



KAN KENT
ACADEMIES
NETWORK
SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

October 2025 Report

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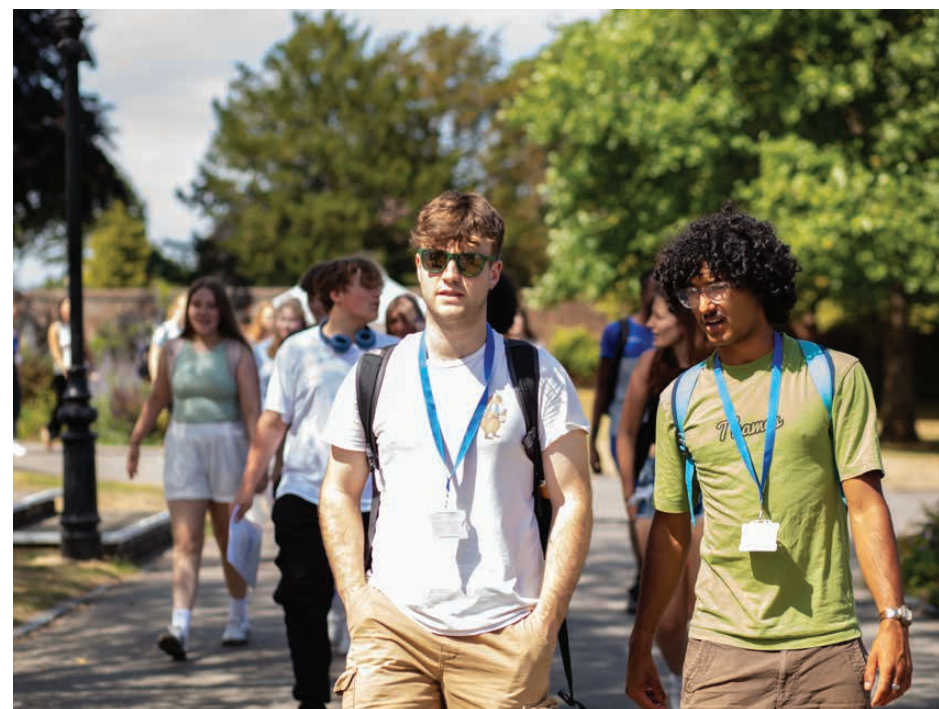
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KAN has been a great journey, learning how to survive from GCSEs to A levels and now to university. With the knowledge I have gained though this experience it has helped me to widen my perspective of the world, allowing me to succeed and flourish into the best version I could be.

Joash, KAN student

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Foreword



This year has been another year of growth and success for KAN. We currently have 92 students on the programme which is the highest number since KAN began. A key objective remains keeping the Core programmes at capacity and, as we begin the 2025-26 academic year, our Core cohorts for 2023, 2024, and 2025 are fully enrolled, with only a single space remaining in the 2022 cohort. Attendance is strong, with over 80 per cent of students attending both meet-up days. 80 per cent of Core students attended the April residential and a fantastic 95 per cent attended the July residential.

One of our KAN schools, the former Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey was acquired by Leigh Academy Trust (LAT) in September 2024 and is now the Leigh Academy Minster. Our current KAN students, who have established relationships with their peers and the KAN mentors, have remained part of the programme, but LAT has established an exciting new university access programme, Ambition, in partnership with us at Sevenoaks School. The programme launched in July 2025 and recruits from five LAT schools, including Leigh Academy Minster. It has been wonderful to harness the transformative power of the KAN programme to shape a second programme that will support ambition and achievement for another cohort of young people. This change has enabled us to invite a new school, St George's Church of England to join the network. We were delighted to welcome two of their Year 9 students into our 2025 cohort.

A highlight of the year was the Alumni Dinner when we welcomed back alumni students and mentors, as well as, current mentors and KAN donors, teacher leads and contributing teachers. There was a palpable sense of collective achievement and pride in the room. The evening also gave as an opportunity to say farewell and thank you to Isla Phillips-Ewen who had served as KAN Director since 2020. She was a passionate leader for KAN, professionalising the programme whilst never losing sight of the students at its core. She leaves behind a programme poised for continued success and her vision and high aspirations for KAN will guide us long after today.

We are immensely grateful to our supporters: Christopher and Kristin Gill, The Buffini Chao Foundation, Queens' College and Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, and Sevenoaks School. As ever, we extend our thanks to our teacher leads who promote KAN in their schools and provide valuable feedback. Our mentor team continues to be the backbone of KAN, supporting our students and sharing their own experiences. Thanks also go to Jutta, Jamie and Sophie at Sevenoaks who have been instrumental in running KAN, as well as all our volunteer teachers who deliver a wide range of engaging sessions during meet-up days and residential. A sincere thank you too to our collaborators (listed in the 'Review of Events' section of this report).

Kathy O'Donnell
Director of the Institute of Service and Partnerships



Overview

KAN aims to remove barriers to Higher Education by improving student:



Confidence



Knowledge



Agency

Our Core university access programme has been running since 2013 and we began our Aspire programme in 2021. These are unique four-year programmes, from Year 9 to Year 13. The current Kent Academies Network includes: Knole Academy, The Skinners' Kent Academy, Leigh Academy Minster, The Marsh Academy, John Wallis Church of England Academy and St. George's Church of England School. Each year, teachers identify Year 9 students to begin the application and interview process and 15 students are selected for our Core cohort and up to 15 for the Aspire cohort. Students must meet certain eligibility criteria that are nationally recognised as barriers to higher education.

Every academic year the programmes entail:

- Termly online mentoring sessions
- Two meet-up days at Sevenoaks School
- The spring residential weekend at Sevenoaks School (Core cohorts only)
- Summer residential week at Sevenoaks School or a Cambridge college (Core cohorts only)
- A summer research project
- A graduation event for Year 13 students
- An alumni and mentor networking dinner at Sevenoaks School

Undergraduate mentors guide the students through the programme. The mentoring relationships and the peer-to-peer support network, fostered by the small size of the cohorts, are fundamental to KAN's success. Other resources we provide to all KAN students include:

- Access to an online mentoring platform
- Access to the Buffini Chao Discretionary Fund to cover the cost of university visits

To date, eleven awards have been made from the Buffini Chao Discretionary Fund. This was launched in 2020 and supports either student university visits or professional development for mentors.



Our students

We have 92 students in the current cohorts who entered the programme between 2022 and 2025.

- 57 per cent are first generation university students
- 35 per cent qualify for free school meals
- 57 per cent are in low-income households
- 27 per cent live in a single-parent household
- Five students are in care and eight are young carers themselves



KAN allows me to meet so many new and inspiring people year after year. Whether it's mentors, teachers or cohort members I hadn't met before, this part of KAN continually reminds me why I find it so rewarding to attend these events.

KAN student



84 students have now completed the KAN university access programme (spanning cohorts from 2013 to 2021).

We know the destinations for 74 of these alumni and out of those, 72 received places for university degrees or higher-level apprenticeships.

Our 2020 cohort have completed their first years of degree courses including Geography, Mechanical Engineering, Law, and Paediatric Nursing, as well as one higher-level apprenticeship. Alumni from our 2021 cohort are going on to study courses including Neuroscience, Law, Biomedical Science, and Equine Training.

We have continued to fill empty places on Core from our Aspire cohorts to ensure they remain at capacity, and the KAN programme can maximise its impact for students and schools.



In 2021 we introduced the Aspire programme with the aims to:



Impact more students



Be cost effective



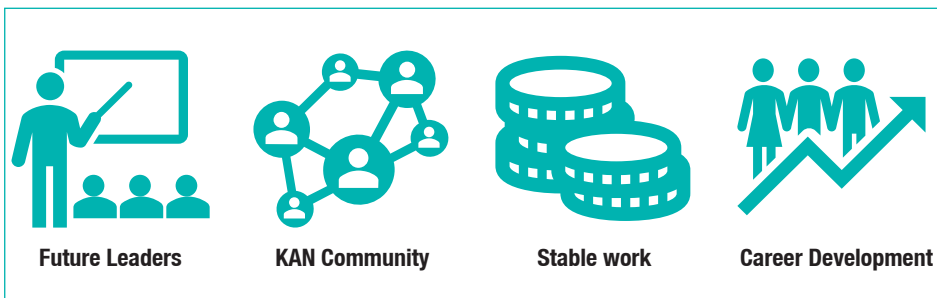
Scale up using technology



Increase ownership in the KAN schools

Our mentors

KAN aims to develop future leaders in education and social impact who feel part of a wider community and have increased opportunities, thanks to the experiences and skills they develop through their commitment to the role.



Including our new recruits, who began in July 2025, we currently have 16 mentors in our team attending a wide range of universities. Four of these are KAN alumni. This year, training for the mentors has included sessions on Post-18 Options, delivered by Advancing Access, a collaboration between 24 Russell Group universities, and safeguarding. Mentors have delivered fifteen sessions at residentials and continue to be the backbone of the summer research project.

Our mentors continue to go on to pursue careers in both teaching and social impact. One of our mentors, who is herself KAN alumni, has just completed a six-week summer social entrepreneurship internship in India. Another mentor qualified as a Junior Doctor this summer.

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The lessons that I had studied in school were put under a different lens at KAN. In all subjects there was room for discussion and debate, and the small cohort size always made it feel like everyone was always listened to.

KAN student

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The role has not only allowed me to give back but has also helped me to develop crucial professional skills, for example writing cover letters, preparing for job applications and approaching interviews with confidence.

Hannah, current KAN mentor

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Review of events

Residential and graduation

As always, the Core residential events are extremely valued by our students. This is reflected in our student feedback with 90 per cent of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'the residential event has exposed me to new ideas'. Student highlights this year were the Articulation Discovery Day held at the National Gallery, a session on life as a newly qualified Doctor by mentor Lottie, punting in Cambridge, and the talk from guest speaker William Carter.

Mentors offered a variety of sessions from social entrepreneurship workshops to the ethics of collective punishment to the psychology of music.

Fourteen teachers from Sevenoaks, Benenden and the KAN academies taught sessions, and we collaborated with University College London, SOAS University, Murray Edwards College Cambridge, Fitzwilliam College Cambridge, Queens' College Cambridge, Articulation, The National Gallery, Noisy Classroom, Sports for Champions, Unifrog and Cantab Tours.

Speakers this year were:

William Carter, who shared experiences from his journey from not receiving the support he needed to access learning as a child with severe dyslexia, to surpassing the expectations many set for him, to studying for his PhD as a Fulbright Scholar at The University of Berkeley, California.

Jesse Elzinga, Headmaster at Sevenoaks School, who shared his reflections on the value of education, his personal journey as a bursary student and his commitment to advancing opportunity for all.

The graduations for the 2020 and 2021 cohorts will be held this spring, prior to the alumni and mentor dinner.



Meet-up days and online mentoring

Our meet-up days have continued to provide varied and enriching sessions for our Core and Aspire students, who have praised the interactivity of content beyond the school curriculum. Attendance has been an average of 82 per cent. We collaborated with Pathway CTM, Noisy Classroom, Body Language expert Mike Carter, PUSH and West Kent Mind.

This year, we began trialling one-to-one online mentoring sessions on Brightside, providing individualised support from our mentors, as well as group sessions on Microsoft Teams.

Alumni and mentor dinner

We welcomed 47 guests for this year's Alumni Dinner, held on 4 April. Guests spanned KAN alumni students and mentors, current mentors, donors and teacher contributors. It was a wonderful opportunity to hear how the KAN alumni are thriving and continuing to benefit from the KAN network. Hannah, KAN alumni and current mentor shared the following in her speech, 'KAN has provided me with a network of like-minded friends across different universities, all of whom share the same drive to break down barriers and ensure that higher education is accessible to those who deserve it. KAN transformed my own future, and together, we can continue making that difference for many more students to come.'

We will be hosting another alumni dinner in April 2026.





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The research skills I gained while writing my summer research projects made much of my A-level work far easier than it would have been had I not had the opportunity to practise those skills earlier on with KAN. I have grown in confidence drastically, particularly when it comes to making new connections with people and sharing ideas.

Y13 KAN student

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The Summer Research Project

Each summer students can undertake an independent piece of essay work, researching a question of their choice. These are supervised and marked by our mentor team. This year, students were given support with academic writing by a visiting academic from King's College London, as well as receiving training on how to reference.

This academic year, the following students were commended for their first-class work.

Name	Cohort	Title
Amelia	2024	Is ignorance truly bliss?
Jensen	2024	What happens when mass or energy enters a black hole?
Lily	2024	An analysis of 'Needy Streamer Overload' and how mental health is depicted in media.
Ronon	2023	Why are Ares and Athena perceived so differently despite both being gods of war?



Reflections



My involvement with KAN started shortly after I began working at Sevenoaks School during the pandemic, with some online A-level Chemistry help sessions. One of the same students from those sessions recently came to observe one of my lessons, having gone on to be a KAN mentor, earn a first-class degree, and embark upon teacher training through Teach First. In the intervening years, I have had the pleasure of watching many more KAN students set and achieve ambitious goals for their higher education and careers thereafter. This is a testament to the calibre of KAN students and their passion for learning and education.

I have supported KAN meet-up days, interviews, archery sessions, and led four Cambridge residentials, as well as one online "residential". As I have become more involved with KAN, I've seen firsthand the tireless work that first Isla and now Kathy put into ensuring the effective delivery of KAN's vital work: breaking down barriers to higher education for students in our partner schools.



The start of every Cambridge residential has felt like a family reunion and that's because KAN is a family. The students and mentors truly care for each other and are one another's safe place and support network. Alongside workshops, talks, and visits it was always wonderful to be able to give students some freedom to explore Cambridge with their friends. I will cherish fond memories of letting students stay up just a little later to watch bats flitting over the river Cam in Queens' College while they discussed their lives, wide-ranging academic interests, and ambitions for the future.

I have been delighted to see many KAN students go on to become mentors, candidly sharing their own knowledge and experiences to support the next generation of students. The meet-up days and residentials are invaluable for students to learn about the university admissions process and university life. Mentors have increasingly taken the lead in these activities and proved themselves to be excellent role models. Through talks and taster sessions, students have discovered new interests that they may not have otherwise been exposed to. I have seen students realise what they want to study, what they might want to do after university, and work with their mentors to plan how to make this a reality.

When I started leading the KAN Cambridge residentials, I was scarcely older than the fantastic mentor team and there was a strong feeling that I was just another mentor who happened to also be the lead teacher. As the years have passed and mentors have started calling me "Mr Russell" instead of "Jamie", I have realised that it is time to pass the torch (or rather the trip phone and first aid kit). I am immensely grateful to all of the students, mentors, and staff who have made my work with KAN a pleasure over the last five years. I know that KAN is in safe hands with Kathy and Sophie and I greatly look forward to many more years of supporting KAN.



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This network of people has not only helped me to become a better student, but also a better person, and I'm really grateful that the programme has helped me to change for the better so much over the years.

KAN student

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Key dates 2025-26

Thursday 25 September	Online mentoring
Wednesday 8 October	Meet-up day, Sevenoaks School
Wednesday 28 January	Meet-up day, Sevenoaks School
Thursday 26 February	Online mentoring
Tuesday 31 March	2020 and 2021 Cohort Graduation and Alumni Dinner
Wednesday 1 April - Friday 3 April	Spring residential
Thursday 14 May	Online mentoring
Monday 29 June - Thursday 2 July	Summer residential

For more information about KAN, visit our website

www.sevenoaksschool.org/service-and-partnerships/secondary-partnerships/kan/

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Thank you to these supporters of KAN



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