taking are having a huge and very real impact on our school, and trust.

We have pledged to UCL to further the work of education about the Holocaust to build towards a lasting peace and a world without hatred and discrimination, through:

- committing to creating and delivering schemes of learning in our curriculum which educate about the Holocaust and other genocides and support our students to consider their own virtues in light of this.
- educating parents and the wider community through educational evenings and civic engagement projects.
- hosting UCL CPD for staff at Nishkam School Trust and the wider educational community.
- continuing our work by creating new 'echoes' every year across each of our schools in the Nishkam School Trust, so that these important messages are preserved, and lessons are never forgotten.

From the very start of the project, we have immersed ourselves in Zdenka's story and have learnt so much more about the Holocaust and the impact on ordinary people, as a result. We have watched our students build real understanding and compassion for what happened and a determination to ensure the memories and truths are preserved and lessons learnt are shared with future generations. It is no exaggeration to say that this project has been life-changing; the memories, we as teachers and the children will take from the incredibly warm, brave and vivacious Zdenka, will remain with us forever. As will the duty we have been given by her: to ensure no-one denies the Holocaust. Where we can, we will educate and set about changing minds. As the passage of time elapses, our heroes and survivors become part of history and our own 'echo' helps to keep this story alive and allow its crucial messages to reverberate, helping us to learn and to ensure our world is a better place, as a result.

# Developing Excellent Teaching



**Harmander Singh Dhanjal**  
**Headteacher**  
**Nishkam Primary School Wolverhampton**

'Every child can and will achieve' is the starting point in our schools across the trust. This short, succinct statement is underpinned by the effort of each individual within our organisation.

Excellence is not a coincidence nor something which happens by accident, it is about having secure subject knowledge and a thorough understanding of pedagogy to enable learners to achieve to their fullest potential. The role of the teacher is the most important aspect that fosters children's engagement in their learning journey within any school. At Nishkam, we value this highly and have developed the 'Framework for Great Teaching', which is a fantastic tool for teacher development. Teachers are able to focus on key areas:

- Pedagogical Subject Knowledge
- Quality of Instruction: Modelling and Scaffolding
- Classroom Management
- Classroom Climate: Excellence
- Teacher Beliefs
- Professional Behaviours

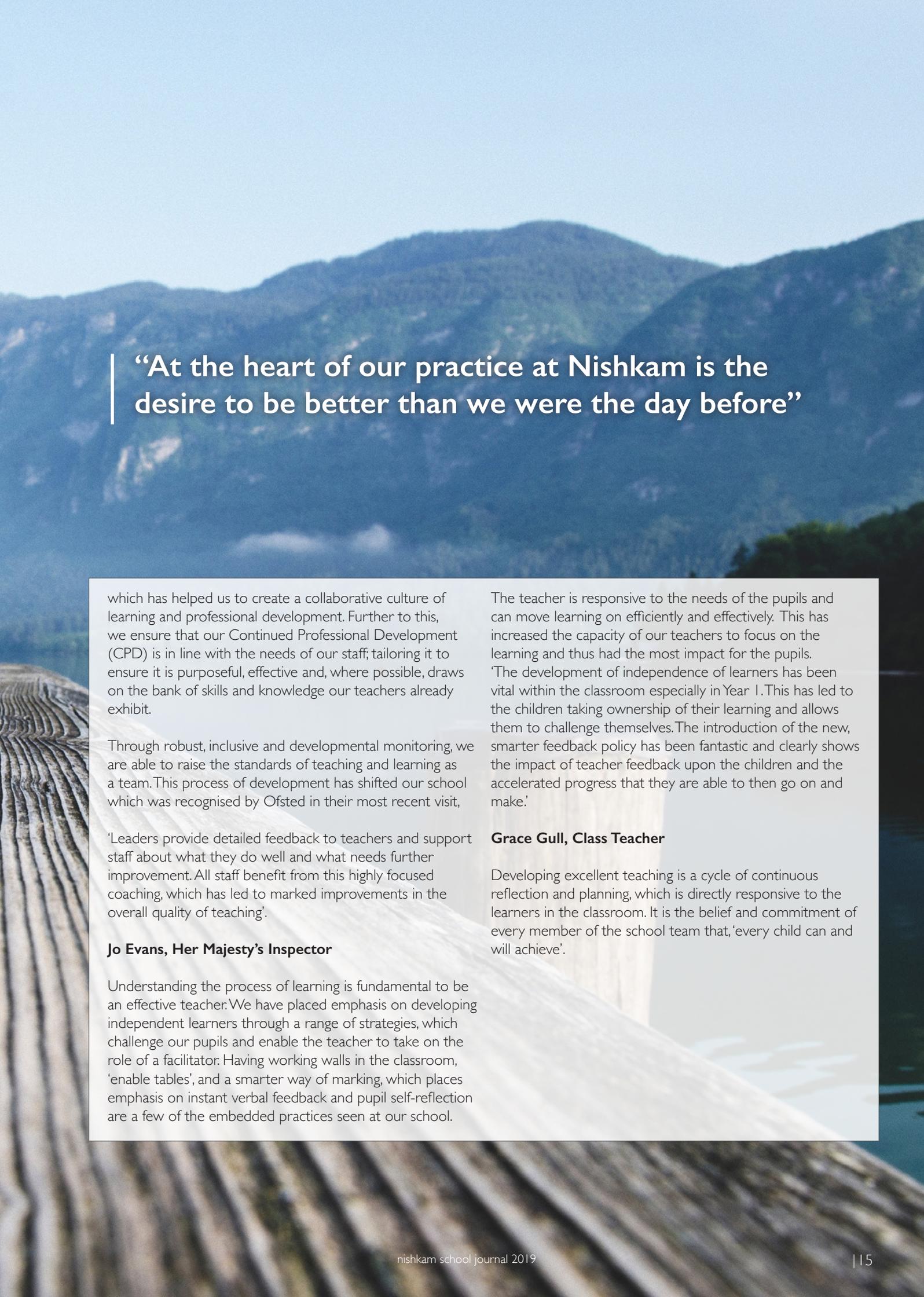
Effective teaching is measured through the progress learners make through their journey. Creating a culture of professional development that is not based on judgement but on pupil progress, which has enabled a climate for quality first teaching (QFT) to be the talk in the staffroom and beyond. Teachers are empowered to be experts in different areas and use research to try, test and evaluate with their class.

A study cited in the Sutton Trust research paper evidences in schools where teachers work in supportive professional environments, they continue to improve after three years, whilst least supportive schools showed a decline. We invest in our teacher development from the newly qualified to the most experienced teacher through a planned approach with learning at the centre. We strive for excellence by not only ensuring our pupils are the best that they can be, but also our staff. This academic year we have shifted to a teacher development programme where each teacher has an individualised focus derived through the 'Framework for Great Teaching'.

'At the heart of our practice at Nishkam is the desire to be better than we were the day before. We believe that every teacher needs to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better. We are always striving for excellence. By placing so much emphasis on developing our staff, we ensure that the quality of our teaching is ever growing, and our pupils benefit from the best teaching possible.'

## **Sophie Worthington, Assistant Headteacher – Learning & Teaching**

Teachers are mentored and coached through their journey by leaders and are required to carry out research to implement in their practice. Once implemented and evaluated the results are shared with other colleagues through our weekly 'learning and teaching blast'. Through this approach teachers learn from one another; they challenge the findings and observe one another in peer observations,



“At the heart of our practice at Nishkam is the desire to be better than we were the day before”

which has helped us to create a collaborative culture of learning and professional development. Further to this, we ensure that our Continued Professional Development (CPD) is in line with the needs of our staff; tailoring it to ensure it is purposeful, effective and, where possible, draws on the bank of skills and knowledge our teachers already exhibit.

Through robust, inclusive and developmental monitoring, we are able to raise the standards of teaching and learning as a team. This process of development has shifted our school which was recognised by Ofsted in their most recent visit,

‘Leaders provide detailed feedback to teachers and support staff about what they do well and what needs further improvement. All staff benefit from this highly focused coaching, which has led to marked improvements in the overall quality of teaching.’

#### **Jo Evans, Her Majesty’s Inspector**

Understanding the process of learning is fundamental to be an effective teacher. We have placed emphasis on developing independent learners through a range of strategies, which challenge our pupils and enable the teacher to take on the role of a facilitator. Having working walls in the classroom, ‘enable tables’, and a smarter way of marking, which places emphasis on instant verbal feedback and pupil self-reflection are a few of the embedded practices seen at our school.

The teacher is responsive to the needs of the pupils and can move learning on efficiently and effectively. This has increased the capacity of our teachers to focus on the learning and thus had the most impact for the pupils. ‘The development of independence of learners has been vital within the classroom especially in Year 1. This has led to the children taking ownership of their learning and allows them to challenge themselves. The introduction of the new, smarter feedback policy has been fantastic and clearly shows the impact of teacher feedback upon the children and the accelerated progress that they are able to then go on and make.’

#### **Grace Gull, Class Teacher**

Developing excellent teaching is a cycle of continuous reflection and planning, which is directly responsive to the learners in the classroom. It is the belief and commitment of every member of the school team that, ‘every child can and will achieve’.

# Aspiration Programme – helping pupils to understand the link between learning and their futures



Sukhjeet Rai  
**Head of Primary Education**  
**Nishkam School West London**

Research by the charity Education and Employers shows that 36% of primary school children base their career aspirations on people they know, while a huge 45% rely on what they see on TV and in films. It is recognised that 60% of the types of jobs available today will not be available tomorrow because of the technological revolution. So, how are we widening the horizons of our pupils to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills to go on to have impactful and fulfilling working lives?

Earlier this year, we launched our 'Building Futures' plan, which aims to motivate and interest pupils in the world of work. The plan focuses on four key areas:

## 1) Career Insight Talks & Career Days

The more options pupils are aware of, the better decisions they can make for themselves. We have been inviting volunteers from a range of careers to deliver talks to the pupils. We have been mindful to challenge gender stereotypes in order to instil a sense of possibility and passion in pupils to pursue what they enjoy, regardless of their background, gender or socio-economic status.

This year, pupils have enjoyed working with Errol Lloyd, a former lawyer, who changed career to become an artist, author and sculptor. Pupils were fascinated to hear about his journey from the Inns of Court to publishing his first children's book. We have also had the pleasure of meeting Dr Garry Hunt, a NASA scientist, who was the only British scientist to be selected to work on the Voyager mission. Pupils were inspired to hear about his exciting career and to learn about the wide range of skills and disciplines required for this area of work.

During the summer term, we are really looking forward to our involvement with the Tate Year 3 Project with Turner Prize and Oscar-winning artist, Steve McQueen. Our Year 3 pupils will be visited by a photographer from the Tate gallery and will feature as part of the largest group portrait ever made in London. We are then hoping to visit the gallery to see the portrait on display.

## 2) Subject/Skill Specific Talks & Activities

Our virtues-led approach nurtures a range of skills which holds the pupils in good stead for the future. In addition, we would like our pupils to develop their critical and creative thinking skills, so we have revised our curriculum to include more opportunities for these skills to be taught. We have changed our approach to home learning by introducing creative projects and by making tasks more enquiry- and research-based. Pupils are encouraged to problem-solve, analyse information and develop ideas. This change has already enhanced the quality of work that is being submitted and in a recent survey, 95% of the pupils said that they felt this approach had helped them to better engage and enjoy learning more.

Our exciting new link with Oxford university will further support this work. We are one of the very few primary phases to be chosen to take a group of pupils to visit this prestigious university. Pupils will find out about the skills that are required to apply for courses, listen to talks by lecturers and find out about what university life is like at Oxford. We are thrilled by this very exciting development. We also look forward to working with Fergus Powell from Cambridge university, who will be delivering a talk to the pupils next term about the benefits of higher education and raising aspirations.

## 3) Enterprise Projects

Research shows what impact the contribution enterprise can make to the personal growth of pupils, as well as enhancing their life chances and choices. It can help them to become responsible citizens and effective contributors to society and at work, with a clear understanding of their roles in the world.

Pupils have been involved in some exciting entrepreneurial projects such as designing and marketing their own board game. Pupils carried out market research, designed and branded their own product. They then made their products

“We have high aspirations for our pupils and believe that there are no limits to what they can achieve in the future.”

and tested it out with their friends. We had so many creative end products, including a Nishkam-themed Monopoly game. We have planned other high-profile enterprise projects for next term, including pupils working in collaboration to set up a mini business.

We are also keen to ensure that our pupils have the knowledge and skills to value and manage money. Pupils have learned about savings, budgeting and borrowing through the 'City Pay it Forward' workshop. This organisation comprises of financial professionals who volunteer in schools to teach pupils essential life skills.

In addition, we are really looking forward to running the 'Fiver Challenge' this year. Pupils will use £5 pledges to get their business ideas off the ground during the four weeks of the 'Challenge', aiming to make as much profit as they can. Pupils will work together to decide what product or service they will invest their fivers in. Teams will source materials or products, prepare sales pitches, and plan selling events. At the end of the 'Challenge', pupils will repay their £5 pledges plus a 50p legacy contribution and decide how to spend or donate their profit. We cannot wait to see what ideas the pupils come up with.

Finally, our involvement in the WE project this year has really inspired our pupils to get involved in social change enterprise projects. The WE movement challenges young people to make a positive impact on the local and global issues they care about the most. Pupils were very fortunate to earn tickets to WE Day this year to partake in an annual celebration of youth social action. The highlight for them was to hear Prince Harry deliver a motivational speech and bring Meghan Markle onto the stage. The team of pupils are now working closely with the School Council to run projects that support both local and global charities.

#### 4) Health and Wellbeing Programme

Evidence shows that across the UK, mental health issues in children are increasing, while child wellbeing is deteriorating. Young people today have to navigate a complex and ever-changing world, facing challenges and pressures in numerous aspects of their life.

Emotional wellbeing is a clear indicator of academic achievement, success and satisfaction in later life. Therefore, an important part of the work to raise aspirations and prepare pupils for the future is to ensure that pupils have positive self-esteem and have the skills and knowledge to look after both their mental and physical wellbeing. Our Nishkam Values Passport and the Language of Values programme supports us in this aim, as pupils strive to strengthen their growth values.

In addition to this, we have partnered up with the Child, Adolescent and Mental Health team to deliver a social skills and resilience building programme that has been recognised by the World Health Organisation, as an effective means to prevent anxiety, improve the ability to focus and regulate emotions.

We have also established links with medical students from Imperial College London, who have visited the school to deliver talks about safe self-care and how to stay well in the future.

#### The Future

We have high aspirations for our pupils and believe that there are no limits to what they can achieve in the future. We want them to be happy, nurturing and insightful members of society, who think critically and solve problems in a loving way.

Through delivering the 'Building Futures' plan alongside our faith-inspired and virtues-led approach to education, we are empowering our pupils to be global active citizens, able to engage in and transform their societies and the world.

# Digital Learning at Nishkam School West London



Sarvinder Phalora  
**Curriculum Leader of Mathematics**  
**Nishkam School West London**

Embracing modern-age technology has been a key feature of early developments at Nishkam School West London (NSWL). Since our launch in September, when we envisaged that the pupils in our school would take ownership of their learning outside of the classroom, and enjoy doing so, we have been pleasantly surprised! By the end of their first month, learners from both our primary and secondary stages were introduced to SAM Learning; a leading digital learning partner for schools across the UK. Their response, ever since, has been nothing short of phenomenal.

As a collective, learners at NSWL currently account for over 14,000 hours of usage on SAM Learning, at an average of a little over 58 hours per individual. These figures become even more remarkable when you factor in that 78% of that time is spent outside of lesson hours. With little more than a prompt in the intended direction, we have observed students, aged as young as Year 3, become agents of their own learning in a way that we could never have previously imagined. Therefore, it is of my opinion that by embracing the works of the digital age, we may be able to harness an apparent enjoyability derived from engaging with curriculum content. But what, specifically, has SAM Learning tapped into, to produce such significant outcomes?

Instantaneous feedback and reward are two prominent features of the package that continue to make a lasting impact on our learners. For every challenge, exercise or revision task completed, they are guided through model solutions, which offer great opportunities for self-checking and reflection. Points, leader boards and usage figures add a competitive edge to the experience: updated with immediate effect and splashed across the homepage for all users to view once logged in. With year groups, forms and individual learners pitted against one another to this extent, the participation in activities and their associated reward becomes of paramount importance. Add in a customisable Avatar, with a range of outfits and hairstyles to choose from, and the whole experience becomes an, almost, personal one.

Gamification is at the heart of what has made SAM Learning an instant success at NSWL, but even that, alone, may not necessarily guarantee sustainability. With over 100 set tasks, across a range of subjects and curriculum stages, teaching staff have played an integral part in exploring this technological approach to learning with students. Homework has a clear majority, when we delve into what teachers have used SAM Learning for, accounting for around 90% of the tasks that have been set, with interventions forming the remainder of the tasks. This is somewhat unsurprising, given the high levels of student activity on the website already, as well as how incredibly easy it is for staff to monitor completion, or non-completion, both during and after a task has been set. The reporting functionality is a highly useful feature that ensures completion reports are communicated to the teacher, at the very moment the task has ended.

As a useful example, my most recent set task had an associated deadline of Sunday morning, by 9:00 am. By 09:02, my Outlook email inbox had received an email containing full details of each individual learner's attempt(s) on the task and to what extent it was completed, by percentage. It is widely accepted that for a teacher to assess the entire class's completion of their latest homework, with feedback on performance offered to all, within just a two-minute window, is a quite impossible feat. Demands on already strained teacher time mean that shortcuts to success such as this keep all parties satisfied. Learners at all attainment levels can be encouraged to persevere with the set task, making as many attempts as is necessary, without losing face in front of their peers. Teachers can gain a full picture of an individual learner's understanding, as demonstrated on their homework, with enough time freed up to choose the course of action they deem necessary to enact.

A third, and perhaps the most interested, stakeholder in the entire digital learning process is the parents. As with any new feature or development in our school, we believed that it was important for parents to be inducted into the process as well. Since September 2018, parent forums and events have been

## we were also able to shine a light on how they, themselves, could use technology to stay informed about their child's homework calendar.

used as opportunities to communicate these technological advances in homework setting. Whilst introducing them to SAM Learning and the role that it would play at NSWL, we were also able to shine a light on how they, themselves, could use technology to stay informed about their child's homework calendar.

ShowMyHomework is an online organisational tool, designed to make homework confusion a thing of the past. Teaching staff are at the very start of the process: typing details of the homework they've set, as well as the date it is due. Additional details may also include estimated completion time, links to particular web pages, YouTube video links, as well as any other relevant attachments. Learners are then notified about the homework, by email, and are actively encouraged to check in and read the details of the set task. Last minute reminders also serve as a useful prompt for those who may have let the task slip their attention. However, the feature we have been most excited about is the mobile and tablet app for parents, which we have just as actively promoted.

Live notifications and updates in the homework calendar are instantaneously communicated to parents, via the app, in much the same way as they are to learners. Despite our initial concerns that such technologies might go beyond what parents could be expected to work with, we have seen a little under two-thirds of the students in Year 7 with parents registered to the app. With all interested stakeholders actively involved with the product features on offer, the setting and completing of homework has become one of the smoothest procedural routines at NSWL. Clarity of expectations and understanding at all stages underpin the success of any effective system implemented in schools. The relatively small-scale issues arising from homework non-completion are a pleasing outcome of a well-functioning system. Inevitably, there will always be a select

few who, despite even our best efforts, may not fulfil our expectations with regards to their home learning. However, with such a well-supported system in place, the onus largely remains on the learner, with very little room for manoeuvring.

It has been a rather whirlwind start to life at NSWL. However, one of the many successes has been the role that technology has played, being seamlessly incorporated into our daily routines and challenging the norms of teaching and learning. Across the curriculum, different subject areas are reaping the benefits of digital advances specific to their discipline. In mathematics, for example, Hegarty Maths has played a leading role in homework setting, which becomes valuable in the lead-up to Key Assessment Tasks, given the number of worked examples and virtual tuition on offer. In their music lessons, learners are introduced to Showbie, who pride themselves as the 'paperless classroom', where the pay-off between designated assignments and teacher feedback truly comes into its own, with the file sharing functionality being used.

There are countless examples of good practice that exist in NSWL classrooms. However, what has been most pleasing, this year has been the good practice we have seen beyond our classrooms. In much the same way that staff have embraced a digital approach to learning, our students have been just as receptive. It is much too soon to comment or make judgments about the extent of the impact on progress, owing to the technology being explored; however, we certainly feel that we have laid the foundations for future work in this area. The good habits we have observed this year are set to establish the future learning culture in our school: and that, we feel, can only be a good thing.



# Music Moves the Brain; Improving Reading Comprehension Through Song



**Matt Higgins**  
Year 6 Teacher and Reading Lead  
Nishkam Primary School Birmingham

Music does something to me. I don't know what it is. I don't know why a chord can say something to you, why it gives you a feeling, why it can move you, why it can talk to the very depths of your soul. I'm in awe of music. I'm in awe of musicians. There's a certain section in Ralph Vaughan Williams' 'Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus' that I cannot listen to when I'm away from home as it just makes me well up – it reminds me of everything; England, my family, my friends. I only need to hear the opening bars of Luciano Pavarotti's rendition of 'Nessun Dorma' and I'm instantly nine years old again, kicking a tiny Coca Cola football around the garden trying to emulate the skills of Lineker at the Italia 90 World Cup, sitting on the floor by my grandmother in a darkened living room watching Gazza's semi-final tears flow. Music does something to me, and it does it on a level that I can't quite understand; it's immaculate; it's magical.

It is not just the high-brow stuff either. I can still sing the jingles to countless adverts and television theme songs, first watched twenty-odd years ago, word for word perfect. I studied French at secondary school twenty-three years ago and yet I can still rattle off the French alphabet to the natty tune with which it was taught to us. The same applies to the English alphabet, it was learnt with a tune, as was the mnemonic to remember what happened to Henry VIII's wives or the order of the colours of the rainbow.

Neuroscientists have analysed the brain mechanisms related to memory, finding that words set to music are the easiest to remember. 'A noun's a special kind of word. It's any name you've ever heard. I find it quite interesting – a noun's a person, place or thing.' This is the Schoolhouse Rock song that taught me what nouns are and I have never forgotten it. Text learnt to music is better remembered when it is heard as a song rather than speech. Try and remember anything set to a tune and your powers of recall will be stronger: 'Now I've sung my ABC'.

Music has been an important mnemonic device for thousands of years. David C. Rubin is a specialist in autobiographical memory and oral traditions and in his ground-breaking book 'Memory in Oral Traditions' he explains how epic stories like Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey were passed down verbally using poetic devices. Before the narratives could be written down, they were chanted or sung. Oral tradition depended on memory.

The hippocampus and the frontal cortex are two large areas in the brain associated with memory and they take in a great deal of information every minute. Retrieving it is not always easy. It does not simply come when you ask it to. Music helps because it provides a rhythm and rhyme and sometimes alliteration which helps to unlock that information with cues. It is the structure of the song that helps us to remember it, as well as the melody and the images the words provoke.

So, with all this in mind I truly believe that using music in the classroom and harnessing its ability to etch moments in our mind is a really important way of engaging our learners. Especially in an age where our young learners are surrounded by a myriad of electronic, technological distractions; concentration-sapping social media; and the time vacuum of addictive online gaming. All of these modern vices provide instant quick hits of gratification and as educators it becomes more and more challenging to compete with them. How can I make my lessons more interesting than Fortnite? However, when we get it right, providing truly engaging stimulus, that is when the most authentic learning experiences can take place. Using songs and song lyrics to form a regular part of our reading lessons has proved to be a very useful way to engage learners and to encourage them to think of literacy as being more than just books. Above all, I want my class to read with greater understanding, to use key reading skills and to persevere through tough texts and using song lyrics allows me to do this almost by stealth. Learners should understand how language is used to convey meaning in every medium and I have found that using songs is one of the very best ways of doing this.

Stevie Wonder once said: 'Music, at its essence, is what gives us memories. And the longer a song has existed in our lives, the more memories we have of it'. Song lyrics are great for developing a broad range of comprehension skills and I always hope that those taught skills and key moments of learning will be forever attached in the minds of the learners in my classroom to the songs we have studied. Song lyrics are not only great for expanding vocabulary and introducing learners to a wide range of cultural references, but analysis of song lyrics develops broader comprehension and critical thinking skills. Learners can generate questions about the possible meaning of certain words, phrases, narratives, themes and symbolism and then make predictions and

inferences about meaning, confirming or rejecting these predictions and inferences as they read or listen to the lyrics. I call this phase of analysis 'queries and theories'. The focus is on the learners: how they interact with the text, and what they bring to the reading or listening process.

I think using song lyrics for comprehension tasks works so well because instead of having students simply recognising facts, it immediately encourages them to delve more deeply into a text. Almost instantly, they are utilising a range of reading skills to compare information; make connections with other parts of the text and their knowledge of the world; or use the information to create something new (such as writing a letter to the singer; or rewriting the song's narrative from a different point of view).

There are four main reasons that I think songs are so useful for improving higher-order comprehension and critical thinking skills:

1. Lyrics are short – songs are often very short texts, yet they can express a lot. This short length makes song lyrics ideal to develop specific skills intensively, or to zoom in on a particular learning approach. 'No One Knows Me Like the Piano' by Sampha, the 2017 Mercury Prize winner, is a perfect example of a song with just two verses and a chorus, but with so much impact and scope for analysis.

2. Lyrics usually follow a similar structure – songs are often predictable in their structure, especially pop songs. Such songs may raise questions and give background context first, before building up to a chorus that might answer those questions and express how the singer feels. As students are often familiar with the structure of song lyrics, it allows them to concentrate on meaning and overall comprehension. With a Year 5 class that I taught, I am utterly convinced that by analysing Billy Bragg's 'Everywhere' and The Dixie Chicks' 'Travellin' Soldier', which are both so poetic in structure and rhyming pattern, they have been great stepping stones and a gateway into the more challenging World War I poetry of Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke and Jessie Pope that we have analysed in Year 6.

3. Lyrics may express emotion – learners can identify with the singer's feelings or relate to their situation, which often encourages meaningful discussion in class. When analysing the lyrics of Katy Perry's song 'Firework' with a Year 3 class, not only did it help to embed the concepts of contractions, compound words and use of informal language, but the core message of the song lends itself so brilliantly to exploring the themes of self-belief, self-esteem, optimism, hope and faith. It is perfect for encouraging learners to reflect and to make connections between the song and their own experiences. Before you know it, a reading comprehension lesson has turned into a PSHE / Faith lesson and nobody sees the joins. When you have an enriched study of our

core virtues and values so intrinsically interwoven through our academic studies – that is when our teaching becomes truly harmonious, relevant, meaningful and memorable for our learners. They may not remember the exact lesson that they learnt how to use relative clauses correctly but there is a very high chance they will remember the lesson they deduced the protagonist's fate at the end of Tracy Chapman's 'Fast Car' or the sense of empowerment they felt when they unpicked and sang along to Keala Settle's magnificent anthem 'This Is Me'.

4. Lyrics are often vague – the language in song lyrics is often open to interpretation and therefore learners are more reliant on inferring meaning by searching for clues. Mysterious references are perfect for critical thinking skills, since they generate a lot of discussion and place learners at the centre of the learning process, by making the content personal. When the text can be understood differently by different people, the number of creative follow-up tasks is not only higher; but always much more engaging. During an inference lesson about the Tom Waits song 'What's He Building?', I had one learner using a range of clues to explain how there could be a murderer in the house, while the other learner used identical clues to suggest that it was an elf building toys for Santa. Marvellous! As long as those inferences have been made with credible evidence from the lyrics, the lesson has provided learners with the opportunity to fully engage with a complex song, analyse its contents and then practise key reading skills.

Reading comprehension is best taught when it is in context, relevant and is clearly forming an essential part of a whole curriculum approach to unlocking new information. For example, when studying World War II, our learners will want to discover more about that period when they are exposed to newspaper reports, the accounts of evacuees, reference books and novels set in that era such as 'Goodnight, Mister Tom' by Michelle Magorian, 'Carrie's War' by Nina Bawden, 'Rose Blanche' by Ian McEwan. Our learners are perceptive, discerning and thrive on making links between different texts. As is so often the case in the hectic build up to the end of KS2 SATS exams, our learners know when we have presented them with a random reading comprehension extract and set of questions about 'The History of Buttons', so completing it will feel like a chore. Using songs to teach reading comprehension is an exception to this – we can use them at any time. In my experience, music with wonderful, meaningful lyrics always provides an enlightening respite from the banality of an off-the-shelf comprehension text. Edward Bulwer Lytton, the writer and politician, is quoted as having declared: 'Music, once admitted to the soul, becomes a sort of spirit, and never dies'. Hopefully the lessons we teach will not either.

# The Value of Early Childhood Education



Parvinder Singh  
Director of Nishkam Nurseries

Positive experiences in their early years can benefit in developing social skills and their ability to learn, and good quality childcare has been shown to benefit children right through primary school.

The Early Year Foundation Stage (EYFS) is how government and professionals describe the time in a child's life between birth and age five.

At the heart of EYFS is the principle that young children need to play in order to have fun, make friends and to begin to learn and understand about the world around them. This is where foundations are laid, good or bad, for a child's future. A child's early years' experience should be happy, active, exciting, fun and secure.

I believe that each provider should not just be content to work to the EYFS framework standards, but endeavour to provide the best possible care and early education possible.

The aim, which we strive for at Nishkam Nurseries, is to create a foundation of knowledge and skills for each child, to prepare them for school and future education via value-led education.



According to current research, the first eight years of life is the period of human development where major development occurs. As a result, nutrition, human interaction, and value-led education during these years greatly impact a child's brain development. Conversely, poor nutrition and education, especially lack of playing and activity/ value-based education, can negatively impact a child's brain development. Therefore, the good quality early education a child receives can have lasting effects throughout their lives. Children are born ready, able and eager to learn. They actively reach out and interact with other people and the world around them. However, development is not an automatic process, it depends on each unique child being given opportunities to interact in positive relationship of enabling environments.

At Nishkam, we cater for each individual: every child in nursery has an individual learning programme that grows with them, week by week. Young children only need to have teeth coming through or a cold and they can regress a little, but just as quickly can surge forwards. It is very important not to push a child forwards or they wouldn't want to come to nursery but equally children should not



“it is paramount that all learning activities are carefully planned, well-structured and supported”



be held back and made to tread water, if they think we have lost interest in taking them forward on that day, momentum is lost and the child's confidence can suffer as a consequence.

There is also a vast difference in children who are born in September to those born in August; If you consider when the September babies are walking, the August babies are born. Therefore, it is paramount that all learning activities are carefully planned, well-structured and supported, within enabling environments to ensure that all children have appropriate experiences, which will allow every child to move to any reception class with confidence, social awareness and readiness for learning. Educating for confidence is central to Nishkam Nurseries.

In order to achieve these high standards, the children are obviously the main priority but in order for children to be happy and flourish in our care, we have to capture the central nerve of an early years' child .... Their parents!

Children feed from emotion and innate feeling. If a nursery mum or dad is already worrying about walking into a setting before they have left home, the child is also fretting, nothing needs to be said.

It is very important, therefore that parents see us as partners. In order to achieve this, a very slow settling process is needed, where the parents come to 'play' with their child for an hour or so, building up to the parent leaving for a short while, till both child and parent are separated happily.

However, that is not where a partnership should end. We continue to have what we call an 'open-door policy' where parents can join in at any time. We encourage parents not to wait for a parents' evening if they have a concern/ suggestion and we endeavour to see parents the very same day they made contact.

The end of a child's nursery education is a special time and marks the start of formal, full-time education.

It is a memorable, celebratory time for both the children and their parents; each child should leave feeling a special, valued individual and looking forward to embarking on the next chapter of their educational journey.

# World's Top Religious Leaders Issue Rare Joint Appeal

"Our advice is to make friends to followers of all religions."



By Carol Kuruvilla  
HuffPost US RELIGION  
15/06/2017



Religion is often viewed as a force that sows divisions between people. But the world's most prominent religious leaders have come together to present a different vision of how faith can work in the world.

In a rare move, major religious leaders - from Pope Francis to the Dalai Lama - issued a joint appeal Wednesday asking people to follow a simple bit of advice: Make friends with people of other faiths.

"Our advice is to make friends to followers of all religions," Ayatollah Sayyid Fadhel Al-Milani, one of the U.K.'s most senior Shia Muslim clerics, said in a video recording.

"Personal contact, personal friendship, then we can exchange a deeper level of experience," the Dalai Lama said.

Pope Francis chose to speak about his long friendship with the Argentinian Rabbi Abraham Skorka, who also appeared in the video.

"My religious life became richer with his explanations, so much richer," Francis said of Skorka. "And I guess the same happened for him."

"Make Friends" is an initiative of the Elijah Interfaith Institute, an interfaith organization with offices in Israel and the United States. In a press release, organizers said the project's mission is to counter the idea that people view each others' religions with distrust or disdain - and to potentially even reduce

violence conducted in the name of religion.

Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, the Elijah Interfaith Institute's director, said that this project introduces a new theological perspective, one that affirms the need for friendship between faiths.

"We cannot deny that in the books of many religions you can find texts that are not very open, even hostile, to people of other faiths," he said in a statement. "Therefore, when the world's most important leaders call for friendship, they are in fact affirming a particular way of practicing religion and rejecting another."

The 22 leaders involved in the appeal represent a wide spectrum of religious beliefs - Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Each leader contributed a personal statement specifically for the purposes of this project.

Many more videos from the leaders, with subtitles in different languages, are available on Make Friends' YouTube account.

"One of the wonderful things about spending time with people completely unlike you is you discover how much you have in common. The same fears, the same hopes, the same concerns," Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the U.K.'s former chief rabbi.



# Akhand Jaap 2019

## Prayers for Peace



Mantej Notay  
**School Business Manager**  
Nishkam School West London

On Saturday 18th May 2019, pupils from Nishkam School West London were privileged to participate in 13 hours of non-stop Prayers for World Peace, held at the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) in Hounslow. This event, organised by a group of local volunteers has been running for the last 17 years and each year our school pupils have been invited to start the prayers by singing the word 'Waheguru' (Wonderful Lord), for approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

During the day, the word 'Waheguru' was sung to a variety of different melodies and instruments including the Harmonium, Tabla, Guitar, Keyboard, Violin and Dilruba. In the morning, it was lovely to see our pupils embrace the moment with their calm and delightful singing and as the environment became evermore enchanting, it was fabulous to see children and adults from all faiths including Sikhs, Hindus and Christians taking part in the tranquil meditation, bringing a calm and serene feeling over everyone present.

We would like to express our appreciation to all the staff, parents and their children who gave up their time to attend this event. Both children and adults alike said they felt blessed and honoured to have taken part and that the experience was spiritually uplifting. It was also encouraging and heartening to see many pupils from Nishkam School showing the value of 'Selflessness' by helping to serve food to the sangat (congregation) in the community langar (open kitchen).



# Thanksgiving Ceremony of Nishkam School West London



The address: 152 Syon Lane, Osterley. This is now the permanent home of Nishkam School West London (NSWL). Our journey began back in 2013 when it first opened in a derelict building on London Road in Isleworth, not too far from the new school site. Since then, with the grace of the Almighty, NSWL, rated outstanding by Ofsted, moved to its permanent site. There have been many challenges on this journey, testing the resolve and resilience of those involved and strengthening the belief that actions born out of humility and selflessness will transverse those barriers we often struggle to overcome; age, religion, gender, appearance to name but a few. Having had to stay longer than expected at our temporary site, with the planning approval in hand, building work finally commenced in 2017. Few schools are fortunate enough to have such vast grounds to call home coupled with state-of-the-art facilities creating an environment for teachers and children alike to prosper.

With its prominent school gates, a magnificent fountain at the centre of the school's main entrance and green gardens all around, it is very hard not to be genuinely in awe of the immense size of the school grounds and one can appreciate the eye for detail and the precision and quality when it comes to adding the finishing touches to each and every classroom. At the centre of the building lies an area which is used as a 'Faith space'. With its huge skylight and openness, it invites and also allows the children of all year groups to come

together and share their values and virtues.

Whilst many parents and teachers would have been busy planning holidays and getaways, the staff and pupils at NSWL were planning the much talked about move to the new building. But before the big move could take place, part of these preparations included the opening thanksgiving ceremony where the Sikh holy scriptures, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, arrived at the school for an Akhand Paath (continuous reading of the scriptures over 48 hours). The school, with its fresh new interior, was transformed into a spiritual place of worship. The school assembly hall and the 'Faith space' became the centre of attention.

The voluminous space was cleaned and prepared for the arrival of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Through volunteer efforts a stage was built, and reams of fabric were draped all the way around to create a truly magnificent backdrop. Flower wreaths and bouquets lay with soft elegance and beauty. The bike sheds outside were converted into make-believe kitchens where the 'Langar' (free, blessed food from the Guru's kitchen) was going to be prepared and a washing area was set up alongside too. The school dinner hall served as a space for everyone from the congregation to sit together and enjoy the 'Langar'. Countless volunteers and stewards travelled from far and near to be involved.



This three-day program brought families and friends together to enjoy taking part in something for the common good. One of the three halls housed an exhibition on forgiveness and the journey and achievements of Nishkam School Trust.

Alongside the 48-hour recital of the Sikh holy scriptures, workshops and activities were set up for children of all ages. The children enjoyed workshops based on the lessons learnt through our Guru's teachings but were also given the chance to reflect on these values and virtues that guide us in our spiritual journey.

For many, young and old alike, the three-day event proved to be challenging yet fulfilling. Many had only slept a few hours for the duration of the programme yet, lack of sleep did nothing to stop the incredible flow of energy that could be felt and the willingness to go on doing 'Sewa' or selfless service.

With funding for the school building being stretched to its absolute limit, parts of the school grounds still needed further work. Through a tremendous volunteer effort from local residents, teachers, parents and the wider community, a huge area of neglected woodland was cleared. Approximately 30 tonnes of rubbish were removed in 10 days to provide over 3,500 square meters of space for our children to add to

their already amazing school.

Overcoming the many challenges witnessed throughout this journey makes one reflect on the presence of a higher authority, one which is forever forgiving and limitless in its wisdom and love. Because of this belief a thanksgiving ceremony of this nature is a way to show both gratitude for the opportunities given to us but also recognise that such opportunities are born out of sacrifice, humility and compassion.

The final prayer or 'Ardas' brought together teachers, pupils, parents and the wider community. Silent prayers were answered and hopes for a prosperous future could be felt on the horizon. As a Catholic prayer was shared by our principal, it too, carried a message of love and prosperity. The concluding blessing from Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji was a universal message; sending out peace and tranquillity and to remind us that each and every one of us is in control of our destiny.



# Visitors at Nishkam Schools

## Nishkam High School

### Lord Agnew and Dame Alison Peacock

In September Lord Agnew, Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for the School System, visited Nishkam High Birmingham to meet with Dr Brin Mahon, CEO, Mr Damien Kearns, Principal, Mr Amrik Bhabra, Chair of the Governing Body and Ms Ela McSorley, Director of Learning and Teaching. Lord Agnew wanted to understand what made a school and a trust successful and what lessons could be shared with other schools and multi-academy trusts.

Lord Agnew commented, 'Nishkam High School's record speaks for itself. It is helping pupils achieve high academic standards – as proved by its attainment scores which place it among the top schools in the country – and it was a pleasure to see this first-hand'.

'Pupils are engaged in lessons and clearly enjoy being at the school – they are a credit to the school's leadership team whose hard work has transformed school and others run by the trust', added the Schools Minister.

Mr Damien Kearns, Principal, commented, 'Nishkam's values led approach to education has helped shape the character of our Year 11 students and those self-same values, such as optimism, diligence and determination have also provided GCSE results that should make all those associated with the school feel humble and proud. On behalf of pupils, parents, staff and the entire community behind Nishkam School Trust, may I thank Lord Agnew for recognising our second successive set of excellent GCSE results and the contribution our multi-faith Sikh ethos school is making to

the educational and spiritual life of pupils in this part of Birmingham'.

Bhai Sahib, Bhai (Dr) Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia, who is the patron and visionary behind Nishkam School Trust said, 'We are living in new global contexts, with new global challenges. These require a mind-set centred on virtues, along with a keen sense of shared responsibility. Our vision at Nishkam School Trust is to help nurture such a mind-set, enabling our future society to advance and flourish for the benefit of all'.

Following this meeting Mr Bhabra and Ms McSorley attended a meeting chaired by Lord Agnew at the Department for Education, with other chairs and leads of multi-academy trusts to explore the key issues and tensions facing schools, with the view towards working together more closely to share best practice.

Also in September the high school in Birmingham welcomed Dame Alison Peacock, CEO of the Chartered College of Teaching, alongside Founding Fellows from the Chartered College of teaching and members of the Department for Education to the very first Founding Fellows Roundtable discussion, which focused on addressing the crisis in teacher retention and recruitment. Ela McSorley, our Director for Learning and Teaching represented Nishkam School Trust at the meeting, as a Founding Fellow of the college. Following on from this meeting, Ela now attends the all-party parliamentary group on teaching, discussing the prospect of a global outlook for the chartered college as well as ethical leadership and solutions to teacher retention and recruitment in the UK.



# Year 12 Summer Placements



## Nuffield Research Placement

Four of our current Year 12s have secured a lucrative 4-week summer placement on the Nuffield Research Placement Scheme, which will see them working on live research projects alongside industry experts within the fields of STEM. Projects take place in the summer holidays and must have broadly scientific or technical content, but they don't have to be based in a laboratory. They might be office-based or include fieldwork, or they might focus on engineering, data science or computer science. Undoubtedly, these placements will provide invaluable insights into potential career pathways, whilst developing broader transferable skills.

Further details of the scheme can be found here:  
<https://www.nuffieldresearchplacements.org/>

## Eton College – Universities Summer School

Ganga Manchanda, currently in Year 12, has secured a highly competitive place on the Eton University Summer School.

For over 30 years Eton College has run a residential summer school for Year 12 (Lower Sixth) students from state schools planning to apply to top universities in the UK and overseas. The Summer School is not about improving A-level grades but is designed to help students with their university applications, through an exciting and challenging ten days of study. Applicants chose a subject and are provided with dynamic teaching and, more importantly, the company of like-minded students from all over the country to work and socialise with.

This residential course at Eton has a packed timetable with lessons, study time, sporting and cultural opportunities. Visiting university lecturers come to teach and discuss entry procedures. The aim is to help students make a persuasive application to the universities of their choice and many go on to Oxford or Cambridge and other Russell Group universities.

Further details of the scheme can be found here:

<https://www.etoncollege.com/USS.aspx>





[www.nishkamschool.org](http://www.nishkamschool.org)

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