

in the news



Jonathan Hancock

Who is he?

Jonathan Hancock is a primary school teacher at St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Portslade, Brighton, who went into teaching after 15 years working on his memory. He is a two-time Guinness World Record-holder, a former World Memory Champion and is also the of the Junior Memory Championships.

What was that again?

Don't be silly.

So what are his records for?

"When I was 16, my friend and I had a bet to win a Guinness World Record," he says. "I discovered that there was one awarded for memorising a shuffled pack of cards. I went for it and won the record for memorising six shuffled packs of cards in order – that's 312 cards. I then did it in the quickest time."

And the Championships?

Held in conjunction with the Learning Skills Foundation, the Junior Memory Championships is an education initiative promoting memory strategies in primary schools.

"It's exciting and creative," he says. "We encourage teachers and pupils to study the art of memory. All schools who sign up will get information, training and lesson plans. There is an online competition in March where the top 20 junior performers meet in a final heat."

Why did he become a teacher?

"I have written several books on memory, half of which are on children. I was running workshops in schools and so decided to teach. I love the astonishing look on children's faces when they have remembered something they learnt in a completely efficient and accurate way."

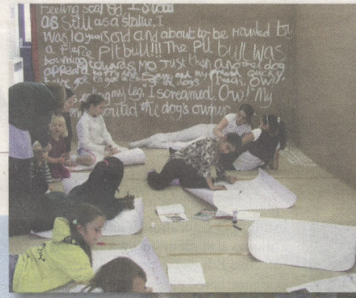
What ways are these?

"The techniques I use have been around for centuries. They are all based on thinking and pictures, bringing in colours and textures. For example, number five – you can think of the physical number as a hook, like Captain Hook. Then for the round bit you can think of a beach ball. The kids remember because they go from one link in the chain to the next.

"It's also useful because I can help them remember their PE kit. If, for example, their PE kits are in the hallway, I tell them to imagine thousands of PE shirts in a pile in their hallway. That way, they remember."

Georgia Laird

noticeboard



To enthuse pupils taking part in The Big Write, **Limpsfield Junior School** in Sheffield transformed itself into a literary wonderland, with writing covering every available surface. Children were asked to write about real-life experiences involving their families and the local community.



St Boniface's Catholic College in Plymouth turned up the fear factor for the second year running with its "Most Haunted" Halloween event. Twenty-five students joined staff in the festivities, including a pumpkin-carving competition.

people

obituary

Roger Simper

1943-2009



Roger Simper knew as much about most academic subjects as the people who taught them. But the Leicestershire headteacher never boasted about his knowledge, preferring to let others speak. Nonetheless, anything he said was always worth hearing: he had a talent for the pithy phrase, and bequeathed his successor a range of school-based aphorisms.

Mr Simper was born in the Norfolk town of North Walsham in 1943. As a schoolboy, he befriended fellow North Walsham pupil and eventual Conservative education secretary Gillian Shephard: he accompanied her on the piano when she sang.

He went on to study economics at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, then trained as a maths teacher at the Institute of Education, London. He had always wanted to teach – he believed deeply in the need to improve pupils' lives. "There are no problem children," he later said, "only children trying to solve problems."

His career began in Birmingham, and he was soon appointed head of maths at Bishop Challoner Secondary School. He then moved to Richard Aldworth comprehensive in Basingstoke, initially as head of maths and later as senior teacher.

But he was more polymath than maths teacher: his interests stretched to music and literature, and he regularly directed drama productions.

Mr Simper had an unusual ability to retain information: colleagues could recite a line of poetry to him and he would instantly be able to tell them its source. Fellow heads of department regularly found that he knew more about their subjects than they did.

But he also applied his logician's mind to more practical school issues. "Problems aren't problems," he said. "They're things to solve."

In particular, he developed an interest in timetabling. The best school timetable, he believed, was compiled only after extensive staffroom consultation and discussion. That way, it would reflect the direction the school would be going in over the forthcoming year. His book, *Practical Guide to Timetabling*, was published in 1980 and remains the standard work on the subject.

In 1981, Mr Simper was appointed head of Abington High School. A profoundly original thinker, he used his new position to introduce a number of measures that would not become widespread for more than 20 years.

So Abington pupils in the 1980s benefited from the type of cross-curricular work mandated by the Government in its curriculum 2008. He also introduced one-to-one tuition for underachieving pupils. And, realising the importance of environmental awareness, he began to promote green issues in the early 1980s, building a garden, pond and wildlife area within school grounds.

He also encouraged originality in others. Staff were challenged to come up with their own ideas, however off-beat. Mr Simper would listen quietly, and then try out each suggestion, determining what worked best. "You can't change people," he would say. "But you need to recognise their strengths and weaknesses."

His belief in consensus and co-operation was also appreciated more widely: in the late 1980s, he was appointed chairman of the Leicestershire branch of the Secondary Heads' Association. And he helped to develop a funding formula for Leicestershire Council. "Get the basics right," he said, "and the pupils benefit."

Mr Simper was naturally modest, preferring to highlight others' achievements than to boast about his own. It was only in later years, for example, that colleagues discovered that he had represented Cambridge at cricket. But this was not a reticence born of shyness: he happily danced on stage in top hat and tails as part of a fundraising assembly.

His devotion to his job left little time for hobbies outside school. But, on retirement in 1995, he realised a long-held ambition to walk across England, from North Walsham to north Oxfordshire. And, following years of short-story writing, he began work on a novel.

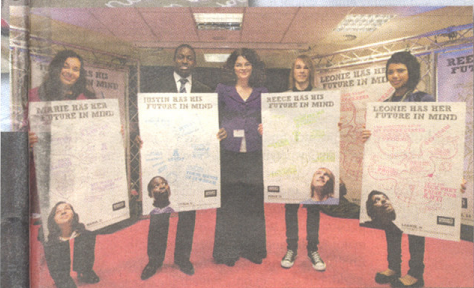
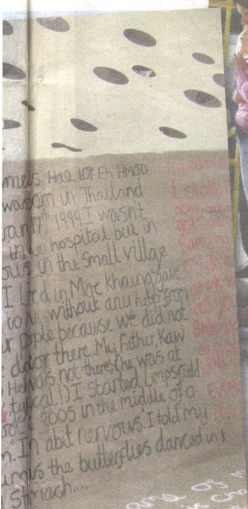
Nonetheless, he retained an interest in education. His wife, Susan, worked as an education consultant in Stoke, and Mr Simper advised the council on timetabling and curriculum development.

In November last year he was diagnosed with a degenerative heart condition. Attempts to arrange a transplant failed, and he died at home on October 11. He was 66 years old.

Mr Simper is survived by his wife, and his children Matthew and Rebecca. **Adi Bloom**



Parents' day at Lamberhurst St Mary's CofE (VC) Primary School in Kent last week gave all visitors a chance to try out the Water Buffalo, a mobile health-check centre promoting family well-being.



Marie Teresa Hanna, Justin Cole, Reece Kidman and Leonie Richardson star in the new London Challenge poster campaign to highlight the achievements of the capital's students. Diana Johnson, minister for London schools, gave them a helping hand at the launch.



Members of the Southbank Sinfonia orchestral academy have been helping Lambeth school pupils explore the life and work of former resident, William Blake.

If you have a story for these pages, please email georgia.laird@tes.co.uk