



Since our last newsletter, we have said farewell to two giants in the educational world who made fundamental contributions to the work to which the ERT is committed - supporting the reinvigoration of education in the modern world.

## Alan Marshall

Alan Marshall died in September. He had been a trustee of the ERT since November 2001. He was easily the longest serving trustee in the lifetime of the Trust.

Alan brought a quiet enthusiasm to his work as a trustee. His ambition for what the Trust could achieve was unlimited. He was keen for us to set up a teacher training college. And we came close to getting the funding. A City-based educational charity was considering ceasing operations. The secretary suggested passing the assets to the ERT - £7 million.

However, the charity's board was stung into activity by our approach and decided to carry on.

Before joining the ERT trustees Alan had founded Alcuin School in Leeds, a sister school to St James

Junior School in London. He was well aware of the work needed to start and maintain a school for children; useful background for an ERT trustee. Alcuin closed after a few years. Its location turned out to be wrong for an independent junior school – another useful piece of knowledge.

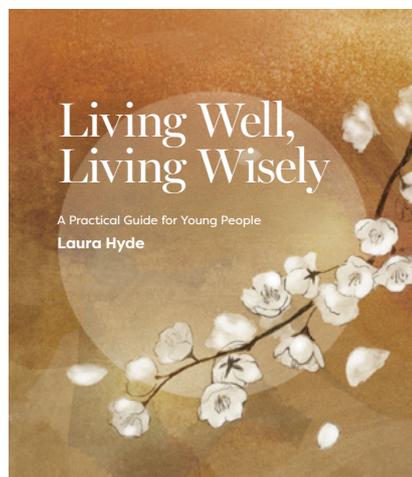
Alan had also been leader of the North East Branch of the School of Philosophy and Economic Science which helped spread the word about the Friends of the ERT.

As a professional photographer Alan was alive to the value of images in publicising and fundraising for the ERT. He and his wife Valerie undertook an arduous tour of all the family of schools around the world, taking wonderful photos of the St James education in action. The idea

was to publish a book about the worldwide educational project. Alas, this never got off the ground. But his photos continue to light up this newsletter and the ERT website.

Alan, you are greatly missed.

*Hugh Venables, September 2025*



## Living Well, Living Wisely

The Trust is delighted to be able to support the publication of 'Living Well, Living Wisely' by Laura Hyde. The book has been written to provide young adolescents with the opportunity to develop deeper insight into how to live well and to live responsibly as they approach adulthood. It will be particularly

useful in the classroom for teachers engaging in reflective conversation with their students.

Work is progressing on the preparation of the manuscript for print and distribution and we look forward to seeing it on bookshelves early next year. It is a book for all ages, full of timeless wisdom.

The Education Renaissance Trust promotes schools and supports teachers around the world who provide a spiritually-based education. This ERT NEWSLETTER is published twice a year, to keep friends and supporters in touch with our work. If you no longer wish to receive it, please contact Kim Brown ([kim@ert.org.uk](mailto:kim@ert.org.uk)).

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## Remembering Nicholas Debenham

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Nicholas Debenham – Nick to his friends and ND as he signed himself – was a founding trustee of the ERT. The Trust was set up in 1987 to support the St James family of schools around the world. ND had been the founding headmaster of St James. He understood better than anyone what made St James special, and the other trustees depended on his insight and experience to guide their approach to helping the schools which asked for the ERT's help.

In January 2004 he took over chairing the Trust from Jeremy Sinclair. Nicholas was the Platonic ideal of chairmanship: a good listener, an expert drawer-together of

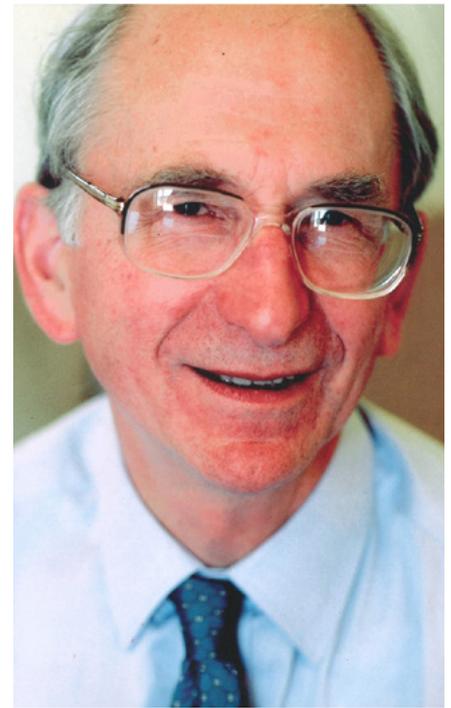
different viewpoints, decisive, quiet, reasonable.

Before each trustee meeting I would drive out to his house in Twickenham to go through the agenda over a cup of coffee. He was such good company and these meetings were very special.

Nicholas was also a trustee of his family's charitable trust, so he had valuable experience of how a charity should be run. But his grounding in the St James education, and his lifelong study of philosophy, were the more important.

He was succeeded as chair by Martin Kettle in September 2016.

*Hugh Venables*



Nicholas Debenham

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## St James Celebrates 50 Years

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The year 2025 marks 50 years since the founding of the St James School in London. During that time, St James has grown into a vibrant and dynamic community, a place where lifelong friendships have formed, dreams have been realised, and stillness has been cultivated – a true hub of philosophical learning.

A marvellous celebration was held in May to celebrate the schools' 50th birthday, with current families and staff as well as the Seventh Form community (representing the

alumni) coming together to enjoy a wealth of talent from the St James' community, with the Alumni Choir giving a stunning rendition of Vivaldi's Gloria and current students showcasing impressive musical and theatrical talent. Thanks to the generosity of those who attended, over £4,000 was raised for St James' Bursary Fund.

You can get a taste of the event by visiting: <https://www.stjameschools.co.uk/50-years/2025/01/07/50th-birthday-celebration-event/>



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## Developments at St James Senior Schools

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Emma Bell will be leaving St James Senior Girls' School at the end of the autumn term. Emma has served St James with enthusiasm, passion and integrity, leading the school through a very successful ISI inspection and encouraging all pupils to live the school motto; to speak the truth, live generously and aim for their best.

Following a thorough process led by a specialist educational head-hunter, the trustees have appointed Helen de Mattos to the position. Helen already has strong ties to the St James community; having served as Chair of Governors at the boys' school where her son was also a pupil, having taught at the school for over a decade earlier in her career and having been educated at St James herself. She embodies the school's ethos and philosophy, returning with a wealth of knowledge in education and leadership alongside an exceptional understanding of the St James Schools.

A proposal currently under consideration is the move to a co-educational model for the senior schools. Consultation is underway, with envisaged implementation of a phased approach starting with the students entering Year 7 in 2027. Pupils currently in the schools, and those joining in September 2026, would continue their education in single-sex classes for the remainder of their school career.

At the same time, what makes the schools unique will remain unchanged: a rare blend of academic ambition and distinct philosophical ethos.



Helen De Mattos, New Head of St James Senior Girls.

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## Letter from Tegan

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As an ex-pupil of Ficino School, mindfulness has been woven into my life from a young age. To now return as an adult and teacher within one of these wonderful schools has been a true blessing — a continuation of a lifelong practice of awareness, presence, and love. The Heads and Teachers Conference in Lucca was a joyous privilege to attend. I still feel its lessons in the depths of my soul and its humming vibrance tingling through my fingertips each day since.



Our week's focus on Love has left a profound impact on my teaching. A written reminder now sits on my desk with the words 'be grounded, present and full of love'.

This experience allowed me to connect with like minded people of different ethnicities, genders, places and ages - each thread woven through the simple truth that love is ever present and universally recognised. The cross-pollination of schools during this experience allowed us to learn and grow together, and to see our shared humanity reflected back in one another. Deep friendships were forged that now span across oceans. Another beautiful aspect of this conference.

My teaching practice has been enhanced by this week as I was reminded that true teaching comes from a place of love - love for our students, our schools, for learning and for life itself.

*Tegan Brickland  
Ficino School, New Zealand*

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## Erasmus graduate speaks about her journey with dyslexia

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My name is Supriya and I graduated from Erasmus in 2023. Now I am in year 8 at MLC (Methodist Ladies' College).

Many people have gone through Erasmus. I wish talk about dyslexia and my experiences of opening my eyes and overcoming my feelings of inferiority.

Dyslexia cannot be seen physically - it is a neurodivergent condition that causes me to think more with the right side of the brain than the left but what is the difference?

The left side is more logical and processes language and math. The right side is more creative and imaginative. So how does thinking with the right more than the left translate to reading, writing and even maths.

Since the right side is more imaginative it is harder to process the letter translating to the sound or the number to the amount. Like a D is an upturned boat instead of meaning I have to say the sound (d) or associating two different letters and numbers together without telling the difference. Like b and d or E and 3. But this can be different for all dyslexics.

School is a place that feels all about reading, writing and math especially in primary school. So finding yourself struggling a lot more than other students caused me to ostracize myself even when other people didn't mind. I labelled myself and saw myself as wrong. I could not see my dyslexia physically, so I just thought I was just dumb.

But one important thing changed during lock down. Yes it did hit my grades hard, but I was taken away from an environment that felt fixed in academics and had a chance to explore. I found an interest in history it was something that I could watch videos and listen to from a podcast it wasn't something that I necessarily had to

read. For the first time I felt smart, like I had something to offer, and my confidence grew. You can be smart outside of test results. You don't have to always measure yourself on the things you can't do.

But make no mistake this world requires that you can read and write and do maths. There is no way around that. It will take practice and hard work. The best thing is to persevere. I would like to say that I never gave up, and I never complained or threw a fit. But that is far from the truth. At times I sunk into a pit of self-pity. But fortunately, I had someone that never let me give up. That was my grandmother.

She was a schoolteacher and would make me read and do phonics every day after school and even more on the weekend. No matter how much I cried I had to do it. And even though I use to hate her for it. It is because of her that I can read.

Then I found myself making my own goals. At the start of year three I told myself that I will work until I can read the first Harry Potter book by myself. It seemed impossible at the start but by the end of the year I was sitting in a park reading chapter 5 'Diagon Ally' to my mum and brother. Some things may seem impossible, but I can't stress enough the importance that you keep going.

Today I am in grade 8. I still need to work on my spelling and math. But I am at grade level and miles ahead from where I was. Everyone can read what I write. There is not an invisible wall separating me from everyone else.

But I still recognise when I need help. I use a calculator in math. I read schoolbooks in the summer holidays in advance. I use a bit more time to write my work. But I don't let myself do worse. I am not dumb because I am dyslexic, I am dyslexic, and it doesn't matter.

I am sharing my story in hopes that it will help you. Maybe dyslexic maybe not. Maybe people who feel like they are less than others. What I want you to take from this is that. firstly, the world is bigger than test results you may be bad to math but find you are good at sport.

Secondly keep going there is a light at the end of the tunnel. And finally, someone that pushes you is not always your enemy.

Before I end I would like to thank the school - especially the teachers who never gave up on me, and always encouraged me to do my best.

Supriya's mother made the following comment:

She is doing well at school. She got 80% in her English, 80% in history and 90 on a recent science test. ...but what makes her different - and this is the Erasmus bonus - is that she has deep knowledge, not shallow knowledge.



## Masibambane College

St James London teacher, Mary-Ann Parker-Wood, has recently visited the Masibambane College where she met the School leaders. The school is situated in Orange Farm, an enormous township situated about 50km south of Johannesburg, South Africa. Mary-Ann was given a full tour and was able to identify priorities for support. The ERT has long provided funds to help the College and St James London has now adopted the school as the charity to which it directs its fundraising efforts.



### Here is an extract from Mary-Ann's report:

When I first met Audrey and Nombeko at the annual St James Teachers' Conference in Lucca, Italy, in the summer of 2024, I was delighted to meet fellow South African teachers who shared a deep love for their country and an unwavering commitment to improving their school. We spent the week learning and laughing together, and on the final night of entertainment - belting out our national anthem with gusto and tears - little did I know that our paths had converged for a journey that would extend far beyond that summer week, inspiring collaboration, compassion, and shared opportunity for the pupils of Masibambane College and St James.

The following morning, as my Headteacher, Mrs Hilary Wyatt, and I shared a cab to the airport, our conversation turned to philanthropy and the possibilities for the year ahead. Ideas flowed freely, connections were made, and a sense of purpose quickly took shape. By the time we reached the terminal, the decision felt both natural and inspired: Masibambane College would become St James Prep's international charity of choice for the upcoming academic year.

By the end of the summer term, we were immensely pleased and proud to have raised just over £1,500 for Masibambane College - an incredible testament to the

pupils' compassion, creativity, and collective effort.

In the summer of 2025, I visited Masibambane College where Nombeko welcomed me with open arms and kindly gave me a wonderful tour of the school. I was immediately struck by the sense of calm that pervaded the grounds - such a marked contrast to the vibrant hustle and bustle just beyond the school gates.

After meeting many of the children and teachers in their classrooms, I began to wonder why none of them were outside enjoying playtime. Although the blue skies and sunshine suggested a perfect day, a strong wind was sweeping across the red, coarse sand of the playground, making it impossible for the children to play outdoors. It became clear that the most meaningful improvement we could make would be to install artificial grass. Providing a safe and inviting outdoor space where the children could play freely seemed a fitting way to support their daily school life.

With Masibambane College continuing as St James Prep's international charity of choice for another academic year, we are eager to build on this partnership and help bring the playground project to life. Fundraising activities will continue throughout the year as we work together to make this shared vision a reality.

## Ficino Students: Expanding Horizons

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The Trust has provided support to a recent trip to Italy by students from Ficino School. The travellers arrived in Rome, Italy after a 28-hour journey from Auckland. Jet lag was quickly forgotten as they explored the historic city on foot, visiting iconic landmarks like the Pantheon and the Trevi Fountain. These world-famous sites offered a stunning introduction to Rome's rich cultural heritage setting the tone for the exciting journey ahead.

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### Letter from the Head of the Ficino School

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Dear ERT Trustees, I am writing to report back on our recent Renaissance Trip to Italy and the UK which took place in September of this year. The students visited Rome, Orvieto, Siena and Florence in Italy taking in monuments from the ancient world and masterpieces of the Renaissance. In the UK they concentrated their time in London and the southwest, where they visited Bath, Stonehenge, Salisbury Cathedral and Oxford University. In London they watched Twelfth Night at the Globe Theatre and toured Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London; the girls also spent a morning at St James Senior Girls School.

This trip is a truly remarkable experience for our students, especially coming from so far away and from

such a young country. The students always come back standing taller with increased self-confidence after the experience, and this group was no exception. The nourishment they receive from visiting places of worship, historically significant sites and great works of art combines with the discipline and independence of being so far from home, to beautifully cap off their time at Ficino School.

Although this group was smaller than usual, the students behaved well and were fully engaged in the places they visited. We prepare them with two term's worth of lessons so that what they see has more significance. Each year we aim to get every student to participate in the trip, and for any students who can't attend for financial reasons we do our very best to provide sufficient support. We wouldn't be

able to do this without the help of the ERT, and the funding you provide each year ensures that this trip becomes a life-changing experience for all students, irrespective of their family situations. Thank you for continuing to support this venture with the funding for students and also covering the cost of our stay at Waterperry. The latter is like coming into a haven after being on the road for a couple of weeks, and is an opportunity to come to rest before we head to London and St Pauls Youth Hostel.

We have decided that we will only run the trip if we get 80% of the year group attending and we have almost reached that for our 2026 cohort.

Thank you again,

*Peter Crompton, 9 October 2025*





## Lucca 2025

Another hugely successful conference was held at the Villa this year, attended by 70 noble souls committed to supporting schools which put spirituality at the heart of their teaching. The following letter from Noel Moodley, the Principal of St James School, Durban, says it all.

As I left Durban, South Africa, on my way to Lucca, Italy, I felt a sense of anticipation and gratitude visiting Europe for the first time. It was going to be my first Lucca Conference in my first year as Headmaster at St James Primary, Durban. I shall never forget arriving at Villa Boccella, and as my feet touched the ground, I felt a deep sense of connection: it felt like home.

I was greatly impressed by the organization and care taken by Kim Brown and her team. Their energy and desire to go above and beyond the call of duty to make our stay as delegates a memorable one was greatly appreciated. The Villa was magical and seemed to transcend time as we went about a daily program that was based on the Conference theme “What is love?” The word “enlightened” comes to mind when I think of how the program empowered us as delegates from early morning yoga to discussions with colleagues about the challenges each school faces. Connecting with other Heads made a huge difference to me as I realized that I was no longer alone, but could now connect with a global group of

heads. It was truly a well thought out program that fed us with the ethos and energy of what St James Schools were about, and the legacy that has become a global reality. I must commend the program director, Mrs Wyatt, and all those involved for their insight in giving us a program that truly left me enlightened in all aspects of my life.

As I look back on Lucca 2025, my biggest take away was seeing a frame on the wall of the room that was being used for Plato Studies with Jane Mason. I was looking for History and found Plato in error. The frame had the word TRUTH on it. It was an extract taken from a letter written by Marsilio Ficino of Florence. The highlighted words in red struck me: LET YOUR HOUSE BE A TEMPLE FOR GOD. I think the owner of the Villa, Mrs Marshall, must have put that frame up. Profound words indeed.

Our school motto is “Let Truth Light the Way”. I can say that Lucca 2025 certainly made that motto a reality for me. I came with an open mind and left enlightened and a better person because of it.



Noel Moodley, Head of Durban School

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## Retirement of Hugh Venables From ERT

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A copy of the recently published Dialogues of Plato translated by Dr David Horan was presented to Hugh by Chris Rees at the book launch held at Mandeville Place.

### Here is what he said:

Hugh started work as the administrator of the Education Renaissance Trust in 1998, 27 years ago.

On behalf of my fellow trustees at the Educational Renaissance Trust, I want to express our deepest gratitude for Hugh's unstinting and exemplary service as Administrator over so many years.

His steadfast commitment, attention to detail, and quiet efficiency have been instrumental in the ERT's success. Behind the scenes, his steady hand and thoughtful presence have ensured continuity, integrity, and a sense of calm purpose that has supported all we do.

It is no exaggeration to say that the work of the ERT could not have flourished without his dedication. He has served not only as administrator but also as a guardian of the ERT's values, a source of wise counsel, and a generous colleague.

We thank him for all that he has given. We are enormously grateful and hold his contribution in the highest esteem.

So as a mark of our appreciation, I have pleasure in presenting Hugh with a copy of David's translation. We hope that he will enjoy studying it in his retirement.

*Martin Kettle, Chairman, ERT*



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## Kim Brown takes on administrator role at ERT

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We are delighted to announce that Kim Brown is taking over most of Hugh's duties for the ERT. Kim brings a wealth of knowledge, having worked at St James Schools for 17 years organising fundraising and alumni events, as well as having organised the International Leaders and Teachers Conferences at Villa Boccella for many years. She will continue to organise the conferences, to act as clerk at trustee meetings and to look after the supporters' database and assist with the newsletter and annual report. Kim is going to be busy.

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## Thanks For Reading! Now, Can You Help Us?

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Many readers now support our worldwide work through regular standing orders. Some sponsor bursaries or help with development projects in needy schools. Others donate to the wider work of the ERT. UK Taxpayers can increase the value of their donations by 25% by making a Gift Aid declaration. Contact us at [admin@ert.org.uk](mailto:admin@ert.org.uk) and we'll send you a Gift Aid form. One-off donations,

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