



Farmington News

Summer 2026



Meet a Trustee

When many years ago I signed up for the Farmington Headteachers Forum I had little knowledge of what it might involve. But I soon met several of the inspirational Heads which Farmington brings together from state and independent sectors – professionals with huge vision and an unquenchable belief in their vocation.

My family are all teachers. My father, a post-war idealist, left the independent sector to become Head of one of the country's largest comprehensives. I studied the violin at the Guildhall and then English at London and Oxford, where I became a lecturer at one of the Colleges. I've written about 19th-century literature as well as about education. Although I was educated in the state sector, I don't have a PGCE, and so have ended up teaching only in independent schools, including twenty-six years as a Headteacher, in Portsmouth, Oxford and Winchester.

Of course I've wanted the schools which I was lucky to lead to teach properly, but I've also wanted them, perhaps even more importantly, to offer top-rate pastoral care, a broad range of extra-curricular activities, and to forge closer relationships with their communities. From 2013-14, I was Chair of the Heads' Conference (HMC), and now work for them as a recruitment consultant, mentor and appraiser. I'm also at work on a book about Victorian religious education.

Bobby Wills, having survived the Second World War, founded Farmington in order to fulfil what I've always told pupils is our prime duty: to leave the world an even better place than we found it. Since our young people need teachers to help them along that way, it's been a pleasure to see how the generosity of Farmington offers those teachers such ready inspiration and assistance.

To become a Farmington Trustee? Well, frankly, it was the easiest of decisions.

UKRAINIAN HEADTEACHERS AT OUR CAMBRIDGE CONFERENCE

We were delighted to welcome two Headteachers from Ukraine to our Heads Conference in Cambridge at the beginning of July. Ruslana Opryshko (right), Headteacher of Andrey Sheptytyskyi Stryi Lyceum in the west of the country, and Tetiana Kyrychenko (left), Head of Konotop Lyceum #1 in the Sumy Region near the Russian border, joined us to talk about the current situation for learning and teaching in Ukraine. Tetiana described the daily threat to life and holding lessons in underground shelters, while Ruslana talked about the steady flow of displaced and often traumatised pupils joining her school. We talk a lot in education about teaching resilience and character. These two Headteachers, and their impressive students, are the epitome of these qualities. They made many friends among the Headteachers at conference, and through them, the opportunity to make connections between their pupils and ours.



A PLACE FOR YOUR MEETING?

If your school or group needs a meeting room, and you can get to Oxford, then we're always happy to offer the downstairs Library or the small Boardroom upstairs (there's a lift for those who need it), free of charge. Tea- and coffee-making facilities to hand, and with notice we can arrange lunch through the college kitchen. Please contact Clare or Natasha (institute@farmington.ac.uk) for availability.

SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

As part of its brief to foster ethical leadership, the Farmington Headteachers Institute also offers short research breaks to senior leaders in the Armed Forces. This academic year we welcomed two new scholars, RAF chaplain, the Rev. Dr (Squadron Leader) John Harrison and Cdr Jon Browett, RN.



Jon's project was on Leadership and Culture in the Royal Navy. He writes:

After more than 20 years of fast-paced, operationally focussed activity with the Royal Navy, a scholarship with the Farmington Institute provided a unique and perfectly timed opportunity to reflect, learn, and shape my thinking before taking up an assignment in late 2025 as the Navy's Head of Leadership and Culture.

Approaching the scholarship like any other military task, I started mapping out mission aims, information gaps and key decision points, generating a campaign plan in my head to tackle the task at hand. Conscious that I didn't know what I didn't know, and keen to make the most of the opportunity, I was soon surrounded by an ever-growing pile of books on organisational culture, ethical leadership, virtues, character and much more. It had been many years since studying for my degree, and I was out of practice, attempting to read everything within reach and cram details, models, theories and case studies into a brain that had been trained to assimilate tactical information quickly, make a decision and move on.

With superb academic supervision from Chris Keeble, in the calm and conducive learning environments of Farmington, Harris Manchester College and the Bodleian Libraries, I was able to settle that approach, open the filters, and explore.

With time to think and the opportunity to learn, reflect and gather my thoughts, the scholarship provided a critical period of preparation for a role shaping and delivering cultural change and leadership development for the Royal Navy. As a result of my time in Oxford, I feel better informed, better prepared and more confident in my approach to the role, and have continued the reading, research and exploration that I started with the Institute.

Alongside the reading and research, the benefit of broader engagement with academics, students and visiting fellows at Harris Manchester was, in military terminology, a 'force multiplier'. Making connections, broadening outlook, and generating new lines of research or enquiry from often unexpected quarters, I'm grateful for the open hospitality, interest and engagement provided by the college.

I use the information, thinking and approach from the scholarship daily, and reflect on Chris' viewpoint, perspective and ability to focus on the centrality of an issue regularly. I have, perhaps unsurprisingly, hit the ground running during a fascinating period of change for the Navy. While I still intend to write a paper gathering and presenting my thoughts from the scholarship, I am in no doubt that I am more effective in my role thanks to Farmington's support and investment, which I hope will now translate into meaningful improvements in ethical leadership, organisational culture and operational effectiveness across the Navy, and I will be staying in touch!

The 'Other John' came initially as part of the college's Summer Research Institute.

He reports:

If I had to choose one word to describe my experiences of attending the Summer Research Institute it would be, wonderful. Once I was informed that I would be attending the week at Oxford, I was able to work with those at Harris Manchester to optimise my time there. From arranging pre-reads to ensuring library access, the level of support was excellent.

I gained so much from my time there. I had already been working on a research project and a week of immersing myself in my work meant real progress. This, coupled with the chance to share the experience with academics from other countries made for a very special time.

Being able to access a world class library, sharing the in the life of an Oxford College and even watching the Varsity cricket match (Oxford won, naturally) was a privilege. Farmington continued to support my work after that week, and I will always be grateful for their help. My advice to anyone looking to attend future events, is make sure you soak up every moment, it is magical.



PRIMARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES


Library supported by
The Farmington Institute

The first year of our new strand of work supporting primary school libraries is just coming to a close, and we've been delighted to be showered with heartwarming photographs of 'before' and 'after' spaces transformed with a little Farmington help. Each school was in a different situation vis-à-vis its library provision and we've admired the creativity they each brought to the task of revivifying what was there already – if indeed anything was. Our only specification was that the project was designed to encourage reading for *fun*, so there could be no classroom books or textbooks. Space is always at a premium, and more than one school created a library outdoors, buying waterproof boxes to house the new books, alongside artificial grass! Others used art in marvellous ways – with teachers' hidden skills coming to the fore. A city school created a library to look like a woodland... and who can resist a toadstool seat!



We designed this project before the National Year of Literacy got underway
– and we're very pleased to see them following our lead!

SUMMER CONFERENCE IN OXFORD

Oxford at the end of June was sweltering, but that didn't deter our Farmington teacher-scholars who created a mediterranean atmosphere at the conference. The Saturday afternoon lecture by Dr Gillian Georgiou, RE & SIAMS Advisor for the Diocese of Lincoln, was wonderfully engaging. 'Knowing You, Knowing Me' recalled us to the necessity (as the Greeks would have agreed) of knowing yourself, before you can usefully know anything else.

After dinner, Simon Lough, chair of the Temple Grove Schools Trust, who have partnered with us to support a number of primary teachers, urged us all not to give up on optimism. At the Sunday service, the Rev. Charlotte Bannister-Parker spoke on the value of teachers, and long-time Farmington supporter Adrian Trapp stood in marvellously as organist and choir director when our usual stalwart, Dr Myles Hartley, was detained elsewhere by his actual paid work (shocking!). Thanks, too, to Dr Martin Kauffmann, Head of Early and Rare collections at the Bodleian, who gave us a private showing of some of the Library's extraordinary materials. His theme – childhood – encompassed a 3rd-century Egyptian boy's letter to his father, Jane Austen's 'Volume the First' and drawings by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis.



The scholars' presentations were wide-ranging and full of interest and, as ever, gave a snapshot of schools around the country: in the same room we heard from a teacher from the largest primary in Britain and another from a school in the 4th most-deprived district in the country.

We were particularly pleased to welcome a strong Scottish contingent – which included Steph Whyte and her podcast, 'What Even is RME?' (What Even is RME? | Podcast on Spotify), in addition to the infectious enthusiasm of Farmington tutor John Meredith and 'The Two Mr Williamsses' from South Wales.

Alongside teachers coming for the first time was Sarah Edwards, who first came in 1995, when there were only about 20 scholars, and who remembers meeting our Founder, Bobby Wills. This was Sarah's last conference before retirement, so we wish her all the best for the future.



Reminders

Scholarship applications open in the Autumn
Farmington Induction Day - 7th October 2026
Annual Conference 25th June - 27th June 2027

Wishing you all a restful Summer break
From All at Farmington
farmington.ac.uk