



# CONNEX Connects

## January 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of Connex Education Partnership's newsletter for 2024. We hope that you had a refreshing break over the last couple of weeks and have returned to work newly energised for the term ahead. This newsletter will explore some of the hot topics and top picks from the world of education as the new year gets underway.

### 1 in 10 Children too Poor to Eat

The 2023 PISA\* (Programme for International Student Assessment) league table report indicated that 10% of children and young people in the UK are too poor to eat 3 meals a day. One in ten children report skipping at least one meal per day as a result of not being able to afford the food. Similar statistics have been reported in countries such as Moldova and Mexico. PISA also reported that the UK's student attainment data continues to be relatively strong, with a ranking of 11th out of the 81 countries who participated. This is somewhat surprising given that 10% of our school populations may be frequently hungry. Loic Menzies (former CEO of the Centre for Education and Youth\*) raised a pertinent question on publication of these figures when he asked 'how good would those results be looking if we were prioritising other aspects of young people's lives?'. At Connex Education Partnership, we wholeheartedly agree that there is little more

In this edition, we cover:

- **1 in 10 Children too Poor to Eat**
- **Ed Sheeran and Dua Lipa Offer Support to Andrew Lloyd Webber**
- **Reflections and Predictions**
- **The Dangers of Vaping**
- **Brew Monday**
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important than ensuring pupils start the day with a full tummy ready for learning. The impacts of hunger on concentration levels are well documented. That's why over the last 9 months, we've been fundraising for Magic Breakfast to pay for 1 million stigma free, easy access, school breakfasts. **To date we have already raised over £55,768, which equates to 199,172 breakfasts.** Through sponsored physical endurance tests and generous donations, we're proud to have already been able to make a positive contribution to the life chances of pupils up and down the country. We will continue to work hard throughout 2024 to make progress towards the million-breakfast mark.



If you'd like to mark the start of 2024 by making a positive impact on a young person's life, find more information on our latest fundraising efforts [here](#). Every penny helps to break the impact of hunger prohibiting learning.

## Ed Sheeran and Dua Lipa Offer Support to Andrew Lloyd Webber

Huge music stars including Coldplay, Liam Gallagher, Ed Sheeran and Dua Lipa have co-signed a letter to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and leader of the Labour Party Sir Keir Starmer, calling for more funding to support music education for schools in disadvantaged areas. Already supporting 20,000 disadvantaged children in locations such as Barnsley, Middlesbrough and London, the Music in Secondary Schools Trust\* (MiSST) is Lloyd Webber's charitable organisation designed to provide free access to musical instruments and weekly lessons.



According to data from the trust, the impact of learning a musical instrument spans far further than simple enjoyment and development of a skill but can have significant impact on the life chances of young people including potentially enhancing the chance of accessing a topflight university.

A spokesperson for the MiSST said that *'If governments are serious about creating equal opportunity in education, programmes like MiSST are exactly where they should be focused.'* If you would like to know more about the opportunities created by MiSST in Key Stage 3, or if you feel your school could benefit from their support, visit their [website](#).

## Reflections and Predictions



As we usher in another new year, we often make poignant reflections of the year that has passed as thoughts turn to the year ahead.

Here at Connex Education Academy, we've been doing just that, and have cast our minds back over what 2023 brought to the education landscape, as well as speculating on what we think 2024 will bring to the table. Deputy Principal Andy Bridge and Connex's own Head of Quality Assurance and Impact Lorna Bradford, join Georgie McIntyre in the final After the Bell podcast of 2023 and the first of 2024. Together, Managing Director Georgie, Andy and Lorna reflect on the big issues in schools in 2023 including problems with student attendance, the retention and recruitment crisis and schools impacted by crumbling concrete (RAAC).

What will be the big issues hitting the headlines in 2024? Take a break and listen to what the team are predicting as the big trends in the latest edition of the fantastic After the Bell podcast, available [here](#).

## The Dangers of Vaping

Schools nationwide are reporting a surge in the number of students known to smoke e-cigarettes, or vapes as they are sometimes known. A survey conducted by the NASUWT\* in September 2023 found that **'75% of teachers stated that vaping had increased in schools in the past year.'** In some worst case situations, some teachers reported that some secondary aged students were having to leave lessons in order to vape, with a some primary school teachers stating the children as young as ten had brought vapes into school. Whilst it is most often a nicotine substance smoked through an e-cigarette, some secondary schools in south east England have recently dealt with young people smoking class B drugs (such as THS – the psychoactive element of cannabis) through a vape. The impact of vaping is having widespread impact on education, particularly at Key Stage 3 and above.



For schools looking to bolster their approach to tackling vaping, the guidance produced by the Action on Smoking and Health\* (ASH) advocacy group may be of use. A briefing for schools looking to write or improve an anti-vaping policy can be found [here](#), alongside plenty of useful and accessible information. In addition, you may find your local authority has produced teaching and learning resources such as those by [Sheffield City Council\\*](#) and [Healthy Schools Cambridgeshire and Peterborough\\*](#).

The fantastic team at the PSHE Association\* have also created a bespoke course specifically for Year 9 which can be incorporated into your Personal Development programme. Their **'[Drug and Alcohol Education: Vaping](#)'** resources are available online.

## Brew Monday



Over recent years, much has been made in the media about the concept of 'Blue Monday.' The third Monday of the year is considered by some to be the most depressing and difficult day of the year. Experts at The Samaritans\* say that the idea that one particular day of the year being more depressing than others is unlikely to be the case, and they understand that everyone is susceptible to up and down days.

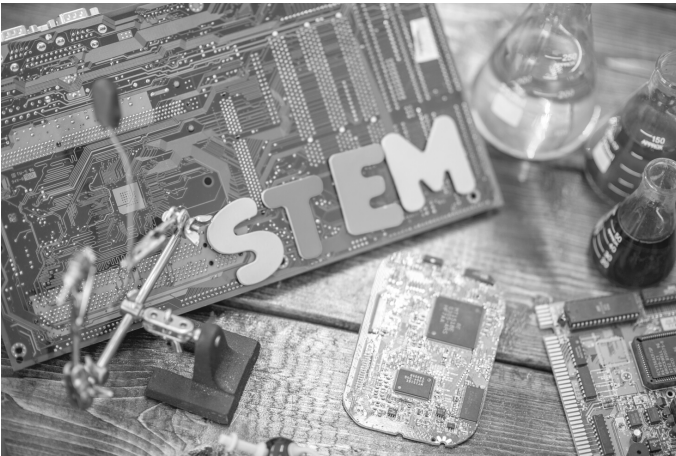
So to combat the negative association of Blue Monday, Brew Monday is a chance to connect with those around you to have a cuppa and an opportunity for a chat. This could be a lovely staff room activity to engage your team with. Activities and promotional materials are available on the [Brew Monday page](#) on The Samaritans website.





## Free STEM and Development Resources

Teachers of STEM related subjects, or those who cover international development in the lessons or extra-curricular clubs, may find the bank of free, inspiring, and high-quality resources from Practical Action\* of interest. The international development group aims to 'build sustainable lives for those living on the frontline of poverty and climate change.' Their library of resources includes challenges and competitions designed to encourage students to innovate and design solutions to serious global problems. Topics include renewable energy, food security and disaster preparedness. Activities include 'Regreen the desert', 'Beat the flood' and 'Plastics challenge.' Check out their full catalogue of resources [here](#).



## You can do it when you B&Q it!

Did you know about the B&Q Community Re-Use project? Last year, they donated over 50,000 products to more than 600 local good causes. Goods available for donating are those which can no longer be sold, such as pots of paint that may have been opened, ex display items or those with slight imperfections. Schools working with community organisations or with internal projects which may benefit from donations from their local B&Q branch can find out more [here](#).

## Get CPD Ready for 2024

If you and your school are looking to widen your CPD offer for colleagues in 2024, check out the School Learning Packages from Connex Education Academy. Our three subscription packages allow schools to choose the best option to suit their staff and budgetary requirements at a time when professional development budgets are stretched. Each tier of subscription provides access to a selection of our fantastic suite of over 120 online CPD courses, for up to either 30, 50 or 75 staff. See details for each subscription package below. Need something else? Our team will be happy to talk to you about how to personalise the packages to best suit your needs. Get in touch today at [enquiries@connex-academy.com](mailto:enquiries@connex-academy.com) to find out more!



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## Free Secondary School Attendance Webinar

The team at SecEd\* discussed why vulnerable students can often struggle to attend secondary school and suggested strategies to improve it in their December 2023 webinar. With attendance being a hot topic in most schools at the start of 2024, why not register for free access to watch back 'on demand' [here](#).



*\*Connex Education Partnership does not have any professional affiliations with organisations referenced throughout this newsletter. We share information that we believe will be of use and interest to schools in good faith, and in the spirit of sharing good practice for the benefit of all.*

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*\*All prices subject to VAT*