

STOP PRESS

If you want to get a message to the media, bear in mind that some press releases are more effective than others...

Doing it wrong

Journalists have short attention spans. Fail to grab their interest with your top line and they simply won't read it, meaning the time you've spent lovingly crafting every word will have gone to waste.

Also, don't send out press releases as attachments – always paste the text in to an email – and be sure to get the facts in. On which day and date was the centre opened?

This sounds interesting, but it's very woolly. How did the architects involve the children?

£2m?! Hang on, who is this parent? What inspired them to support the build?

Oops – you've buried the most newsworthy part of your story among the final paragraphs. An internationally acclaimed composer backed your build? Tell us more!

Urgh. Provide brief notes at the end of the press release that include a named contact for further information, their email address and mobile phone number, plus a link to the school website – and ensure that this contact will provide an immediate response to journalists' enquiries. They'll give up if they're given the runaround or no one gets back to them.

School opens new arts centre

Anywhere Primary School in Nowhereville has opened a new arts centre.

Headteacher Mary Principal said: 'We're delighted to have this unique new facility. We've worked incredibly hard alongside the PTA with fund-raising to make this possible. We're really grateful to everyone who has helped.'

The architects, Build & Partners, asked the children what they wanted from the building so they were really involved with the process.

St Nowhere Mayor Christopher Danglechain opened the facility on Saturday and said: 'This is a really exciting new facility and the council is thrilled to have had a major role in getting the project off the ground.'

The parent of a former pupil contributed £2m to the project, for which the school is extremely grateful.

The school plans to use the new arts centre for music and drama performances and preparation.

Last year, pupils appeared in a very successful performance of Joseph and His Technicolour Dreamcoat at the community centre, which composer Andrew Lloyd Webber attended.

Chair of Governors Peter Lingering said: 'This is a great achievement for the school and I congratulate Ms Principal on her hard work.'

For more details, contact the school.

Is it unique? Probably not. If it is, explain why. What fundraising did you do? This is also a very dull quote. Education is about changing young lives – what could be more inspirational than that? This just focuses on the effort of fundraising rather than the children. Also, avoid using abbreviations.

If this is for local media it's probably worth mentioning the mayor, but if you can't persuade him to say something more interesting than this, forget the quote.

This is from what Basil Fawlty might have called the 'Ministry of the Bleeding Obvious.'

No doubt the chair of governors is keen to be included in the press release, but he's not adding to its news value. Try to think yourself into the role of media consumer – would the story interest you if you weren't linked to the school?

Getting it right

Andrew Lloyd Webber backs primary school in building new arts centre as grateful parent pitches in £2m

Head says she hopes it will inspire new generation of performing talent as composer acclaims 'a building for future stars'.

As cash-strapped schools battle against cuts, a primary has opened a stunning new arts centre – with a little bit of help from *Cats* and *Evita* composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and a grateful parent.

Mary Principal, headteacher of Anywhere Primary School in Nowhereville, said she had feared that in the current funding climate, the school's new arts centre would remain a pipe dream.

But when local resident Lord Lloyd Webber was spotted in the audience of a school production of his musical *Joseph and His Technicolour Dreamcoat*, Ms Principal said the project took on a new momentum.

"Lord Lloyd Webber was so encouraging and has been a mentor for the whole project," she said.

Meanwhile, the parent of a former pupil who is now enjoying a successful career as an actor came forward with a £2m contribution to ensure that the centre was built.

They wish to remain anonymous.

Ms Principal said: 'At Anywhere Primary, we are passionate advocates of the performing arts and believe that exposure to the arts at an early age can be a life-changing experience. The marginalisation of the arts in many secondaries as a result of the EBacc – which only includes 'academic' subjects – is a real worry to us.

Lord Lloyd Webber said: 'Anywhere primary is a school which understands the power of creativity in children's lives. Their new arts centre is a building for the stars of tomorrow.'

The centre's architects, Build & Partners, based in Somewhere Else, involved the pupils in a year-long design project for the duration of the build. Project Manager Dan Design said: 'The children showed fantastic creativity in their ideas. They came up with the idea of different types of seating in the theatre space to fit adults and children, and the chair designs are theirs.'

The new centre was opened on Friday January 14 by the mayor of Nowheresville.

Now that you've got a real story to sell, think about targeting. Do one version of the press release for local media flagging up your local connections and one for the nationals without.

Work the news agenda to your own advantage by hitching your press release to topical talking points and current discussions around education policy – in this case, funding cuts.

This is another big education policy topic that takes your story out of the realm of 'local school builds building'. The quote also keys into the idea of education as something that changes lives.

Great! You've got a quote from the main man.

Don't forget to send out sharp, high-resolution pictures with your press release. I can't stress strongly enough that images which 'say' something can make all the difference to your chances of success. It may be worth hiring a professional photographer for a few hours to capture a big event. It can be the best story in the world, but blurry, badly composed photos will scupper its chances of publication.

Susan Delgado is media and policy director at the specialist education PR company Empra and a former assistant editor of *Tes*