# COMMUNITY SPIRIT

A structure based on vertical integration encourages engagement and collaboration across the year groups and helps to maintain our founding ethos as a family school, writes **Jo Pache**

Broomfield is a family school. We all feel it, pupils, staff, parents, even the team of ISI Inspectors who recently visited felt it. Their report noted: "The school's implicit culture and sense of family… underpins the pupils' desire to do their best."

Founded in 1876, Broomfield was owned by a local family who ran the school for over 50 years. We are now part of a much wider family, Dukes Education, but determined that this core element of our school isn't lost in the bigger picture.

So, how do you make and sustain a family school? It's important to embed values that foster partnerships in our school community, and instil a culture of kindness and mutual support.

But how the school is structured matters too. Vertical integration is a key plank in Broomfield's strategy to create this sense of family. It might sound formal but, in essence, vertical integration simply maximises every opportunity for the children to engage in learning and play with other year groups. Thousands of interactions take place every day in school and we want these to be supportive moments where older and younger children benefit and learn from each other.

To achieve this, our pastoral and academic initiatives are aimed at creating constructive relationships across the school years which result in a number of important outcomes.

**Role models:** small children love older ones to pay them attention and vertical integration allows our older children to play a key role in modelling positive behaviours with the younger ones.

**Social skills:** hands-on experience of supporting more junior children gives opportunities for senior pupils to influence school life for the better. They learn to challenge poor conduct and help each other make better choices going forward. Encouraging children to tell a teacher if they see any unkindness means we can address issues when they occur. We ask children to be upstanders not bystanders, empowering them to share responsibility with the whole school community to make sure it is a happy, safe space. Vertical integration makes it more likely they will choose to be proactive, to interrupt a playground game to take care of a younger or older friend.

**Personal development:** our house system brings children together in sports, academic competitions and charitable endeavours. Elections within houses bring dynamism to our pupil council, where classes in KS2 are represented. They canvas opinions, debate ideas and make proposals to influence school developments; they even have a budget to spend, courtesy of our fabulous PTA. We have implemented some terrific ideas, from introducing trousers to the girls' uniform options to managing competing demands for different games at playtime.

Jo Pache is Deputy Head of Pastoral at Broomfield House in Richmond, West London

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There are many other ways in which we encourage vertical integration. Trained anti-bullying ambassadors in years four and five assist others in the rest of the school in handling tricky social situations. Year six pupils take on prefect roles, which reflect their personality and interests. They escort younger classes to assemblies and run activities with them during wet play.

Year one is a lovely moment, when the class transitions into the more formal school uniform and important new skills are required. They are championed in this by year five, who help teach them to do up shoelaces and ties.

As Deputy Head of Pastoral, I see the benefits of this family culture daily. Confidence grows, social skills develop and the ability to work with others increases. Children can adapt to new experiences and find ways to solve challenges by thinking in different ways. The vertical links also benefit year six in their 11+ interviews, when they are often asked how they contribute to life at school. They have real life experience of leadership, motivating others, tackling challenges and building a sense of community and shared endeavour.