

# SCHOOLS WEEK

A digital newspaper determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts.

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Moving on  
from 'no excuses'

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'Government should  
learn leadership  
from heads'



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FRIDAY, JUNE 5 2020 | EDITION 216

## Keep up! DfE nears 100th Covid-19 guidance update

GOV.UK

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avirus (COVID-19).

### Education and childcare

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teachers, school leaders, carers, p

Schools can reopen for children in reception, year 1 and year 6

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Schools remain closed

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groups, except for children

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assessed diff

school meals or food vouchers will be available for

attending school

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What you can do now

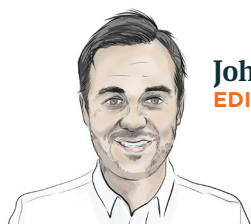
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## Trust warned over local spike days before school closed

- Primary closes after staff member tests positive, despite warning
- Another four schools shut after cases in first week of reopening
- Just half of schools go back, with new track and trace delays

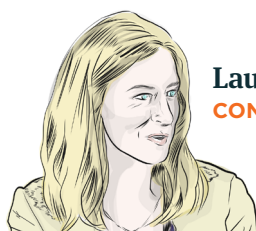
# SCHOOLS WEEK

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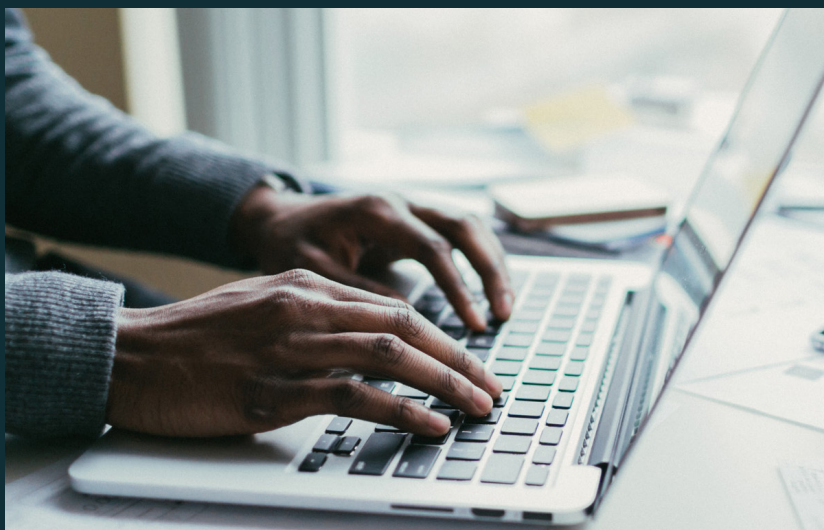
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# Just half of primaries welcome back more pupils

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**

**@FCDWHITTAKER**

Thousands of primary schools remained closed to all but the most vulnerable pupils and children of key workers this week, as concerned headteachers snubbed the government's plan for wider reopening.

Boris Johnson asked primary schools to reopen to reception, year 1 and year 6 pupils from June 1, but surveys of school staff this week show a mixed response.

Data from Teacher Tapp suggests just 53 per cent of state primary schools welcomed back more pupils this week, with just 26 per cent doing so on Monday. Twenty-eight per cent are waiting until next week.

A poll of National Education Union members found just 44 per cent saying their school reopened to more pupils on Monday.

The figures will make for disappointing reading for the government, which has repeatedly defended its back-to-school plans, warning of the impact on children's education if closures remain in place indefinitely.

But YouGov polling showed the government's plans were opposed by 50 per cent of Britons.

Public trust in the government as a source of accurate information on coronavirus has also slumped to less than 50 per cent – down from more than two-thirds in mid-April.

Headteachers whose schools did welcome more pupils this week reported a relatively



smooth transition, but warned they could not go much further.

Alice Witherow, chief executive of the Tyne Community Learning Trust, which runs nine schools in the north-east, said her children had been "amazing, and staff had a full day to train, which was really effective in tackling any safety concerns".

But she was "very concerned" about suggestions that schools could be asked to open during the summer "as it took considerable planning to do this safely now, and headteachers who worked all of last week keeping schools open need a break".

Jamie Nairn, head of Wootton Primary School in Northampton, said his school had reopened to all three year-groups on June 1, and had attendance of between 50 and 60 per cent.

"It has gone very smoothly," he told Schools Week. "Parents have been grateful that we have

been able to open."

However, his school is "now at full capacity as our classrooms cannot accommodate 15 and maintain effective social distance... Our largest groups have 12."

Another senior leader, who did not want to give their name, said a rigorous risk-assessment process had "supported as safe a return as possible in the circumstances", but the "lack of robust track and trace is a real concern."

"Schools have been asked to dismantle and rebuild the entire school system twice since March. The negative rhetoric from the government and media about teachers has been shocking."

And another leader, whose school reopened on Wednesday to between 20 and 30 per cent of reception, year 1 and year 6 pupils, said although the first day had gone well, reopening to more pupils would require "a greatly reduced timetable as we don't have the room required to ensure reasonable social distancing".

The government has said its "ambition" to see all primary pupils return before the summer break "remains under review".

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT leadership union, said earlier this week that such a return was "not possible, based on the advice we have from the Department for Education. Despite the narrative from the government, the level of confidence for a return to schools remains low."

**This week, the future got a little brighter', page 26**

## EXCLUSIVE

## New parent and pupil panel will aid Covid policymaking

The government is setting up a new online panel of 5,000 pupils and parents who will complete fortnightly surveys to inform coronavirus policymaking.

The Department for Education is looking for a contractor to set up the "parent and pupil panel" to "help monitor the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on children and young people".

The panel will consist of around 2,500 primary school parents and 2,500 secondary school pupils and their parents.

The department wants the first survey to go out in August, with the possibility for

"appropriate incentives" to "boost response rates". Surveys will be run once or twice a month until mid-January.

Areas of interest include the types of learning activities children are engaging with outside of school; support for vulnerable children; the effect of the pandemic on future education plans, and parents' awareness of communications around school opening.

The DfE is inviting expression of interests from companies to recruit and run the panel.

The tender document states the panel will be selected using a "stratified random probability

sample" of pupils from the national pupil database (NPD).

However, as the NPD doesn't include emails or phone numbers, recruitment to the panel would have to be achieved via post.

An initial letter would be sent to selected pupils and parents inviting them to take part in a 12- to 15-minute online survey, with those respondents then asked if they'd like to join the panel, with the option for telephone interviews.

The document adds: "Given the fast-moving nature of the current situation, the contractor will need to work flexibly and at pace."



# DRET warned over local spike days before coronavirus closure

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

An academy trust forced to close one of its schools days after reopening because of a coronavirus case had previously been warned about a rise in infections in the area.

The David Ross Education Trust closed Cedar Road Primary School, in Northampton, on Wednesday after a member of staff tested positive for Covid-19.

The trust said the staff member has not been in school for 13 days, but absences caused by other staff isolating meant it could not remain open.

Correspondence seen by Schools Week shows that concerns about rising infections in Northamptonshire were raised with the trust last Friday, before its schools reopened to pupils in reception, year 1 and year 6. The trust decided to proceed with its plans anyway.

It is one of at least five schools forced to close in the past week after staff tested positive for the virus – outlining the importance of an effective national track and trace system.

The government has promised the system will pinpoint localised outbreaks and lock down areas with high infection rates. But the *Guardian* reported yesterday it is not expected to be fully operational until September.

Leadership unions have warned of the difficulties this puts leaders in.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT, said leaders “do not want to see classrooms empty for a day longer than they need to be. But there is not a school leader in the land who wants to risk admitting more pupils unless it is safe to do so.”

It is the second time in a week that DRET, whose chief executive Rowena Hackwood sits on a panel advising the DfE on its coronavirus response, has had its approach to reopening its schools challenged.

On Tuesday, support staff unions Unison and the GMB reported the academy chain to the Health and Safety Executive over allegations it put employees and pupils at “serious and imminent risk” by allowing more pupils to return too early.

According to the *Northampton Chronicle*, confirmed Covid-19 cases in the town rose from 396 on May 9 to 473 on May 23. The paper has also reported high coronavirus-related death rates at Northampton General Hospital and Kettering General Hospital.



Cedar Road Primary School

A spokesperson for DRET said the trust stuck with its reopening plans as local guidance said schools can “remain partially open” with the “right protective measures and risk assessments in place”.

It is also reviewing risk assessments “at least weekly, and considering factors outside of the school, including local infection rates”.

Following the positive test on Wednesday, local leaders have “been in touch with Public Health England and informed both parents and staff of the situation”.

Councils have been given a role overseeing the track and trace system at a local level. But Northamptonshire County Council said schools are only required to notify their local authority for public health reasons if they have two or more cases.

However, the council has asked all schools locally to report any positive cases among staff “so we are able to inform local teaching unions”.

The authority confirmed it had been informed about Cedar Road but said further details “were not shared as they are not required”.

DRET said all staff who came into contact with the infected employee are now being tested and are self-isolating, in line with government advice.

“This has an impact on staffing numbers and so we cannot currently put in place the required

staff-to-student ratios required to open the school in line with our risk assessment. We will be re-opening as soon as we are able.”

The case also highlights the additional pressures school leaders are facing from unions. The Astrea Academy Trust this week stepped back from opening six schools in south Yorkshire following pressure from unions amid heightened risk in Sheffield and Doncaster.

Unions claimed DRET gave them “insufficient time to consult with staff” over the return of pupils.

The HSE said the unions’ referral was “being assessed in line with our procedures”. But they said employers following relevant government guidance will be “taking reasonably practicable precautions to control workplace risks”.

However, Jon Richard, head of education at Unison, said the government’s “rush to open schools” had “put the safety of pupils, staff and the wider community needlessly at risk”.

He also accused other trusts of “ignoring” recommendations of councils and public health staff, saying “more cases will follow”.

Arboretum Primary School, in Derby, has been shut for deep cleaning after seven employees were found to have the virus. Thorpe Primary School in Bradford announced a week-long closure on Saturday.

# Investigation

## Heads struggle to keep up with antisocial Covid-19 updates

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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INVESTIGATES

School leaders have had to read almost 100 updates to government guidance during the coronavirus crisis – a quarter of them published during antisocial hours.

Analysis by Schools Week found the government has published 29 guidance documents or announcements for schools about the pandemic since mid-February, and issued 94 coronavirus-related updates for the sector.

We have analysed the number of guidance documents as the government and unions quarrel over the numbers (see box-out) and heads say they cannot keep up with the piecemeal changes.

Anne Longfield, the children's commissioner for England, told the parliamentary education committee this week it was "the thing that headteachers talk to me about most".

"What they say is they get so much guidance so rapidly updated that it's a work in itself to keep up with it.

"Something comes in on a Friday, 70 pages, it's updated on a Monday and it's another 70 pages, often without clear indication of what's changed. There has to be a better way of doing that."

A search of the Department for Education's website on Tuesday found 29 new publications of coronavirus guidance for schools, and 94 updates, either to guidance issued since February or to older guidance already updated to reflect the crisis.

Our analysis also found that at least 25 of these updates were published during antisocial hours – after 5pm on a weekday or over the weekend.

For example, the DfE published three updates for schools between 5.13pm and 6.52pm last Thursday, just days before schools were due to reopen. Three further updates were published about 8pm on Saturday.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT school leaders' union, said the government was "dealing with an evolving picture so updates to guidance are inevitable". But he added: "The sheer number and the fact that they ping into inboxes late at night really isn't helping school leaders at a very challenging time.

"There's also the anxiety they create that you don't want to miss even a single one in case that update turns out to be crucial later."

The department said it updated documents so that they reflected the "most up-to-date information to make sure that teachers, parents and young people are as well-informed as



possible in what is a rapidly changing situation".

But Dr Mary Bousted, the National Education Union's joint general secretary, said the documents were published "without tracked changes, so our members have to read through the whole thing to see what's changed. As if they don't have better things to do."

She said leadership members of her union contacted her in "desperation that yet another DfE document has come out at 6pm on a Friday".

The department appears to be improving the system and now includes more detailed information on the changes to some pieces of guidance.

For example, recently updated guidance for parents and carers includes a "main changes to previous guidance" section near the top, with a bulletpoint list of what has changed and where.

However, most updates have been issued without detailed information about what is new.

### FACT CHECK: WHO WAS RIGHT ON GUIDANCE STATS?

The Department for Education this week published a blog in which it said claims about the number of guidance updates were "misleading".

It was responding to an article in *The Independent* that quoted Dr Mary Bousted as saying "the government's plans on reopening schools, since they were first produced on May 12, have been changed 41 times".

The figure comes from an earlier story in the *i newspaper*, which quoted a letter to parents from Ani Magill, the chief executive of the Xavier Catholic Education Trust, who said heads had "received 41 sets of changes to the original guidelines that were sent out just over a week ago".

The DfE's post claimed its guidance

on reopening had been updated once. But it was referring to just one guidance document, "Actions for educational and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020".

Not only has that document been updated twice since publication – not once, as the DfE said – it is one of many that inform schools about reopening plans.

Who's right? *Schools Week* found at least 26 more examples of DfE publications and updates relating specifically to the wider reopening of schools. This number grows if guidance for early years settings and ITT providers, which will be relevant to some schools, are included.

# Schools withdraw training placements

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

EXCLUSIVE

A “worryingly high” number of schools have pulled out of offering teacher training placements for the next academic year as they adapt to a post-pandemic world.

Schools are saying that they do not want extra people in classrooms and are reluctant to allow trainees to teach because of the amount of school time pupils have already missed.

Half of the 247 initial teacher training (ITT) providers surveyed by the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) reported their school partners would not participate in training programmes in 2020-21.

However, providers hope any potential disruption may be limited after confirmation yesterday that the Department for Education will extend the relaxation of certain ITT criteria.

Emma Hollis, the association's executive director, said the survey findings were “worryingly high” at a time of “increasing applications to teaching”.

More than four out of five ITT providers were more concerned about securing enough school placements next year compared to previous years, with 45 per cent of providers having closed, or considering closing, programmes as a result.

The survey included school-centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers, School Direct lead schools and higher education institution ITT providers.

James Noble-Rogers, the executive director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers



(UCET), said: “At a time when we are experiencing the first significant increase in applications to ITT for many years, it would be a great shame if potentially excellent teachers were turned away because of placement difficulties.”

The government has been called on to provide “encouragement” or, if needed, a “requirement” for schools to “engage in ITT”. NASBTT also says funding for schools to “incentivise” placements and for providers to support additional mentoring should be considered.

But Schools Week can reveal certain ITT rules will be relaxed next year, including the expectation that trainees teach in at least two schools and meet the standards across the full age and ability range of training.

Removal of the expectation that training cover no fewer than four years has also been extended.

But the coronavirus pandemic has brought some more positive news with UCAS statistics for the month between mid-April and mid-May showing that the number of applicants accepted for places on postgraduate ITT courses rose by about 4,000.

John Howson, the founder of TeachVac, said this was an “unprecedented increase”, adding in a blog the “super-tanker that is teacher supply looks as if it is changing course as a result of the pandemic”.

Jack Worth, the schools workforce lead at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), said an “increased labour market insecurity” under Covid-19 meant many companies had slowed recruitment, while demand for teacher “will remain comparatively unchanged”.

Therefore, increased applications and places accepted “could represent an encouraging shift in the trend in teacher recruitment”.

But NFER's annual Teacher Labour Market report, published today, warns secondary recruitment still faced “significant challenges” as “supply is not meeting demand”.

The report found teacher leaving rates had improved slightly in 2018-19 – falling from 10.5 to 9.9. This represented 1,350 teachers, which the report said was “nearly half of the under-recruitment” in ITT in 2019-20. However fewer newly qualified teachers are being retained into their second year.

A Department for Education spokesperson said it recognised that working with teacher training providers “may be challenging” but it brought “benefits including providing schools with additional capacity”.

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR\_93

## Undergraduate ITT courses capped for next year

Recruitment to undergraduate initial teacher training (ITT) courses will be capped next year.

The government wants to stabilise admissions during the Covid-19 pandemic, reducing “volatility and ensure fair and orderly admissions” so “students are safeguarded at a time of unprecedented uncertainty”.

Postgraduate teacher training courses will not be capped to help ease the teacher retention crisis.

However, undergraduate course providers can only recruit up to 5 per cent more students than their forecasted intake for 2020-21.

James Noble Rogers, the executive director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), said he would have preferred undergraduate teacher training courses to be outside the controls and “flexibility should be allowed”.

The Department for Education does have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 undergraduate places. Of these, 5,000 are ring-fenced for ten courses, including ITT.

Providers bid for these extra places, which are allocated by the education secretary.

However, the places “are not guaranteed,

and no provider or institution should rely upon receiving additional places in their planning process”, guidance warns.

If the number of bids placed by providers exceeds 5,000, those with the “highest rates of continuation and high-skilled employment or further study” will be prioritised. And if multiple institutions apply for the same region or courses, places may be divided between them.

Far fewer applicants were recruited on to undergraduate ITT courses (4,963) compared with postgraduate courses (29,580) last year.



# AQA's online portal 'ripe for human error'

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

EXCLUSIVE

An exam board's online portal that requires schools to input potentially thousands of teacher-assessed grades one-by-one could result in "horribly wrong" results, school staff have warned.

Schools are providing centre-assessment grades and rankings for each pupil after summer exams were cancelled.

Exam boards WJEC, OCR and Pearson have set up systems whereby schools can download a pre-populated spreadsheet, enter relevant data and then re-upload.

However, AQA – the country's largest board – has opted for a "grade entry portal" in which grades must be entered and submitted individually. AQA said it chose this system because spreadsheets had "too high a risk of errors or viruses".

However, Mark Thornber, a maths teacher who has been responsible for analysing Durham Johnston School's exam data for the past two decades, said its leaders were "horrified" when they discovered they had to use the system.

He said it was "ripe for basic human error" as it had been designed "so there can be no real oversight from the school".

The grade entry portal includes students' details, so schools only have to enter grades and rankings for each qualification.

But Thornber said: "Grades could be horribly wrong because of a transcription error – a swap. There is a process for challenging that in the summer, but it will be too late for the pupil trying to get into sixth form."

He estimates that 47 AQA exams were originally scheduled at his school, or about 2,000 individual exams.

The school will have to input grades and rankings into 47 different AQA portals, with from 270 to just 20 pupils in each.

In normal circumstances, Thornber said, school management teams used spreadsheets to check and re-check that grades were in line with school predictions "making sure there is no rogue data".

However, AQA's system allowed only one person to input data and his school was unable



to go through the same "rigorous reviews".

Schools can appeal grades where a "centre believes it has made an error when submitting its information".

But a data manager at a West Yorkshire school said that mistakes "will be unavoidable across the country" as "when completing such an extensive and monotonous data entry task, the chances of an error are quite substantial".

Typing errors could also be "extremely detrimental to the student". The "unnecessary and avoidable" inputting also took up a lot of time.

"My team will have about 3,000 pieces of data to manually input."

However, a spokesperson for AQA said the system had been made as "easy to use as possible. Our biggest priority is to make sure students get the right grades.

"We know some schools would like to be able to send us their data in a spreadsheet and we gave this some serious thought – but the fact is there's just too high a risk of errors or viruses.

"Even minor issues with formatting could cause problems, so entering data directly into our system will make sure we have it in the right format, with lots of checks built in."

They added there was "no opportunity for 'typos'... as users choose grades from a pull-down menu, rather than typing grades in".

## e-Marker Grade Entry

Centre Administrator Home Page  
Final Submission deadline: 12th June 2020

### Allocations

Qualification

A level

### Subject progress - Please select your users:

Save centre users changes Cancel changes Refresh

| Level   | Series | Subject Ref | Subject Name            | Total... |
|---------|--------|-------------|-------------------------|----------|
| A level | 196A   | 115         | Art & Design: Fine Art  | 19       |
| A level | 196A   | 100         | Biology                 | 52       |
| A level | 196A   | 109         | Business Studies        | 41       |
| A level | 196A   | 107         | D & T: Product Design   | 6        |
| A level | 196A   | 108         | D & T: Textiles         | 10       |
| A level | 196A   | 128         | Drama & Theatre Studies | 21       |
| A level | 196A   | 130         | French                  | 9        |
| A level | 196A   | 117         | History                 | 35       |
|         |        |             | Physics                 | 23       |

Centre Administrators - Home Page example

According to the exams regulator Ofqual, during a normal summer "exam boards have several layers of quality assurance... to make sure the marks of students are totalled correctly".

However, a spokesperson said that it was not possible this year for boards to check if the "rank order position of individual candidates" was correct. Heads of centre were instead asked "to carry out appropriate checks to ensure the accuracy of the data before it is submitted".

The spokesperson added that the collection and submission of required data was "a matter for the individual exam boards".

Schools have until June 12 to submit their grades, designed to reflect pupils' most likely exam outcome, and the rank order of pupils within each grade.

# Private school 'casualties' will add to state sector 'burden'

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

INVESTIGATES

The closure of private schools unable to weather the economic hit from Covid-19 will put more pressure on state schools as they welcome back additional pupils while social distancing.

Two long-standing prep schools announced this week they would close permanently. One, the 180-year-old Ashdown House Preparatory School in Sussex, is an alma mater of prime minister Boris Johnson.

Peter Woodroffe, the deputy chief executive of the Independent Schools Association (ISA), said it was a "really difficult time for the sector. There will be casualties and that will put a burden on the state sector."

The association, which represents more than 500 schools, said seven had closed. The Independent Schools Council (ISC), another sector body that represents more than 1,300 private schools, said it did not have figures on closures.

Government guidance advises private schools to access its furlough scheme "to retain staff and enable the school to reopen fully in due course".

But Woodroffe said the true impact would be seen after the government's aid programmes were wound-up later this year. "There's going to be businesses closing for the next couple of years, and that will impact people that won't be able to afford to send their children to private schools."

He pointed to the 2008-09 recession as a potential indicator of the fall-out, although the Bank of England has warned the upcoming recession will be the worst for 300 years.

Figures collated by the ISC in its annual census show the number of pupils in its member schools dropped from a pre-recession high in 2009 of 514,531, to a post-recession low in 2011 of 506,500.

While this represents a drop of just 1.5 per cent, it took eight years for the number of private schools to bounce back to pre-recession numbers.

The ISC census shows there were 1,271 private school members in 2009. This number steadily fell each year until a low of 1,221 in 2012, before rebounding and surpassing the pre-recession number in 2016.

But any closures in the immediate future – resulting in more pupils joining state schools – will come at a problematic time, particularly for primaries.

Some are already struggling to welcome back all the pupils eligible to return this week – reception, year 1 and year 6 – alongside strict

## HOW PRIVATE SCHOOLS WERE HIT DURING THE 2009 RECESSION

### PUPIL NUMBERS:

2009 PRE-RECESSION HIGH:

514,531



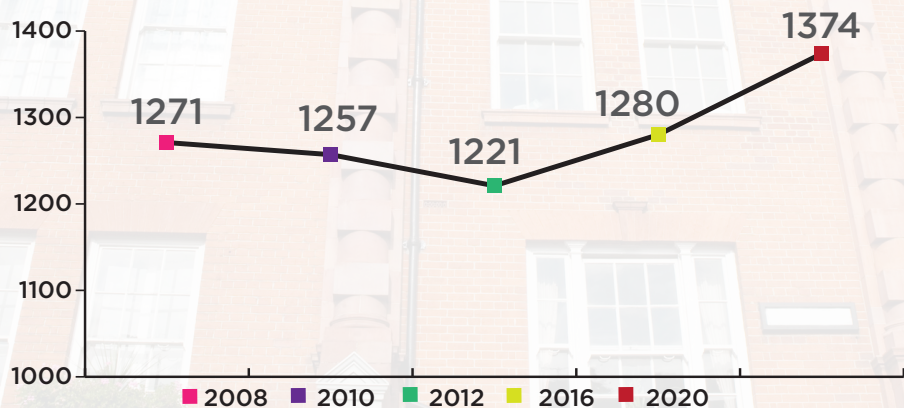
2011 POST-RECESSION LOW:

506,500

1.5 PER CENT DROP



### SCHOOL NUMBERS:



\*Figures are based on the ISC annual census

social distancing measures that demand spaced desks, one-way systems in corridors and classes capped at 15.

Ashdown House, which has 104 pupils on roll out of a capacity for 173, will close at the end of this term.

The school, which charges annual boarding fees of nearly £30,000, was founded in 1843. However, it projected that it would be less than a third full next year, following a decline in international boarders and fewer parents taking up places for their children.

Meanwhile, the BBC reported on Wednesday that Minster School, a prep school that provides choristers for York's cathedral, will close at the end of this term after a "catastrophic loss of income" caused a £5 million budget shortfall.

The 145-pupil school has origins dating back to AD627 and has existed in its current form since 1903.

HawleyHurst school, in Camberley, Surrey, shut suddenly after going into administration in April. The school, owned by Sir Tim Smit, who founded The Eden Project in Cornwall, reportedly had a £600,000 hole in its finances. According

to government data it had 282 pupils, from a capacity of 450.

Victoria Smit, the school's principal and the founder's sister, told parents that coronavirus had a "hugely detrimental impact on our ability to continue with fee income stopped in its tracks".

Tom Beardmore-Gray, the chief executive of the Cothill Trust, which runs Ashdown school, said the trust had invested heavily in the school but "it is not possible to maintain this support... The harsh reality is that the impact of the coronavirus has changed everything."

The school had also been at the centre of a child sex abuse investigation. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse heard last year that sexual touching at the school was "seen as acceptable" for almost 25 years from 1969.

Julie Robinson, the ISC's chief executive, said it was "impossible to predict with any accuracy the full impact this pandemic will have. We really are all in this together and much depends upon how long the restrictions are in place for."

Woodroffe said private schools that were coping had built up a "good amount of parental support" to help them through.

# £7m one-off boost for year 11 AP pupils

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Alternative provision settings will be given up to £750 for each year 11 pupil to aid their transition into post-16 work or training.

But the one-off funding, totalling £7 million to cover 11,300 pupils this year, should become an annual addition to AP budgets, says Cath Murray, alternative provision lead at the Centre for Social Justice think tank.

Vicky Ford, the children's minister, said the £7 million would allow AP settings to offer mentoring, pastoral support and careers guidance to pupils in danger of becoming "NEET", or "not in education, employment or training" after completing their GCSEs.

"As many young people stayed at home to stop the spread of coronavirus, they missed out on time with their teachers and peers," she said.

Cath Murray



"For those attending alternative provision, who may have relied on additional support to ease this important transition in their lives, this new funding will help get them back on track, re-engage them in their education and direct them on to the next chapter of their lives."

The Department for Education said the money could be used for transition coaches and mentors to provide one-to-one support for young people deciding their post-GCSE futures.

It follows data that shows that 59 per cent of young people who attend AP go on to a sustained post-16 destination, compared with 94 per

cent of those in mainstream schools.

Murray said that while the funding was welcome, it "should not be extraordinary".

"Every AP school in the country should be funded to support students to transition to a positive post-16 destination," she told *Schools Week*.

"Given that there is no statutory requirement to provide post-16 AP, this is the very least that these children should receive. One in two children leaving AP becomes NEET after their GCSEs, compared with one in 20 from mainstream schools."

The government said AP settings would be able to retrospectively claim up to £750 per sole-registered pupil to cover the costs of activities undertaken to help prevent that pupil from becoming NEET.

Sarah Dove, the president of the National Organisation of Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision, said the fund "allows a continuation of these professional relationships to bear fruit in terms of ensuring successful outcomes for the students".

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR\_93

## Attendance data form 'complicated and clunky'

The Department for Education's "clunky" expanded attendance form has been denounced by school leaders already under pressure.

Under guidance rolled out last week, schools must log more detailed attendance data using new codes that reflect specific reasons for absence during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The forms record attendance, absence levels and the school's open or closed status and must be submitted by noon each day – with the government saying it plans to collect "twice daily" data from September.

Cassie Young, head of school at Brenzett Church of England Primary School in Kent, said the system was "clunky", unnecessarily complicated and time-consuming.

"This just seems to be an onerous task that could have been simplified if they [DfE] had put strategic thought behind it."

She recognised it was an important piece of information and that the DfE "need to

get a national picture", but the new system piled pressure on schools already working at capacity.

The DfE is also inviting suppliers to develop new systems "to inform a discovery into returning absence data... potentially twice daily".

However the department said it was "investigating the possibility of automatically collecting the essential data directly from schools' management information systems" and there were "no plans to ask schools to collect or update systems more than once a day".

The contract notice states the attendance data gathered would help "build a detailed picture of education provision" to "monitor the impact and ensure safety".

A DfE spokesperson said: "Collecting attendance data supports safeguarding and enables the government to track capacity in the system and feed into wider tracking of the

impact of the virus."

Despite the quick introduction of attendance data, the UK Statistics Authority has praised the department for producing "timely and valuable statistics in challenging circumstances".

But Stephen Tierney, the chair of Headteachers' Roundtable, said school leaders were increasingly frustrated by the DfE's coronavirus response which was "continually being rewritten and seems to be developed without a thought on implementation within schools".

"All this time focused on large amounts of administration is taking away from children and time spent with them," he said.

Tierney said most teachers and parents wanted to spend the time "focused on children", not only from an educational point of view but on a "social and emotional level".

"We could be dealing with a great deal of trauma," he added.



## Speed read

# What governors can (and can't) do as schools reopen

Governors and trustees have been given updated guidance on how to do their jobs as schools begin to reopen. Here are seven things we learned

## 1 Governors should raise concerns over school reopenings ...

Trust boards have "ultimate responsibility for being assured by the chief executive that all the academies within the trust have been risk assessed and are ready for extending their opening".



If local governing boards have concerns about a decision to reopen an academy, its chair "should raise their concerns in accordance with the scheme of delegation where applicable or directly with the chair of the trust board".

## 2 ...but they can be overruled

The guidance states that trust boards can suspend local governing bodies and committees' powers "to assist timely decision-making".



"If necessary to maintain effective and timely decision-making, trustees may temporarily rescind any delegated responsibilities (except where there is a requirement within the Academies Financial Handbook for the establishment of a committee with particular responsibilities), for example, where a committee is currently unable to meet due to coronavirus (Covid-19)."

But the guidance goes on to say that the Department for Education "would expect any short-term changes to be reassessed as the situation changes over the coming months".

"All boards should keep a paper or electronic record of any decisions related to delegation."

## 3 LA school governors can't overstay their term...

The law does not allow elected governors of local authority-maintained schools to extend their terms of office, even during a crisis.



According to the DfE's guidance, it is "a matter for the governing board to decide whether to take a pragmatic approach to the timing of governor elections during the outbreak and continue to function with vacancies where necessary and practical".

## 4 ... but academy governors and trustees may be able to

The rules for academy trust elected governors and trustees are determined by each trust's articles of association "and trustees will need to make pragmatic decisions as to whether terms can be extended under the particular terms of their articles of association (usually the case for parent local governors), or whether the trust can continue to function with less governors or trustees if necessary".



Recruitment can still go ahead, with discussions with those who are interested taking place virtually.

## 5 Keep an eye on workload

Boards "will want to assure themselves that workload is being carefully managed by senior leaders and that this is factored into their resource and curriculum planning", the guidance says.



This includes considering "where additional resource could be safely brought in if necessary".

In a message published alongside the new guidance, Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, said he was "particularly grateful to trustees and governors for your dedication to the wellbeing and capacity of school leaders, who are under immense pressure, as well as your ambition to support your communities".

## 6 Headteacher recruitment and appraisal is a local matter

The recruitment of heads is "a matter for individual governing boards and in trusts, this will be through the trust's scheme of delegation".



Appraisal of senior leaders is also up to local boards and trusts, but the DfE says it "encourages all boards to have a flexible and pragmatic approach, keeping in mind that the headteacher's objectives will likely have evolved during the outbreak".

"We recognise that governors/trustees will want to work collaboratively with the headteacher on how best to support them."

# This week in Parliament

## Coronavirus: How experts believe pupils can catch up

**JOHN DICKENS**

@JOHNDICKENSSW

The education select committee heard from social mobility experts this week as part of its inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on education.

It comes after an analysis by the Education Endowment Foundation found that school closures because of the pandemic were “likely to reverse progress made to narrow the gap in the past decade”.

### DfE in talks of a summer school, but ‘time is ticking’

Natalie Perera, the executive director at the Education Policy Institute (EPI), said the Department for Education was looking at summer school options to help disadvantaged pupils catch up.

But Anne Longfield, the children’s commissioner, said there was a “window of only about two weeks” before the government “runs out of time” to set this up.

Susannah Hardyman, the chief executive of Action Tutoring, added that “time is ticking” for providers and the schools to prepare.

The experts were also keen to warn against any mandatory catch-up. When asked about non-attendance, Longfield said any additional lessons had to be made “appealing” with a range of people who could make them “attractive and fun”.

On tutoring, Hardyman said it was essential that schools worked in partnership with providers, as was building a good relationship with a tutor so pupils could see the value of it.

### But how much will it cost – and who will pay for it?

The EPI has proposed a one-year “catch-up” package of measures – such as doubling pupil premium funding for some pupils – that would cost £1.2 billion, but a summer school plan hasn’t been costed.

David Laws, the institute’s executive chairman and a former schools minister, said the Treasury would be attracted by initiatives that were



time-limited.

He added it would be “very concerned” about the learning loss and the impact of this on productivity, future wages and therefore tax revenue – catch-up plans presented a “strong cost-benefit case”.

“There may be a very good case for keeping them in education, improving their skills and going on to higher levels of qualification, rather than entering the labour market, becoming unemployed and having long-term scarring impacts.”

### Time for a ‘minimum common standard’ for home learning

Becky Francis, the chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, said there was a risk of information overload and inappropriate instruction in the early days of closures.

But she said it was now important to think forward and, given the “diversity of provision”, move towards a “minimum common standard that we encourage schools to build on ambitiously”.

James Turner, the chief executive of the Sutton Trust, said the government needed a “national approach to catch up and we need that soon if it’s to be effective”.

Laws said there could be “considerable disruption” to schools

through the autumn term. Planning and giving guidance to schools now – for home learning for lots of pupils for a long time – was very sensible.

He said schools would need to engage with pupils before the summer about any catch-up plans; an announcement would be needed by early July at the latest.

### Ofsted should look at ‘lesson learned’ during lockdown

Ofsted inspections are currently suspended, but debate is ongoing about the inspectorate’s role in the recovery.

Scotland’s schools inspectorate confirmed this week it would continue to suspend inspections when schools reopened in August. Writing in *Schools Week*, Amanda Spielman, Ofsted’s chief inspector, said Ofsted would “play its part” in “supporting the process of recovery”.

Longfield said there should be a focus on “catch-up and support for health and wellbeing”.

“They need to be part of this recovery, but in a much more supportive role and really looking at how schools have responded.”

Laws said there was no reason Ofsted could not report on best practice during lockdown without

it being a “commentary on each school at time of disruption”. A “general lessons” piece of work would be “welcomed by most school leaders”.



Natalie Perera



David Laws



Becky Francis

## News

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## Former trust boss 'unable' to repay loan

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

The director of a private school that went bust had an "overdrawn" £150,000 loan when it collapsed, an investigation by auditors has found.

But despite the Henriette Le Forestier Schools company owing creditors more than £900,000 – including £231,000 to former employees – just £30,000 will be recouped from the loan.

Henriette Le Forestier Schools, run by Trevor Averre-Beeson, the co-founder of the collapsed Lilac Sky Schools Academies Trust (LSSAT), was liquidated last year.

The company had taken over the Henriette Le Forestier prep school in south London in September 2016, but closed six months later after running out of money.

In 2018, the insolvency firm appointed to liquidate the private school company launched an investigation into payments made to directors.

Schools Week can now reveal it found an "overdrawn director's loan account" to Averre-Beeson, totalling £150,740.

The investigation also found payments of £37,776 made to his partner.

A liquidator's report filed last month at Companies House states that £30,000 will be repaid in a settlement agreement. Averre-Beeson was "unable to pay the full amount due to his personal circumstances".

Creditors are owed £917,000, including £375,000 to the landlord – Our Lady of Fidelity Convent – and £78,000 to the taxman.

The liquidator's report said there were "currently not funds available for preferential or unsecured creditors". It added that the liquidator's fees had reached £18,700.

Averre-Beeson said: "The matter is confidential, sensitive and complex. I am therefore unable to offer commentary at this moment in time."

Eight teachers who brought an employment tribunal case in 2017 were awarded £120,766 after claims against Henriette Le Forestier School for unfair dismissal and unauthorised deduction of wages were upheld.

But they could only recover the money from the government's redundancy payments office, which usually consists of statutory redundancy pay and up to eight weeks' arrears of salary.



Susan Ryan, a deputy head at the school, had to go through the government office to get her pension pay – however, it was capped at 20 years, despite her working at the school for more than 30.

She described it as "like being at home, because we were like a family", adding the closure "broke our hearts".

She said: "Staff still meet up regularly. We were very much a family and he [Averre-Beeson] took that all that away from us."

Meanwhile a government investigation into allegations of financial malpractice at LSSAT is yet to surface.

The government stripped the trust of its nine schools in July 2016. The closure followed poor performance at some schools and concerns about finance. Annual accounts published in 2017 by trustees appointed by the government to oversee its closure revealed a list of financial breaches.

More than £200,000 was paid to a company owned by Averre-Beeson without meeting government rules. Averre-Beeson also had to repay cash spent on luxury alcohol for an awards evening that was classed as an "inappropriate use of public funding".

The government was also concerned that LSSAT's sponsor – Lilac Sky Schools, the for-profit company owned by Averre-Beeson that is now



Trevor Averre-Beeson

in liquidation – provided services totalling more than £800,000 to the trust. This was stopped in 2015.

Averre-Beeson set up the trust in 2013, but resigned as chief executive in 2015.

The Education Skills and Funding Agency failed its own pledge to publish the investigation last year. In September, officials promised it would be published this academic year, but it's yet to surface.

The Department for Education refused to confirm the report would be published this year.

An Insolvency Service spokesperson said: "Our enquiries into the conduct of the directors of Henriette Le Forestier Schools Ltd are ongoing and we cannot comment further."



# DfE forms hit squad to tackle 'fake news'

BILLY CAMDEN

@BILLYCAMDEN

EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education has set up a “rapid rebuttal unit” to tackle “fake news”.

It is said to be one of the first department-specific teams in government to challenge “misinformation at the source” and rebuff “misleading content” before it reaches the mainstream.

Two job adverts for media officers state that this work is “more vital than ever” in making sure the public is not “deceived by so-called fake news”.

It adds: “The department’s new rapid rebuttal unit is one of the first in government to be looking to tackle misinformation at the source with a team that will aim to make sure misleading content running in the media or on social media is corrected in the shortest period possible time before it reaches the mainstream and misinforms the public.” A DfE spokesperson said the unit officially went live last Tuesday and currently has a team of three media officers.

In 2018 Theresa May set up a similar government-wide “rapid response” unit to counter fake news. Michael Gove used it in August last year to target Brexit half-truths.

In March the Cabinet Office announced this unit would now combat misinformation about Covid-19.

There do not appear to be any other similar teams across Whitehall, which means the DfE could have the first department-specific rebuttal unit.

Damian Hinds, the former education secretary, raised the problem of fake news just before he was sacked in July last year. He spoke at a social media summit about the “spread of misleading content on vaccinations” in schools, but added this “issue goes much further than that, and without firm action it is set to get a lot worse”.

Gavin Williamson, his successor, has not publicly repeated this concern, but his department has rebutted stories published by the media.

On April 18, a preview of The Sunday Times’s front page revealed reports that senior ministers had drawn up plans for schools to reopen as early as May 11.

But the DfE tweeted that evening: “No decision has been made on a timetable for reopening schools. Schools remain closed until further notice,



except for children of critical workers and the most vulnerable children. Schools will only reopen when the scientific advice indicates it is the right time to do so.”

And just this week the DfE published a blog entitled “addressing misleading claims about department guidance” following two stories that appeared last Sunday.

It said that one in The Independent reported on claims made by National Education Union joint general secretary Mary Bousted that the department’s guidance to schools on how to open to more pupils had been updated 41 times since May 12.

The DfE claimed this was “untrue”; the guidance had been updated “just once since it was published last month”.

Another article, published by The Mirror, reported

that celebrity fitness guru Joe Wicks was due to lead a review of the PE curriculum, which the DfE said again was “not true”.

The government’s existing anti-fake news units have, however, come in for criticism, with the Liberal Democrats’ former Brexit spokesperson Tom Brake last year describing them as “shameful spin machines”.

A DfE spokesperson said: “In line with wider work by the government communication service, we want to identify and counter misinformation and disinformation online, whether it is shared inadvertently or maliciously.

“That’s why we’re looking for talented individuals to join our team, helping us dispel myths and explain education policies to the public using straightforward, easy-to-understand social media content, blogs, and more.”

JOHN DICKENS | @JOHNDICKENSSW

## DfE should get its own house in order, first

The DfE setting up a ‘fake news’ squad was met with disbelief among some given the department’s own track record in this arena.

Schools Week reported in May last year how the government’s statistics watchdog had issued five separate slapdowns to the departments over its misleading use of data.

The department’s own transparency record on revealing the truth is also patchy. We revealed in April the DfE spent £50,000 attempting to keep secret its failure to properly vet

a businessman it allowed to run an academy trust that later collapsed.

We also reported in 2017 the department was in danger of falling before the floor standard for meeting its legal duty to respond on time to freedom of information requests.

And, as I write, Schools Week has four overdue FOI requests.

Perhaps the department should dedicate these fact-checking resources to getting its own house in order, first?



## News



## School improvement programme has 'detrimental effect'

**JAMES CARR**  
@JAMESCARR\_93

A whole-school improvement programme which has been used at over 4,000 schools across England has a "detrimental effect on learning", according to a damning two-year study.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) conducted a randomised controlled trial of 134 primary schools to assess the impact of the Achievement for All (AfA) programme at key stage 2.

The trial, which cost over £900,000, took place between 2016-18 and found children in treatment schools made two months' less progress in key stage 2 reading and maths, compared with children in control schools.

The findings rank AfA as the joint worst-performing of more than 100 projects reviewed by EEF since 2011, with only three other projects earning an impact rating of negative two months.

Of these it is the only one to have the highest possible evidence strength of five – which indicates EEF "have very high confidence in its findings".

The EEF found the programme "had a detrimental effect on learning" and advised schools delivering the system to "evaluate whether it is having the intended impact".

AfA was founded in 2011 by Professor Sonia Blandford and its trained coaches deliver bespoke two-year programmes to schools through 12 half-day coaching sessions a year which focus on leadership, learning, parental engagement and wider outcomes.

It also focuses on improving the outcomes for a target group of children – commonly the lowest 20 per cent of attainers.

The not-for-profit organisation's website states its "proven ability to accelerate academic progress closes the gap for all ages and stages, regardless of their background, challenge or need".

However, EEF's evaluation concluded these

target children, on average, made two months' less progress in reading than children in schools who did not receive the programme – while children eligible for free school meals made two months' less progress in maths.

Blandford pointed out that disadvantaged pupils within the AfA trial schools still "achieved above national expectations, which was our key aim in the intervention".

She added "it was an error to agree to a trial that attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of our broad and yet bespoke approach through the narrow lens of two school improvement parameters".

The founder also said seven out of every 10 participating schools continued with the programme and in the two years since the trial ended changes had been made to further support schools as part of the programme's "continuous development".

During the trial, the flexibility of the programme divided opinion. While some schools found it beneficial, others reported it made it "difficult to grasp what the programme was".

Nevertheless, the evaluation states the findings are "unlikely to be a result of schools failing to effectively implement" the programme, as in some cases "better implementation... may even have been associated with more negative impacts".

The EEF's findings are in contrast to glowing reviews the programme has previously attained, most notably from the Department for Education in 2013. A national evaluation commissioned by the government found AfA had a significant impact upon progress in English and maths among pupils with SEND who made "significantly greater progress" than the nation average.

Elsewhere it stated the programme led to "significant improvements in positive relationships, and reductions in bullying and behaviour problems among pupils when compared to those in non-AfA schools".

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## Free schools can follow Nightingale lead

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**  
@FCDWHITTAKER

The rapid creation of temporary Nightingale hospitals during the Covid-19 pandemic shows free schools shouldn't have to wait for years to open, says a director at the New Schools Network.

Sophie Harrison-Byrne, the director of programmes at the free schools support organisation, also urged the government to approve fewer bids from academy trusts "that simply replicate their existing provision", and favour innovation instead.

The UK's seven Nightingale hospitals were established in convention centres, university buildings and former retail outlets in anticipation of increased strain on the NHS caused by Covid-19. Several have now closed.

Appearing in a webinar organised by the Westminster Education Forum on Tuesday, Harrison-Byrne said there was a "role for free schools to play in the sector's recovery as we come out of the current pandemic", and that new schools set up to close the disadvantage gap should be fast-tracked.

A *Schools Week* investigation found that almost half of the new free schools in the past three years opened in temporary accommodations, with most still not in a permanent home.

"I'm not suggesting we should turn national convention centres into schools, but I think it's been a clear example of what can be achieved if assets are doubled-down," Harrison-Byrne said.

"Clearly if a new school is approved to open with a particular focus on closing the attainment gap in a disadvantaged area. Where disadvantage has been further exacerbated by the pandemic, that school should be enabled to open as quickly as possible."

Harrison-Byrne also called on the government to place more weight on innovation in free school applications.

It follows a gradual shift in the programme, originally pitched as a way for parents and teacher groups to start their own schools, into a vehicle for the expansion of existing trusts.

"Obviously in some contexts this is, of course, right, but it shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all approach, and the criteria shouldn't incentivise this replication over innovation," she said.



# What you may have missed over the half-term

## BAMEed issues new guidance for schools

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**

@FCDWHITTAKER

The physical and mental health of black, Asian and minority ethnic staff should be part of risk assessments as schools reopen, says the BAMEed network.

It published new guidance last week to address a "significant gap" in advice issued by the government and other bodies for protecting BAME employees.

A Public Health England review this week found people from black and Asian ethnic groups were up to twice as likely to die with Covid-19 than those from a white British background.

People from Bangladeshi backgrounds had twice the death rate of white people. Those of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, other Asian, Caribbean and other black ethnicity had between a 10 and 50 per cent higher risk compared with white British.

While the study did account for the effects of sex, age, deprivation and region, it did not consider obesity or occupation, both known risk factors.

Department for Education guidance states that schools should be "especially sensitive to the needs and worries of BAME members of staff, BAME parents and BAME pupils", given the higher risk.

But BAMEed believes this does not go far enough. "We know that many school leaders lack the requisite knowledge and confidence to



address this issue, and that BAME staff members themselves may feel unsupported and unsure about how to broach the subject with their employers," said the organisation's steering group members Allana Gay, Penny Rabiger, Amjad Ali, Hannah Tyreman and Lizana Oberholzer.

"Having not found guidance from DfE or from the unions, we decided to draw on support from colleagues in the NHS who have made strides in this area, and to create guidance and risk assessment that can be used by schools and other education settings."

The group's guidance, **published online**, makes five "calls to action", that are modelled on calls made by the NHS Confederation regarding BAME healthcare staff.

That includes risk assessments "that specifically

take into account the physical and mental health of BAME staff", with engagement "paramount".

It also states that representation in decision-making is critical "to include BAME staff as key influencers in decisions that may be made that directly affect them".

They also call for a national audit of BAME representation across education's leadership, "bespoke and continuing" health and wellbeing support and for education communications to be "positive and representative" of BAME colleagues and students.

The network hopes the document's release "will facilitate the start of a conversation that needs to happen more widely, and that we can make real and lasting change for our BAME colleagues and the communities we all serve".

It follows calls from Dr Patrick Roach, the general secretary of the NASUWT teachers' union, for reassurances that ministers' back-to-school plans fulfil their duties under the Equality Act "to prevent further discriminatory impacts related to the transmission of the coronavirus".

Matt Hancock, the health secretary, said on Tuesday that the pandemic had "exposed huge disparities in the health of our nation. It is very clear that some people are significantly more vulnerable to Covid-19 and this is something I'm determined to understand in full and take action to address."

## Voucher scheme switches to food parcels

Schools are now expected to make food parcels available for delivery or collection instead of using the national voucher scheme.

The Department for Education said this would ensure children "have access to a healthy free meal, and can help the school to stay in contact with those families".

A national scheme allowed closed schools to order free school meal vouchers.

But guidance updated on Friday said that as schools opened more widely, food parcels should be made available for collection or delivery for any eligible children who were staying at home.

*Schools Week* reported last month how school kitchens faced a planning "nightmare" for the return of pupils, with uncertainty and concern over numbers, food availability, rising prices and a lack of government guidance.

The updated guidance said schools could continue to use the national voucher scheme if their catering service could not provide meals or food parcels.

The DfE also said it was monitoring voucher orders to "broadly check" if schools were ordering in line with their estimates of eligible children, "recognising that for some schools this will be lower if they are providing food parcels or using a local arrangement".

But if the order was higher than expected, the department might "speak to the school about why this has occurred and will take forward any necessary action to rectify the position".

"A cross check will also be done for those making a claim for free school meals funding via the financial support available for schools."

It comes after Human Rights Watch warned

that the government's failure to ensure that all children had access to adequate food during school closures violated their right to food.

The national scheme has been beset by problems, including schools unable to place orders because the scheme's website couldn't cope with demand. Some parents were left without vouchers for weeks.





# EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Closures will impact pupils, but what about the impact of reopening on heads?

Today marks the end of a landmark week – the first of the new era of “Covid-19 secure” schools.

But it looks like just half of primary schools opened to welcome back more pupils – a pretty resounding vote of no confidence in the government’s back-to-school plans.

It’s not surprising. The government promised to have a “world-beating” track and trace system in place for when schools reopen.

Instead, we found out this week that the NHS contact-tracing system – an integral part of the system – isn’t expected to be fully operating until September.

It’s increasingly obvious the government decided to reopen schools without a proper plan in place to deal with the potential risks. They’ve instead pushed this issue on to the shoulders of headteachers.

But as a Teacher Tapp survey showed: heads are struggling. Nearly a quarter were more likely to leave the profession because of the coronavirus crisis. The figure was just ten per cent for teachers.

They need a hand from government.

Instead, ministers haven’t even got the basics

right – such as communicating their safety plans in a manageable and timely manner.

Our investigation this week reveals just how swamped headteachers have been with the deluge of new guidance on reopening.

New guidance is to be expected – of course it is. But first, when guidance is issued, it doesn’t even tell headteachers what has specifically changed. Instead, they have to trawl desperately through previous versions to try and work out what’s new.

Second, a quarter of the updates have come after school hours or during weekends.

More schools will begin to reopen as cases continue to drop, which is welcome – pupils need to get back in the classroom as soon as it’s safe. Ministers are right that the loss of learning could be catastrophic.

But so could the impact on headteachers of their rushed back-to-school plans.

The least government can do now is prove the test and trace system works – that will give heads confidence they are not putting their staff, pupils and communities at risk.



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# Profile

JL DUTAUT | @DUTAUT



**“You can’t ignore the statistics. For people from disadvantaged backgrounds, it’s more difficult to succeed”**

**Schools Week meets the new Magna Academy head on a mission to move on from the school’s ‘no excuses’ mantra**

Perhaps the importance of place isn’t talked about enough in respect of leadership. We hear a lot about community, but seldom about belonging. For Natasha Ullah, after years of commuting from Swindon to Reading, the opportunity to move her family to Dorset and secure a foothold by the sea was the chance of a lifetime.

“Living down here is a bit of a dream. I actually told the students in assembly that I’ve chosen to

live where you’re from, and I’ve chosen to stay here for the rest of my life, and they all looked at me with a strange look.”

The new headteacher of Magna Academy knows what she wants and has the endurance to get it, and those may be the very characteristics that got her the job. Securing the headship of a school twice rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted in 2015 and 2019 is intimidating enough. The fact that it is Ullah’s first only adds to that.

But Magna Academy has also courted critical headlines, and taking the helm from the controversial previous head, Richard Tutt, is not an easy gig. A year ago this week, Schools Week revealed that the Aspirations Academy

Trust school had kept its Ofsted grade despite “exceptional levels of pupil movement”. At the height of public outcry about off-rolling, and after the regulator had vowed to crack down on the practice, Tutt (one of many to have been labelled “Britain’s strictest headteacher” for his no excuses policies) explained that pupil movement was down to pupils’ inability to handle the school’s “high-expectations approach to learning”. Ofsted accepted this, finding “no hidden agenda” and “no sense of any inappropriate movement” in an inspection triggered by the local council in response to complaints from other headteachers. Ullah says part of her role now is to improve “issues with relationships in the community”,



## Profile: Natasha Ullah



especially with other local headteachers. Her sense of belonging here seems a good foundation to build on, and her background has led her to adopt a less controversial stance. "I'm quite positive and pragmatic," she says. "The mantra here used to be 'no excuses'. I think really the mantra probably should be 'there are barriers, but let's get over them together and then succeed'."

It's a marked change from her predecessor. Gone are silent corridors, and when I visited Magna in February, Ullah showed me around a large area of the school that was lying under-used. It has now been revamped into the "Phoenix Centre", a dedicated space for student support services. The only reason it hadn't already opened its doors was a lack of qualified personnel to staff it. (The 2019 Ofsted 'outstanding' report highlighted that the SENCO at the time was not fully qualified, and this is also being rectified.)

Ullah's first leadership position came just two years after completing her GTP at high-performing Windsor High School in Halesowen, just half an hour from Small Heath, where she was born. She was appointed lead teacher of history at The John Madejski Academy in Reading, where she quickly climbed the ranks to become

head of sixth form, then assistant principal and finally vice principal between 2008 and 2014. Upon initially taking up the post though, Ullah discovered that things weren't quite what they seemed.

First, though nominally lead teacher of history,

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**"Even early in my career, I was keen to keep subjects and not dumb things down"**

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she found the curriculum was designed in a way that meant history was not taught as a separate subject but as part of a "rolled-up humanities mush". Then, her first staff meeting delivered a shock. "I sat down and the headteacher, who I'm very good friends with now, said, 'We've done the best we've ever done: 17 per cent for English and maths', and I just remember thinking 'that's really low, but they're really happy'."

The experience was a formative one in many

ways. It gave Ullah a deep sense of the importance of curriculum. "I remember someone saying to me, 'oh, we shouldn't be teaching them history, they need more literacy'. I went home thinking 'why can't I do both?' Even very early in my career, I was really keen to keep subjects and not dumb things down but to adapt it for the students in front of me. When that worked, and they loved history and it was improving their literacy, it strengthened my resolve that you've all got to have the same opportunities."

Within two months in post, she had disaggregated the humanities curriculum and John Madejski had its first history GCSE group in years. It had been taken off the school's offer because the last group had entirely failed to gain a qualification.

Promotions followed in recognition of her work ethic, but Ullah recognises that she has also been "fortunate to work with people who have been able to see what I could do and given me the opportunities to do it". That sense of seeing the potential in others, trusting them with responsibility and expecting nothing more than "to be the best that you can be" informs not just her teaching but her leadership style too. And it very much reflects

## Profile: Natasha Ullah

the way she was raised, as an only child.

Ullah's father was a train driver and her mother "became qualified through experience" in accountancy. Neither had furthered their education. "Growing up, we didn't have a lot of money. But my parents worked incredibly hard to make sure that my house was filled with books. My dad is a great reader. He loves history and politics."

She went on to get a joint-honours degree in modern history and political science from the University of Birmingham. "From really little I remember being told education is super important. And it was always an expectation that I would go to university. Never 'you have to do this subject' or 'this career is better than anything else'. That always was very open. But you absolutely have to do your best. And I think that's where that high expectation comes from because I'm the same with my children, and I'm the same with my students."

Ullah also knows how fortunate she is to be so well supported. Her parents moved to Dorset to be close to their three grandchildren, and when she separated from her husband they moved in to ensure she could pursue her career. It has also meant she's managed to keep working through the Covid crisis, knowing that her children's home learning was in good hands.

The value of that support in empowering people to 'be the best they can be' is something Ullah experienced first-hand working to raise standards in Reading too, and it's a key reason why the idea of 'no excuses' doesn't sit well with her.

"You can't ignore the statistics. For people from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is more difficult to succeed. It is complex. And it's difficult. Sometimes it's cyclical, and [it's a question of] breaking that chain so they are doing something different to what their families have done before, and also taking the parents along with them. I've had numerous conversations with parents where initially they're quite against an apprenticeship or further education. And then when the kid's successful, they come back and they say, 'Do you remember that conversation we had?'"

After John Madejski, Ullah spent five years as

Natasha and her daughter



deputy headteacher of Thomas Hardy school in Dorchester, finally working in the county she's chosen to settle in. She has been in post at Aspirations Academies Trust's Magna Academy in Poole for only 21 weeks, and 11 of those have been spent dealing with the local impacts of a global pandemic.

**"I've been fortunate to work with people who have been able to see what I could do"**

One positive off-shoot is that the response has had to be local and collaborative, and relationships with other schools and the community more broadly have already improved. But as this piece goes to press, barriers to success for disadvantaged groups dominate the headlines, whether that's lack of access to technology for home learning or systemic racism.

Ullah is already ahead of the curve on both counts. The Phoenix Centre is now open to help students close learning gaps, and when it comes to racism, she has recent first-hand experience of its perniciousness. Her grandfather is Bangladeshi and, when she was announced

Natasha at her graduation with her mum



Natasha with her parents



in the Bournemouth Echo as the south coast's first BAME headteacher the article was met by a stream of racist comments from that paper's online readership. Driven to improve discourse, she and her team have reviewed Magna's curriculum.

"We have made some big changes with personal development and actually carving out large chunks of time every single week to be tackling these exact things. If they aren't discussed and students are left to toil with it themselves, then nothing will change."

Of course, there is a long way to go before the true impact of Ullah's leadership can be assessed. She freely admits that local cooperation hasn't yet meant partnership work with local alternative provisions, for example, but the changes she is putting in place represent a different commitment to the whole community.

And why wouldn't they? It is, after all, the community she has decided to make her own and her children's.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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MARY  
BOUSTED

Joint general secretary,  
National Education Union

## Crisis management: listen and learn from school leaders

**Announcements to please narrow audiences while washing your hands of the tough choices creates division, says Mary Bousted**

School leadership is difficult even in normal times. And these are not normal times. Covid-19 has cut through normal like a knife through butter and left the old certainties of school life flapping in its wake. School leaders have grappled with government bureaucracy as they've tried to keep children on free school meals fed.

With their teaching and support staff they've kept schools open so that vulnerable children and the children of key workers were cared for. And with their colleagues they've worked ceaselessly to support children at home during the lockdown - providing learning support, family counselling, safeguarding and, in many cases, food deliveries.

It has been a heroic effort, done with little or no fanfare. So how is it that leaders and teachers are under such sustained attack in the print and social media? I hesitate nowadays even to open Twitter because of the virulent, nasty attacks by so many enraged people who

believe that leaders and teachers lounged about during the lockdown and are now trying to delay a wider opening of schools out of laziness.

Over the weekend, I found myself defending school staff from such accusations as I argued that teachers should not be required to work throughout the summer holidays to

**“As any headteacher knows, you have to take people along with you**

make up for missed time in school. Broadcasters seemed not to want to hear about the double shifts done by teachers - on site and then at home, teaching in person and then preparing home learning materials. This truth was received as special pleading. All that school staff have done in a time of crisis seems, too many times, to have been forgotten.

And now there is a new front on which to attack school leaders. They have become targets for abuse about the decisions they are making about when, and how, to open their schools to more pupils. In one extreme case, a leader's decision not to bring back year 6 pupils this week has led to parental outrage and governor



dissension. Local fury is fanned by continued attacks by some newspapers who like nothing better than to print hate-filled headlines about teacher incompetence and sloth.

All this could have been so different if in England there had

the department and have been left without essential guidance and information as they make the difficult decision about whether or not to send their child back to school.

The National Education Union's survey of primary schools' wider opening on June 1 showed a chaotic state of affairs. Forty-four per cent of schools did not open more widely to any of the year groups announced by Boris Johnson on May 10 and a further 21 per cent to fewer year groups.

Local authorities have reasserted their authority. Those with high rates of Covid-19 infection have instructed their primary schools not to open more widely - so in the northwest only 8 per cent and in the northeast 12 per cent of schools followed the government's instructions.

There is a lesson to be learned by government here. As any headteacher knows, you have to take people along with you. You can't simply assert and instruct. When the stakes are this high, the teaching profession stands on its own ground, with its own ethical and moral foundations, to do the right thing. It should be supported, not knocked for doing that.



# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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**Calls for summer catch-up lessons for young people are understandable and well-meaning, but they are the wrong solution, says Nick Brook**

As many of us feared from the start of this crisis, research by the Children's Commissioner and the Sutton Trust concludes that disadvantaged pupils have been disproportionately affected by lockdown.

And while schools have moved rapidly to implement home learning arrangements, NAHT's own surveys show that there is a significant difference in degree of engagement between families. Home circumstances and lack of access to connected technology are significant barriers to learning, and the more education relies on online learning in the absence of full-time schooling, the greater the likelihood that gaps between the most and least affluent will increase.

Addressing these gaps in learning is undeniably important, but children need to be ready to learn first. The impact of enforced isolation on young people is little understood, yet likely to be significant for many. This might range from loss of routine, social interaction and self-regulation, through to erosion of mental health and coping with anxiety, bereavement and trauma.

Plus, the children we would be most keen to engage in catch-up are also the least likely to attend; Schools have gone to extraordinary lengths during wider closure to reach out to all pupils, yet school leaders tell us that there can be low engagement among pupils who have already fallen behind. It is unlikely that any "offer" of academic catch-up would reach the children it is designed to help most.

And when it comes to summer



NICK  
BROOK

Deputy general secretary, National Association of Head Teachers

## Teachers should not provide summer catch-up

schools, current evidence suggests they provide very little benefit. Out of context and unaligned to the school curriculum, learning is unlikely to stick. More importantly, the sum of learning through to the end of the year is unlikely to be any greater as a result.

The autumn term is already long. Every parent and teacher knows that

the summer risks shifting the point of exhaustion sooner, for students and their teachers.

This next term is likely to be the most challenging that any teacher has experienced for generations. The lure of additional money to work over the summer might appeal to some, but such offers are also potentially

**“Youth groups need assurances of funding to start tentative plans**

children are exhausted mentally by Christmas. Putting on "catch-up" over

damaging. Quite rightly, the education secretary has said on numerous



occasions that schools will not open over the summer because staff need a break.

In truth, teachers and leaders already work over the summer and we must avoid making even more demands on their time. It would not be wise for them or their pupils to go into September with the fuel tank already half empty.

Young people need to begin socialising in a safe and structured way again. School sites are perhaps the most obvious places to host summer activities, but school staff are not best placed to deliver them and curricular catch-up should not be their goal.

Youth groups and youth charities are perfectly positioned and experienced in structuring the sort of activities to draw young people out of their homes and encourage resocialisation. Yet when we need them most, funding challenges mean that many are facing an uncertain future.

High-quality provision that takes account of current restrictions will take time to get in place; funding needs to be available so that providers can plan with confidence and ensure that costs do not fall upon families. Government should be prepared to give a strong signal of intent and hard assurances of funding to youth groups across the country to start tentative plans.

Arguments are playing out in Westminster on how to balance public health needs and the negative impacts of lockdown. Our request of government is that these discussions are widened out to include school and youth sector representatives who understand the risks and are masters of the art of the possible.

With the summer break just seven weeks away, there is no time to waste.

# Opinion

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CAT  
SCUTT

Director of education and research,  
the Chartered College of Teaching

## Disregard teachers' concerns at your peril, Boris

**Big questions remain unanswered as schools reopen and big decisions still have to be made. The DfE must work better with the profession as we enter the next phase, writes Cat Scutt**

On May 20, the Chartered College of Teaching wrote to the prime minister requesting responses to five issues that we considered key to the government's plans for reopening schools:

1. Detail on the scientific evidence base for schools reopening more widely
2. Clarity over the risk and purpose of reopening before the summer
3. Clear guidance with sufficient notice for schools to make use of it
4. A commitment to valuing the contribution of teaching staff and prioritisation of their health and wellbeing
5. Ongoing, meaningful consultation with teachers.

Although there has been progress in some of these areas, critical issues still need to be resolved and we will be pushing

for a response to our letter. They are hugely important now that some schools are starting to open to larger numbers of children.

The scientific evidence base has been published, but it is concerning that none of the approaches modelled has been adopted. Recent political events have highlighted the importance of transparency, and there is something to be said for the honesty in the admission of Andrew McCully, the DfE's director general, early years and schools, that "there are policy decisions that come on top of science and transmission evidence", and standards minister Nick Gibb's explanation that the reasoning for not advising rotas was partly to do with parents being able to return to work.

The way in which these policy priorities and scientific evidence are balanced will have



significant consequences; teachers and school leaders – as well as parents – will understandably be anxious that the scientific advice appears to have been ignored in many cases.

“Schools have been forced to change plans already in place

The discussions and the decision-making are not over – certainly not for the government, nor for staff in schools – now that some schools are reopening. There are risks inherent in larger numbers of pupils returning to school, and honesty about the emerging picture, responsiveness to new evidence, and a willingness to pause or roll back opening plans, will be critical for the government if it wants to rebuild trust. So too will be a genuine commitment to providing clear, useful, timely guidance. This has too often not been in place. What has been released so far has not always been consistent or realistic in a school context. It has also

often been released after the point when it would have been useful, reducing schools' planning time or forcing changes to plans already in place. While we recognise that the understanding of effective approaches constantly grows, this puts huge pressure on schools and increases risk.

Support for teachers in their academic and pastoral roles, as well as for their own wellbeing, will also continue to be key. It is high-quality teaching that will ultimately make the difference for our children and young people – whether in-school or at a distance. Valuing teachers' expertise and the incredible job they have been doing is critical. One way to ensure that teachers feel recognised and trusted is for the government to listen to them – and to respond. Maintaining ongoing, meaningful consultation with teachers and engaging with their professional expertise demonstrates that they are valued and helps to ensure that any guidance is practical and feasible in schools.

We are well aware that there are no easy answers. However, teachers and school leaders are, and always have been, committed to doing the best possible job for the children and young people they serve. They need to be trusted to do so and recognised for their professionalism and hard work.

The government must ensure that its next steps are closely monitored and frequently reviewed. It must not just push ahead and disregard teachers' concerns.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Lockdown diaries – a week in the life of...



**LIV EREN**

Year 11 student, Saints Peter and Paul Catholic College

### Monday May 25

“Half term” starts with the arrival of a work package from a college I hope to attend in September. Despite the cancellation of our GCSEs, I have decided to spend this period productively and get a headstart on my A-level content so that I am in the best possible position for September.

Today’s headlines are dominated by the news that government adviser Dominic Cummings drove 260 miles to Durham. I try to focus on my work, but as a young person who has been in lockdown for more than two months it feels like a kick in the teeth.

### Tuesday May 26

Much of today is spent on Zoom calls with friends, a refreshing break from what is a really worrying and stressful time. One of our discussions is about the government’s u-turn on providing free school meals over half term after a petition from a 16-year-old Londoner, Christina, got more than 100,000 signatures. This will

definitely benefit the 1.3 million young people that rely on those meals, many of them my friends and neighbours. However, there is no doubt that the lack of clarity will mean some young people will miss out.

### Wednesday May 27

Throughout lockdown I have become increasingly frustrated that young people have not been consulted about their experiences and thoughts. The government has allowed over-18s to submit questions, but is not accepting them from anyone younger. I decided to create a consultation for young people in my local area, Halton, to ensure their voices and opinions are fed into local decision-making. Today we hit 220 submissions and received a very welcome response from our council’s chief executive, who told us that “young people’s opinions are always important, but even more so at present”. It’s good to know that our local decision-makers value young people’s input, even if their



national counterparts don’t seem to.

### Thursday May 28

Today has been the most challenging day of lockdown so far. I woke up with the feeling that I had no control over my life. Although it has had its positives, including the cancellation of GCSE exams and more family time, it has also come with challenges such as social distancing, ruined sleep and constant anxiety. All of which led, for the first time in my 16-year existence, to the urge to clean my bedroom. Doing so gave me a sense of accomplishment, something I have not felt since I was last in school.

### Friday May 29

I have found that I am most productive in the evenings, so I use this time to complete my schoolwork. That isn’t such an issue now, but having practised this habit for such a long time now I worry how it might affect my studying at college. Making a start

on my A-level courses has been enlightening, but the uncertainty about whether and how schools and colleges will reopen is distracting. And in the end it shouldn’t be down to children to teach themselves. I know it can lead to misconceptions and confusion, which will ultimately negatively impact final exams. Not knowing if I’m learning things right is sometimes enough to put me off.

On a more positive note, I bumped into a friend when I went out for some essentials. It was refreshing to have a socially distanced catch-up – the first face-to-face contact I have had in seven weeks.

My time in lockdown has given me an overwhelming sense of gratitude. Never again will I take seeing my friends, attending school or going on peak-time trains for granted. This time last year that would have all sounded so strange, but now even the simple act of stepping outside my front door feels liberating. I’m sure I’m not the only one feeling it.



# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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**Braced to comfort crying children without physical contact, reopening has instead resulted in smiles and boisterous enthusiasm. Tracey Hudson explains her school's safety-first strategy**

Everyone at Rockingham Primary School knew that managing a wider reopening while maintaining strict social distancing was going to be complicated, but looking back on it, I couldn't be happier with how this week has gone. Parents and pupils have been in touch to say how happy they are to be back, safely learning with their friends. It has been exhausting, but seeing so many of our pupils has made it all worthwhile.

Our key priority had to be easing our pupils into their new system safely and without disruption. Two pupils who were already in school worked with my deputy headteacher to make a video showing the changes. They filmed themselves proceeding through the footsteps of a pupil arriving at school, narrating the changes made, how the one-way system works, what the zones on the playground mean and the new classroom layouts.

That format was really accessible for our pupils and helped them visualise what school would look like when they came in on Monday morning. And it's the culmination of a lot of other work to stay in touch with them, making weekly calls to ensure they felt supported and knew they could count on us.

All of this prep work was key to making sure they weren't too nervous about coming back in. In fact, I think I was more anxious than they were! Of



TRACEY HUDSON

Headteacher,  
Rockingham Primary School

## Reopening our school has made the future a little brighter

course, more issues may well come up in the future, but for now everything is going well.

Much of what we are doing is happening in schools across the country. We have split our pupils into "bubbles" of six to ten pupils who are spread out across the school. The bubbles have staggered timetables to ensure we don't have too many pupils moving around school at any

In addition to all that, we have introduced roving staff members – colleagues present in the school corridors and acting as a constant source of support – and that has been invaluable. They are working within incredibly tight safety protocols but they are crucial to keeping our system running. From taking a child to the toilet to replacing Chromebooks with flat batteries to bringing bagged

**“Our transparency has meant that our relationships have never felt stronger**

one time, and that allows us to make sure they are always safely distanced. We've introduced one-way corridors, staggered drop-off, break, lunch and pick-up times, and brought in sanitisation stations.

lunches to the classroom doors, they keep our pupils safe in their bubbles.

For our pupils, we've introduced resource packs so they can keep everything they need within their own learning space, and they know to touch



only the items within their packs.

Planning playtime was more of a challenge. Our solution has been to divide the playground into different zones, each with different play options. Each bubble has an allocated time slot within a zone, supervised by a member of staff, and can either play non-contact games or use an individual piece of equipment (like a skipping rope) which is then sterilised before the next child takes it up.

These are early days, but not a single pupil has been upset by these changes. We were prepared to have to re-establish routines, and braced ourselves to try to comfort crying children without physical contact. Instead, we have been met by huge smiles and unchecked enthusiasm.

Perhaps the biggest challenge, it turns out, has been trying to get our heads around the overwhelming amounts of guidance from the DfE. This revealed a huge advantage of being in a multi-academy trust, as our central team did invaluable work disseminating the most relevant and up-to-date information.

Staff and parents were concerned too, and we have tried to ensure they all felt reassured and appropriately informed. Staff were encouraged from the outset to raise concerns and in the end our transparency has meant that our relationships with staff, parents, carers and pupils have never felt stronger.

We don't know what will happen in the future, but we are confident we will meet it as a school community. As the week comes to a close, the future is a little brighter.

# Reviews

## BOOK REVIEW



### Mastery in Primary Mathematics: A guide for teachers and leaders

**Author:** Tom Garry

**Publisher:** Bloomsbury Education

**Reviewer:** Sarah Khan, early career class teacher, Fern Hill Primary

The terminology of maths mastery has been kicking around for a few years now. I hovered around it as a teaching assistant, but came face-to-face with it as a recently qualified teacher suddenly expected to teach from a mastery philosophy. Yet there seemed to be a lack of consensus as to what maths mastery entailed; was it simply White Rose downloads and manipulatives, or was there something deeper? Like many new teachers, I suspect I did not have the full confidence to deliver outstanding maths mastery lessons given the diversity of definitions and views about it. I therefore set out with the hope that Tom Garry's book would bring clarity and confidence to my practice.

The introduction laid the groundwork – that this was a revolutionary method that would help “all pupils to learn the school mathematics curriculum to a high standard” and was “making this possibility (of passing SATs) a reality for almost all children”. As a year 6 teacher, this seems to be a tall order. I have spent the year using everything at my disposal to help children progress in maths and to give them the skills and confidence to meet age-related expectations. To be honest, the results (despite a lack of formal SATs this year) were mixed and I had to acknowledge that time was too limited with some children to achieve this goal. I was sceptical that mastery could deliver on this promise.

The definition offered in the opening

chapter was vague, giving broad principles already in circulation. This was compounded by the statement that mastery means having “high expectations for all pupils”. Surely this is already part of the teachers' standards and not a new approach? Nor is this exclusive to maths. Sadly, the first two chapters regurgitated the view that we shouldn't believe some children can't learn mathematics because this hampers their progress. I found this assumption that we pigeonhole children and restrict their opportunities a little too laboured.

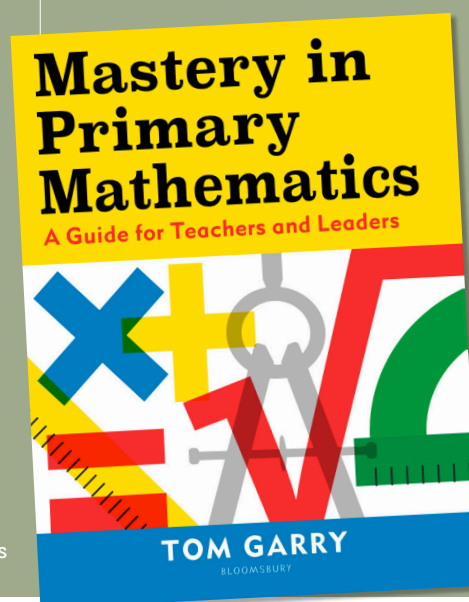
The author's general opinion about the knowledge and skills of primary teachers seemed low, as if by assuming that most are deficient in some way would bring them onside with the mastery approach – not a particularly appealing basis for readers who are teaching professionals. I hoped that practical tips and explanations of mastery would redeem things.

*Mastery in primary mathematics* does provide a useful glossary, and chapters are set out in a logical and coherent order. It doesn't feel like an intimidating tome, and it can be flicked through and dipped into when the need arises. Every aspect of the approach is covered and described, and it is written in a style that is understandable for teachers with a range of experience in this area. Its clear explanations of key concepts, and diagrams and examples in support of its

theoretical explanations, will certainly help to refresh existing knowledge or to serve as a handy reference.

Overall then, it is a good introduction and reference for teachers starting out with mastery. It won't inspire anyone to take up the approach, and it won't help you decide if you are thinking about whether it is for you. The author hasn't included much by way of testimonial, and does not make any sort of emotive appeal other than the aforementioned trope of high expectations.

At heart, without the detailed discussion of why mastery is better than traditional methods, I found it functional, but uninspiring. It certainly isn't the “perfect book for achieving mastery in maths”, as its blurb says. However, if you have already come across the language of mastery or need to implement it and would like some concrete guidance to get started, then this book will make a useful companion.



# Reviews



Jon Hutchinson, assistant head,  
Reach Academy Feltham and visiting  
fellow, Ambition Institute

@JON\_HUTCHINSON\_

## Exposure to racism is trauma

@ieshasmall

Like many people, I have spent much of this week feeling sick about the killing of George Floyd. And like many people, I've been left asking "What can I do?". In this powerful post, Iesha Small answers that it starts with understanding that "continued exposure to racism and its effects creates trauma". Piercingly, for me at least, Small suggests that we don't "leave it to the only black person in the room or organisation to bring up race and inequality at work". I know that as a white person I can never understand the lived experience of racism as a "repeated, insidious, ongoing series of events", but I can listen and speak. So what can you do? Well, for a start, read this post.

## Towards an evidenced-informed approach to prioritising curriculum-led outdoor learning

@HeenaDave12

When I'm not teaching, I love to get into the great outdoors. I remember whiling away summer days in my local woods and

## TOP BLOGS of the week



lament the dearth of knowledge that so many children seem to have about nature. Yet, "outdoor learning" often gets a bad rep, synonymous with woolly planning and juxtaposed from the rigorous instruction and rich knowledge that pupils need to flourish. You will find no such woolliness in this post from Heena Dave, which is comprehensively referenced and framed through "less obvious" knowledge that transcends the narrow definition so often promoted. This post is beautifully constructed, punctuated with enchanting literary references to the great outdoors.

## Perverse incentives: The ks2 reading SAT and the myth of generic reading comprehension skills

@teach\_well

I think that SATs are a good thing. I know that I'm in the minority, and defend them more as a "least worst option" than a beacon of what could be. But, nonetheless, I think we are better having them than not. Sorry.

However, I'm willing to concede that the reading test in particular has deep flaws, which Tarjinder Gill persuasively outlines in this third post in a series of blogs on the key stage 2 test. After demonstrating in an earlier post how it doesn't actually measure what it sets out to measure, this blog goes further to suggest that it has a backwash effect of promoting faulty practice and beliefs amongst ks2 teachers.

## Flowers of rhetoric: elaborative diacope @jasonwade71

This post from Jason Wade is jam-packed with examples of "elaborative diacope", why it is powerful when writing, and how best to deploy it. Even better, a detailed lesson plan with extremely useful commentary follows, with the resources needed to put it into action in your lessons. This is the primary English teacher's dream, and I know that secondary colleagues will love to adapt it for their classes too.

## School's out for summer @head\_teach

"If you are outside the education system it is difficult to appreciate quite how uncomfortable those inside it are feeling right now." I furiously nodded with Matthew Evans's opening sentence, and was left with a neckache by the end of this post on the complexity of bringing large numbers of students and staff back to school with the necessary safety arrangements in place. Evans asks us to consider the "valuable commodity" inherent within schools: "looseness". Contrary to "tightly-coupled" systems, he argues that building looseness into schools is paramount to avoiding "catastrophic error" that arises when complexity and blind spots (unavoidable features of schools) are also present.



# Research

Jack Worth reviews the evidence on a school-related theme. Contact him on Twitter @TheNFER if you have a topic you would like him to cover

## Short-term capacity and long-term supply challenges beset teacher workforce

**Jack Worth, NFER School Workforce Lead**

**T**oday, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published its latest overview of the teacher labour market in England, 18 months on from the launch of the government's teacher recruitment and retention strategy. Written before the coronavirus outbreak, it describes a world with very different challenges to the ones the education system currently faces.

The long-term challenge of teacher supply has understandably faded from view in the past few months. School leaders have become slightly less focused on what their chances of finding a physics teacher for September are and have instead been a lot busier setting up online education systems from scratch, providing schooling for key worker and vulnerable children and planning how to open again to more pupils in the new world of bubbles and social distancing.

However, as coronavirus has such big implications for staffing capacity, the issues affecting teacher supply also matter more than ever, both in the short term as the lockdown eases and more pupils return to school, and in the longer term as schools gradually head towards what we are still optimistically calling "normal".

The short-term impact of coronavirus on existing teaching capacity is substantial. On Monday, NFER and the Nuffield Foundation published new insights from a survey of senior leaders on schools' preparations for more pupils to return to school, exploring the extent of the challenge the disruption poses.

The survey shows that in May schools were operating with just 75 per cent of their normal



teaching capacity. In addition, school leaders report that an average of 29 per cent of the available FTE teaching capacity is only able to work from home.

At the same time the demands on teaching staff's time have increased, due to both smaller class sizes in school and the need to continue providing for teaching pupils who are not yet returning to school. More than six in ten school leaders feel unprepared for delivering a combination of face-to-face and online lessons.

One senior leader told us that while "extra teachers will be needed to teach a smaller number of pupils, remote online learning cannot happen at the same time". Senior leaders are having to make difficult trade-offs in deciding how staff are deployed, while also balancing teachers' workload and wellbeing.

The impact of coronavirus on staff capacity is also likely to persist into next year and beyond. Some teachers who are shielding due to a condition that means they are clinically extremely vulnerable may not be able to return to work in school in the foreseeable future. Others are in households with someone who is shielding or have conditions that mean they are clinically vulnerable, making any return to school feel risky while there is no vaccine.

These capacity issues come at a

time when teacher supply was already in a precarious state. Our 2020 teacher labour market annual report suggests that despite the significant challenges that remain to the teacher supply picture, particularly for secondary teacher recruitment and retention, some progress had been made towards easing the teacher supply challenge in 2019. Teacher retention rates had improved slightly and the average working hours of full-time teachers had fallen by around one hour per week.

However, teachers continue to work longer hours than people in other professions, and report having lower leisure time satisfaction and lower autonomy over their work. Policymakers and school leaders therefore need to continue to improve teachers' working conditions to ensure sufficient teacher supply during the coronavirus crisis and beyond.

The recession induced by coronavirus also appears to be encouraging more teachers to stay in teaching, at least for the short-term, and more teachers to apply to teacher training. This is potential good news for the future, in spite of the short-term capacity challenges posed by the pandemic. However, making teaching an attractive and sustainable career option is essential for ensuring those teachers are supported to stay in the profession for the long term.

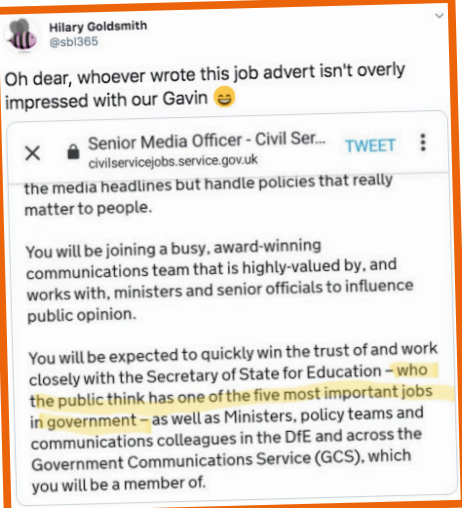


# WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

Your regular guide to what's going on in central government

## SUNDAY

The DfE staffer who wrote a recent job description for a new media officer gave a pretty lacklustre performance when it came to summing up the importance of the job of their boss, the education secretary Gavin Williamson.



The job advert states that the successful candidate "will be expected to quickly win the trust of and work closely with the Secretary of State for Education – who the public think has one of the five most important jobs in government – as well as ministers, policy teams and communications colleagues".

Then again, given civil service neutrality and all that, they probably weren't allowed to give anything other than a statistical view of their boss's job.

## MONDAY

Our colleagues over at *FE Week* brought us news earlier this week that the DfE is setting up its own "rapid

rebuttal unit" to tackle so-called "fake news" in the media.

Onlookers were quick to point out that this is a bit rich, coming from a department that is regularly less than honest with the taxpayer.

As our editor, who the public think has one of the five most important jobs in journalism, pointed out on Twitter: "This is the same DfE slapped down FIVE TIMES in 18 months by the government's stats watchdog over misleading use of data. Lol."

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On the subject of fake news, the DfE was in such a rush to use its "education in the media" blog to dispute claims from union boss Mary Boustead about the number of guidance updates it pumps out that whoever wrote the blog post forgot to check their facts before it was published.

"We update our materials to ensure they are up to date and meet schools' needs. Our 'Actions to prepare for wider opening' guidance has only been updated once since its publication," the blog states, smugly.

But a look at the document in question shows this claim is not actually true: it has been updated twice.

The DfE can be forgiven for being a bit pedantic, but we would hope it would at least try to get its facts straight.

## WEDNESDAY

The appearance of infamous squeaky glove puppet Sweep on the bookshelves of education committee chair Robert Halfon during virtual meetings in recent months has been a source of much amusement of politicians across the country.

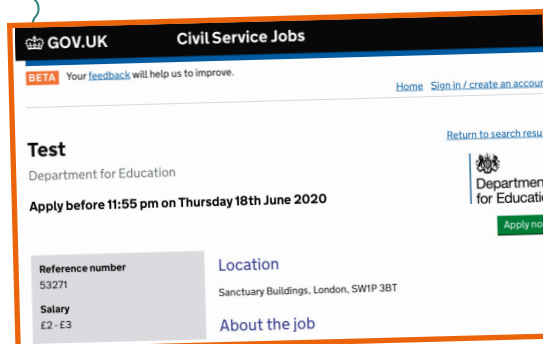
But one eagle-eyed viewer has discovered Sweep isn't just there to look cute. He also appears to be covering up books about Hitler (see image).



## THURSDAY

We know times are tough, but we never thought we'd see the day when the Department for Education would advertise a job with a salary of £2 to £3, especially for a Grade 7 civil servant.

It turns out the job advert in question is only a test, but it has no doubt caused widespread amusement for those who stumbled across it. Maybe the DfE has been taking advice from its own schools cost-cutting advisers?







# Shoreham College

FOR BOYS  
AND GIRLS  
AGED 3-16



## Head Teacher

Salary will be based on your skills and experience with a minimum of £85,000 offered

The Governors of Shoreham College invite applications for the post of Head Teacher, to commence within the next academic year. We seek an experienced senior school head or an ambitious senior leader with a proven track record of overseeing whole school initiatives. We are looking to appoint an articulate, intelligent, innovative and visionary leader with strong business acumen, who will build on the achievements of our current head and lead the school to further growth and success.

Shoreham College is a registered charity, overseen by the Kennedy Independent School Trust Ltd. The College was founded in 1852 and is close to the sea, Brighton and the South Downs National Park. We have a Christian foundation and a strong reputation for meeting the individual academic and pastoral needs of our mixed ability intake. We are co-educational from age 3-16, and we are proud of our pupils and their achievements. We are fully compliant and our exam results are impressive.

The Governors wish to appoint an inspiring, motivational and dynamic leader who is solution focused and intuitive. The appointee will possess high levels of emotional intelligence and demonstrable strategic skills, someone who is proven at the most senior levels in education.

The Head Teacher will have direct responsibility for educational outcomes, safeguarding, student recruitment and community engagement. The Head Teacher will be the public face for our School.

A candidate pack, including application form, recruitment monitoring form, job description, person specification and information letter from the Chair of Governors is available from the College website ([www.shorehamcollege.co.uk/recruit](http://www.shorehamcollege.co.uk/recruit)) or upon request from:

**The Clerk to the Governors**  
**Shoreham College**  
**St Julian's Lane**  
**Shoreham-by-Sea**  
**West Sussex**  
**BN43 6YW**

Tel: 01273 592681 Fax: 01273 591673

e-mail: [ashleywarner@shorehamcollege.co.uk](mailto:ashleywarner@shorehamcollege.co.uk)

Applications should be returned no later than noon on Monday 8 June 2020.

Longlisted online interviews: Tuesday 16 and Wednesday 17 June 2020.

Shoreham College is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. Applicants must be willing to undergo child protection screening, including checks with past employers and the Disclosure and Barring Service.

We will process your data for recruitment purposes only. If you are unsuccessful in your application, we will keep your data on our systems for 6 months in case any similar future roles become available. If you have any objections to us storing your data for this purpose please email [data@shorehamcollege.co.uk](mailto:data@shorehamcollege.co.uk).

For further information about our compliance with GDPR please see our privacy notice.



**SCHOOLS WEEK | FE WEEK | EDU  
WEEK JOBS**

# Recruitment advertising during the Coronavirus Pandemic

To assist organisations over the forthcoming weeks, Schools Week, FE Week and EduWeek Jobs will be offering the following:

- **Free recruitment advertising for Coronavirus cover roles** at education settings remaining open to support key-workers
- **On all online listings**
  - A **free of charge** extension by up to 8 weeks after the closing date
- **On all adverts within the digital editions**
  - A **free of charge** second insertion of your advert

**CLICK HERE TO****ADVERTISE  
A ROLE****CLICK HERE TO****SPEAK TO A  
MEMBER OF  
THE TEAM**