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'Every positive test is reinforcing exams injustice'



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MASS TESTING 'GAME CHANGER'

- Pilot heads say rapid tests can 'radically reduce' school disruption
- Army helps test children in 12 Liverpool schools under city-wide trial
- 600k tests sent to councils for wider roll-out following vaccine boost

Pages 6-7



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SCHOOLS WEEK

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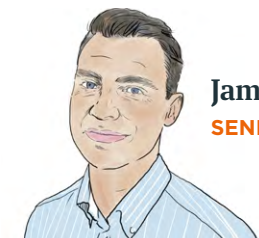
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Supersize me? This Covid patch is not a system fix



Page 31



Holiday hunger scheme roll-out: what schools need to know

Page 9



Has Ofsted misunderstood cultural capital?

Page 29



University admissions overhaul: what's on the table

Page 15

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Pupils in hard-hit regions face exams 'covid penalty'

JOHN DICKENS & FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

EXCLUSIVE

Pupils face a "covid penalty" unless Ofqual takes geographical differences into account when awarding grades next year, a leading academy trust boss with schools in hard-hit coronavirus regions has said.

The intervention by Hamid Patel (pictured), the chief executive of Star Academies, comes as pressure on the government to ditch exams ramped up this week after Wales followed Scotland in cancelling exams next year.

But ministers and Ofqual again insisted they would go ahead next year, with proposals to run tests in core subjects alone.

However, Patel, whose trust run 29 schools in areas that include Lancashire and Greater Manchester, said: "We can't allow young people, already disadvantaged by the educational gap caused by deprivation, to have their prospects further limited by a 'Covid penalty'."

Secondary school attendance rates vary hugely from as low as 61 per cent in Knowsley to 94 per cent in Bath and London's Kensington and Chelsea.

While backing plans to run exams, Patel said: "We need to recognise that they will not be completed on an equal footing." Writing for Schools Week, he added Ofqual must take "bold steps" to ensure there was "no difference in the proportion of good grades awarded in areas that are



blighted by Covid and those where there has been little disruption".

He suggested pupils' exam marks could be compared only with peers "within similarly affected parts of the country".

He also put forward a system in which all pupils got the better of two grades: their raw exam grade or one moderated to guarantee their school's results next year had the same proportion of 9, 7 and 5 grades as in their best year between 2017 and 2019.

This would avoid using teacher predictions. "Hundreds of thousands of young people risk having their results decided by the relative fortunes of their postcode and the willingness of their communities to adhere to government guidelines.

"Doing nothing will herald another summer of huge upset, with long-term consequences for their life chances. That is simply not an option."

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's chief inspector who is chairing Ofqual's recovery committee, told MPs this week she had "not yet seen anything that suggests that pulling exams as we did last year is the sensible

default route".

Instead the regulator is coming up with plans to mitigate any unfairness. Spielman said exams only in core subjects was "the kind of option that is under consideration".

Robert Halfon, the chair of the education select committee, has written to the education secretary to propose exams are run in at least English, maths and the sciences should any disruption make a full schedule unviable.

However, Spielman noted that "every option creates some unfairnesses". It was "very clear that those coming through for exams this year have actually had a tougher time than last year's year 11s and 13s".

Sir Jon Coles, the head of United Learning, the country's largest academy trust, has been appointed as the DfE's nominated member on to the recovery committee, which is tasked with drawing up exam proposals for ministers.

Scotland announced last month that National 5 exams would be replaced next year by teacher assessments and coursework, while Higher exams would take place later than usual.

Teacher assessments that are more "generous" than exam grades could impact English pupils who may be competing with their Scottish and Welsh counterparts for university places.

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said exams were the "fairest way of judging a student's performance". Plans for 2021 would be set out in the coming weeks.

Opinion, page 25

MPs question Ofqual's independence

The education select committee has questioned Ofqual's independence, claiming the regulator ignored warnings about this year's exams and instead followed orders from ministers and "hoped for the best".

Robert Halfon, the committee's chair, also questioned the Department for Education's failure to produce papers detailing the decision-making behind scrapping exams. He demanded they were produced by Monday, November 23.

The harm caused to pupils during this

year's fiasco "could have been avoided had Ofqual not buried its head in the sand and ignored repeated warnings, including from our committee, about the flaws in the system for awarding grades".

He wrote that although Ofqual was "clearly aware" that its controversial algorithm would cause problems for high-achieving pupils in historically low-attaining schools, it "believed the number would be statistically small and could be addressed through an appeals process".

Halfon said it was "revealing" that Ofqual

ploughed ahead instead of raising issues at the time. "They simply followed the ministerial direction and hoped for the best.

"The whole episode calls into question Ofqual's independence" from government."

A DfE spokesperson said it had "full confidence" in Ofqual's independence, and was responding to the request to release further information.

An Ofqual spokesperson said it was "doing a great deal to learn lessons from summer 2020".

Technical woes hinder Oxbridge entry tests

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

Pupils' hopes of studying at Oxford and Cambridge may be in jeopardy as admission exams, switched to an online format in the wake of Covid, have been beset with technical difficulties.

Last week, year 13 pupils across England sat a variety of admission exams for the two universities, such as the BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) for medicine, biomedical science or dentistry.

But schools say some pupils have been disadvantaged by tests not working, test links not arriving or formatting issues stopping them completing questions.

A number of the tests were administered by the exam board Cambridge Assessment, which is looking into the issues as a "matter of urgency".

Deepa Jethwa, the policy manager at the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said many of its members had experienced problems. "We hope that the special consideration process they have in place will help to compensate for the technical issues students faced that were no fault of their own."

Eight pupils at Chiswick School in west London sat a variety of admission exams.

The school registered for the tests in September. But on the morning of November 4, the date of the BMAT test, a link to the exam had still not been sent through.

Graham McNamara, the director of sixth form at the school, said the sole pupil sitting the BMAT had to be put in isolation for two-and-a-half hours until the link arrived.

"He couldn't have his phone and no one could speak to him," McNamara said. "For him it was stressful – there is a lot riding on him doing well in the exam."

The student hopes to study at Oxford.

The school had sourced mentoring from a local doctor and had invested hours in exam preparation.



George Budd, the principal of the independent boarding school Moreton Hall in Shropshire, said a specialist exam assistant sat with each of its three pupils before the tests to ensure all equipment was set up correctly.

He said problems could have adversely affected schools in which pupils did not sit the exams often.

Cambridge Assessment said it was "impossible to run tests in centres" because of the large number of candidates around the world who were either self-isolating or subject to restrictions.

As such, BMAT, with other exams such as Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) and the Test of Mathematics for University Admission (TMUA), were delivered online through a platform provided by Mercer Mettl.

A spokesperson for the board said it had used the platform "successfully to deliver online testing on several occasions". Most of the 3,000 exam locations around the world had no problems.

"Unfortunately, some centres in the UK experienced technical issues and we are looking into these as a matter of urgency. At this stage, we have not confirmed the number of candidates affected, but it is a small percentage of the total number."

Analysis of the board's Twitter feed shows it received 16 complaints regarding links not being sent or logins not working between November 3 and 5.

Another teacher, who wishes to remain anonymous, had a pupil sitting the TSA to study land economy at Cambridge.

The student was unable to properly view sections of the exam as the screen zoomed in on text she was attempting to analyse, making it impossible to read.

"Because it was being invigilated online she didn't want to run the risk of being accused of plagiarism or communicating during the exam so she stayed silent", the teacher said.

"She definitely didn't have the chance to answer the whole paper and is gutted this might count against her."

The Cambridge Assessment spokesperson added: "It is extremely important to us that no candidate is disadvantaged and we have a special consideration process for any candidate who felt that something on test day – be it a technical or other issue – impeded their ability to answer the questions."

The board was reviewing such requests and "working closely" with the universities involved. A full update would be made later this week.

Investigation

Rapid Covid tests a 'game-changer' for schools

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Headteachers piloting rapid Covid-19 antigen tests under the government's Operation Moonshot have described them as a "game-changer" to keep pupils in the classroom and help squash outbreaks.

Sedgehill Academy in south east London, Poole Grammar School and South Wiltshire Grammar School in Salisbury have now done two rounds of testing using lateral flow tests, which give a result in less than an hour.

One head reported being able to test 50 pupils in as little as 12 minutes, while another said they were able to send just a few pupils home who tested positive – rather than an entire year group for two weeks.

However, questions have been raised about how a wider rollout of the tests will be staffed, and a recent evaluation of the antigen tests hints that cases could be missed.

The government announced it was issuing a further 600,000 tests to local authorities, who will decide whether to deploy them in schools.

It comes after the promising news earlier this week of a vaccine by the end of the year.

Sir Jon Coles, chief executive of United Learning, which runs Sedgehill and three other schools soon to join Public Health England's (PHE) pilot, said: "We see this approach to mass testing as a potential game-changer.

"If someone tests positive, but those of their contacts who test negative can stay in school as long as they agree to further testing, then we can radically reduce disruption to schools and children's education."

'It's very fast, efficient and is keeping pupils in school'

The tests have allowed schools in the pilot to identify confirmed cases, even among asymptomatic subjects, so they can be sent home to self-isolate. The schools can then repeatedly test close contacts so that only those with a positive test need go home.

Normally, contacts of confirmed cases must self-isolate, which has led to whole year groups sent home.

Unlike the commonly used polymerase chain reaction (or PCR) tests, lateral flow tests do not have to be sent off for evaluation.

However, although a recent study by PHE and the University of Oxford found false positives



MOD testing operation in Liverpool

'We can radically reduce disruption to schools'

were rare, the tests were found to have a 76.8 per cent accuracy rate, meaning they do still miss some cases.

The evaluation also found that there was a test failure rate of 16.8 per cent in one of the schools where it was trialled, but PHE was not able to say whether the school in question was one of those involved in its pilot.

Those heads involved in the pilot in the south of England, carried out with the help of the Army, said the experience had been positive.

South Wiltshire Grammar School identified three positive and two potential cases among year 10 pupils during its testing of 877 staff and pupils earlier this week. These came on top of another positive test in that year group identified externally by the test and trace system.

But because the rest of the year can now undergo so-called "serial testing" every two days, they have been able to stay in school.

"[This is] what I think is the most powerful idea about this ... that my year 10s are still in school," said Michele Chilcott, the school's head.

"If we weren't testing, we wouldn't have picked up those students. Had I got, potentially, six cases in one year group, a whole year group would now be self-isolating for 14 days. It's kept them in school."

Army sets up camp as halls transformed into testing centres

With no indoor sports and assemblies held by video, the three schools have been able to transform their halls into temporary testing centres.

Clare Cassidy, the head of Sedgehill timed how long it took to test 50 year 8 pupils. "Once they were in the sports hall, it took just 12 minutes and 40 seconds to test them all. So in terms of the disruption to lessons, it's been minimal and very efficient."

The school tested about 300 people before half term and 400 this week. There were no positive cases.

Although the Army and PHE employees helped with the testing, the schools are now training their own staff with a view to becoming self-sufficient.

Cassidy said: "If you don't have to isolate students they can stay in school where they're safer and learning much better than they would at home."

Dr Amanda Smith, the head at Poole Grammar, said the main benefit was being able to assure staff and students that the school environment was safe. Her school tested 1,000 pupils in the first round and 900 this week, and found no positive

Continued on next page

Investigation

cases.

"I see testing in schools as being a massive game-changer in terms of helping to maintain continuity. And, really importantly, offering huge reassurance to our school population, parent population and staff population."

Ofsted analysis published this week found almost half of schools that took part in "visits" reported that since the start of the autumn term some parents had removed their children to electively home educate.

Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector, said school leaders were "clearer that this was being motivated by concerns around the virus".

But Chilcott said the testing had been "really positively bought-into by parents, students and staff".

She said take-up had been "very high" for sixth-formers – who can self-consent, although parental permissions was needed for younger pupils. "That shows their interest in it because it's their decision, not their parents," she said.

'It's about making sure people are informed before the rumours start'

According to all three headteachers, communication with schools is key to any national rollout.

"It's keeping on top of it and making sure people are informed before those rumours start to spread," Chilcott said.

Cassidy said that communication with heads was "really vital in advance of the testing beginning so that they understand fully what it's about and know what's involved".

Smith said building the confidence of staff to deliver the tests was also important.

Schools needed as much information as possible so that the tests became "a really straightforward process for them".

Schools are still waiting to hear when the lateral flow tests will be rolled out more widely. Boris Johnson told Parliament last week that the government was "massively expanding testing for schools", and Downing St later said he was referring to the development of antigen tests.

But no timescale has been provided.

600,000 more tests could benefit schools

However, the government did announce earlier this week that a further 600,000 lateral flow tests would be distributed to councils, who would decide where to deploy them. The London borough of Southwark has already indicated some of its tests may be used in schools.

Meanwhile, 12 schools took part in a mass testing pilot in Liverpool this week, with more set to join.



Headteacher Dr Amanda Smith being tested at Poole Grammar School



MOD testing operation in Liverpool

But there have been problems. Protesters picketed Calderstones school, using a megaphone to shout at pupils not to get tested.

The council was also forced to clarify that parental permission was needed after another school, Broadgreen, suggested in a letter to parents that none was needed. Both schools were approached for comment.

Stephen Brierley, the head of St Margaret's Academy in Liverpool and the city's local representative for leadership union ASCL, said he was hoping testing would begin at his school soon, as it had "huge potential".

"At the moment there's a lot of guesswork on who the contacts are. And even if you can ascertain exactly who's been within two metres for 15 minutes and all the other rules, all that

gives you is an indication that's it's more likely transmission has taken place. You don't know for sure.

"That risk, that guesswork about who might have caught it, you can eliminate that straightaway. That's why it's got to be a good thing, even if in the short term it does lead to more self-isolation."

But schools will need support if they are to deliver the tests. Army and PHE personnel are helping at present, but there has been no information about how they will be run if rolled out nationally

"They're talking about deploying 23 people to oversee the 20 booths. Clearly, that's not going to be possible in a school setting staffed at very tight margins," Brierley said.

Schools miss out as £2.2m cut from overhauled support scheme

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EXCLUSIVE

The government has cut funding promised to schools for improvement support after the scheme was repurposed to help leaders struggling with educational issues or remote learning during the pandemic.

Under a new recovery scheme, schools can request an "experienced system leader" for up to five days to "help them overcome the challenges faced or exacerbated" by Covid-19.

The Department for Education support scheme has been repurposed from last year, where schools rated 'requires improvement' could get up to three days' support from a national leader of education (NLE) and £24,000 to address the needs identified.

A total of £16.5 million was set aside to support 2,400 schools nationwide for three years, which worked out at £5.5 million a year. But just a third had been spent when the scheme was paused in March as schools closed because of coronavirus.

Under the new "recovery" scheme, launched in May but details of which were published this week, the DfE said about £3.3 million was expected to be spent this financial year – 40 per cent down on predecessor.

Any further spend beyond spring next year would be confirmed in the spending review, a spokesperson for the department said.

Toby Greany, professor of education at the University of Nottingham, said there needed to be a "wider reset about how we help all schools get back onto a positive footing".

"It seems very unlikely this can be done on a smaller budget than what we had pre-Covid. The scale of the issue is in all likelihood greater now than it was before. The department needs to put more money into it and really help all schools."

Under the scheme, system leaders will "tailor support to the individual needs" of the school or trust. They are likely to focus on support or planning with remote learning, how to use catch-up funding and replacing "lost leadership" capacity because



of the pandemic.

Eligible schools are those with "educational issues that have either been caused or exacerbated by coronavirus" or who are "facing operational challenges because of coronavirus and would benefit from additional leadership capacity, including help with your remote learning offer".

Schools wanting support should contact their local regional school commissioner's office. The commissioners will administer the offer and work with local authorities, dioceses, the Teaching Schools Council and academy trusts to match leaders to those in need.

However, the additional cash of the old scheme has been dropped. Support for this year will "be in the form of dedicated time made available to the school and, where appropriate, its MAT, for up to five days". The offer is also described as "time-limited", but no further details are provided.

The DfE added: "We may provide additional support to schools with particularly challenging needs."

Schools with an existing signed grant offer letter from the previous scheme could "still receive their allocated support under the previous school to school support offer", a DfE spokesperson said.

However, Heather Leatt, director of school improvement at Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership, said one of its primary schools had been promised £24,000 under the old scheme in the Autumn term last year. Problems finding an NLE meant it rolled

over past March, when the scheme was paused.

When schools reopened fully in the summer term, Leatt said she was told the "funding had been stopped".

"We wanted to spend that on an action plan to improve maths and we were desperate to get it underway. £24,000 would have gone a long way."

Almost 500 schools have been matched to a system leader so far. The DfE said it "would like to offer support to every school that is identified as vulnerable, although if the level of demand increases significantly, we could be limited by the availability of system leaders".

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts and a member of the group that advised government on NLE reform, said: "It's a completely sensible move to repurpose this scheme as part of the crisis recovery response. It's supposed to be responsive to what schools need."

It is not the first government scheme to be repurposed to address specific Covid challenges. The edtech "demonstrator schools" programme was refocused to help support better use of remote learning in the sector.

The government is also implementing proposals to reform the NLE programme. The number of leaders has plunged in recent years after the government halted recruitment amid a review into school leadership structures.

Holiday scheme needs more than one-off funding

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INVESTIGATES

The government must allocate “multi-year funding” for its holiday activities and food programme, previous recipients said after the announcement of a £220 million expansion to the scheme.

The extension of HAF to all areas in England and into the Easter and Christmas holidays next year was announced on Sunday, following mounting pressure on ministers to extend free school meals over holidays.

A separate £170 million Covid winter grant scheme between this December and March will allow councils to help families struggling with food and bills.

But the expansion cash is only confirmed for one year, with a decision about future years not due until the next spending review.

The government has been criticised for repeatedly renewing the pilot and pledging funding on an annual basis, preventing any long-term planning.

The HAF programme was trialled in 2018 with £2 million split between seven providers to run schemes in the summer holidays.

It was expanded in 2019 with £9 million for 11 schemes, although an initial plan to extend the scheme to Easter was abandoned.

The pilot ran again this year, with a further £9 million for ten projects in 17 local authority areas.

The Department for Education said it hoped to reach 50,000 pupils in 2019 and 2020, but an evaluation report on the 2019 pilot by the consultancy firm Ecorys has still not been published.

An evaluation of the 2018 pilot found that although at least 18,200 pupils attended at least one session, only 13,000 attended more than one.

Vicky Ford, the children’s minister, said this week that the report on the 2019 pilot would be published “in the near future”.

Despite the impact of Covid, organisations that ran schemes this summer reported a successful year.

In Hampshire, The Romsey School



Vicky Ford

Academy and Park Community School teamed up to run pilot schemes in 2019 and 2020.

This year, more than 7,600 children attended clubs in the county over four weeks, with a focus on family activities. A hot meal was served each day.

Jan Lefley, one of the coordinators, told *Schools Week* the involvement of families as well as children was a “big part” of the scheme’s success.

“You can’t change what happens inside a child’s home by just working with a child. The kids in school know what healthy eating is, they know what they should be doing, but when you go back into a home where there isn’t a lot of money, that child is not going to have an impact on that.”

Lefley believes the government should pledge multi-year funding for the HAF programme, but said tackling poverty in communities like hers was “about more than just feeding kids”.

“We have to change what we’re living in and how we’re operating. I’ve been doing this for 40 years and I am still coming up against the same thing time after time.”

In the south London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, the Mayor’s Fund for London ran activities and food programmes for more than 4,800 pupils this year.

Clara Widdison, the head of social inclusion at the charity, agreed that multi-year funding was needed, with “long-term

investment into delivery areas”.

The government has said the £220 million expansion money will be shared between councils based on the participation rates in the pilots. Further details on the delivery model and funding would come “shortly”.

But some areas might need more help because provision was patchy.

“In London we have boroughs that have next to no provision,” said Widdison, who revealed her charity was turned down for funding in 2019 because it was “trying to go into a borough that had little existing provision”.

“The basis of our bid was that we would set up that infrastructure, we would develop these organisations. But of course, six weeks is a very short period in which to do that and to establish a long-term network, which is why we are asking for multi-year funding over a committed period of time.”

In Gateshead, the local council was given funding in the 2019 and 2020 pilots, but was able to build on holiday provision that had been in place for several years.

This year, just over 8,200 places were filled, down from 10,800 last year. But the number of children participating increased, from 2,020 to 3,340.

Ian Stevenson, who led the schemes for the council, welcomed the government announcement, but said there was “still a long way to go to help our residents out of poverty”.

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Academy loses fight to restrict in-year pupil admissions

JAMES CARR

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An academy that wanted to reduce its admissions to restrict the number of pupils it had to accept mid-year has lost its battle after the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) upheld a local authority's objection.

The Westleigh School in Wigan, which is part The Shaw Education Trust, was attempting to reduce its Published Admission Number (PAN) from 210 to 180 from September 2021 onwards.

However, Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council objected as it said this would "compromise its ability to provide sufficient school places".

The council said it had made a "considerable capital investment" into the school's buildings when it was still a community school in 2014 and had made such changes to meet its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places.

Department for Education statistics released earlier this year found 17 per cent of secondary schools were full or over-capacity in 2019, as a population bulge brought on by a baby-boom in the early-2000s makes its way from primary to secondary schools.

But the school argued that while the PAN had been increased from 156 to 210 in 2016, it had not increased the capacity of the canteen, changing rooms or toilets and was therefore "not equipped to safely accommodate year groups of 210".

The report also shows it expressed concerns



THE WESTLEIGH SCHOOL
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the PAN "is not determinative of the numbers on roll for other year groups" and as such the school has been asked to accept "a disproportionate number" of in-year admissions.

Figures provided by the school show around 10 per cent of its 870 pupils had been "mid-term transfers" and it raised concerns about the level of in-year admissions that it had been asked to accommodate by the local Fair Access Panel.

According to the OSA, Fair Access Protocols (FAPs) make sure that "unplaced children, particularly the most vulnerable, are offered a place at a suitable school as quickly as possible".

But a Schools Week investigation last year revealed hundreds of pupils were being turned away by schools during in-year admissions and requests for the secretary of state to intervene rose by 45 per cent from 2018.

The school added: "We believe that a PAN of 180 will help to put the school in a stronger position when we are talking to external parties

about the number of in-year admissions we can accommodate".

John Fowler, a policy adviser at the Local Government Information Unit, explained that while academies could change their own PANs, such changes are usually performed "in a more collaborative way".

Tomas Thurogood-Hyde, assistant CEO at Astrea Academy Trust, said the case brought to light the balance between a local authority's duty to ensure there are places children can access and individual schools' duty to provide excellent education provision. "It's not always one and the same thing," he added.

Thurogood-Hyde explained there was "a difference between physical capacity and education capacity" and that capacity for schools included "the time and resources of teachers".

The assistant CEO added that children admitted to school in-year are "more likely to have additional support needs" and it's a "big pastoral ask of the school to make sure those children are supported well".

Cath Peeling, assistant director for education at Wigan Council, said it is "committed to ensuring that children can access school places in their community and we believed that reducing capacity would compromise this, leading to children having to travel further afield and be separated from their community support networks".

The school did not respond to a request for comment.

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR_93

Private school charity investigated for second time

A private school charity is under investigation for a second time by the charities watchdog.

Rabia Education Trust, which runs Rabia School, in Luton, is being investigated by the Charity Commission again after breaching operating conditions imposed by the Department for Education.

The trust was previously investigated in 2016-17, and issued with a legal order directing trustees to make improvements and ensure it complied with the regulatory

requirements of Ofsted and the DfE.

Rabia was prohibited by the DfE from admitting more students after Ofsted inspections revealed safeguarding and welfare failings. The school has been 'inadequate' since 2014.

In May, the charity and its chair Zafar Khan were fined £8,000 and £4,000 respectively as Ofsted secured an "unprecedented conviction" after discovering the school was found to be admitting pupils.

Due to this breach and "the failure to

comply with regulatory advice and guidance", the commission is now investigating again.

The probe will examine trustees' compliance with their legal duties around the "administration, governance and management of the charity, and whether the charity can be placed on a firmer footing for the future".

Rabia Educational Trust was contacted for comment. According to the trust's website, Khan remains chair of the trust.

After-school sports back on the field (but no official update)

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

A controversial new lockdown rule banning after-school sports clubs unless they are for childcare has been ditched, marking a climbdown on official guidance.

The government sparked confusion and prompted criticism with its new national lockdown guidance last week, which said schools could only continue to run after-school sports to "support parents to work... and for the purposes of respite care for vulnerable children".

All out-of-school activities "not being primarily used by parents for these purposes should close", it added.

Following an outcry, Nick Gibb, the schools minister, tweeted that "schools can and should continue offering sports clubs and activities". He linked to a blog that repeated the DfE guidance, leading to accusations schools were being "gaslighted".

Now the government has seemingly U-turned, with after-school sports activities allowed if they meet Covid-19 protocols,



such as bubbles, and are risk-assessed.

The Youth Sports Trust (YST), one of several sports charities that sought clarification from the government, said this interpretation of the guidance had been "approved" by the Department for Education and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Following consultation with the government, YST is now advising that schools "should continue to provide extra-curricular sport as long as they can do so in a way which i) maintains the integrity of schools' Covid-19 protocols such as their

approach to bubbles, staffing and social distancing, and ii) is subject to appropriate risk assessment.

"Where the guidance refers to supporting parents to work, there is no additional need for schools to prove that extra-curricular clubs are helping parents to work or seek work."

Bizarrely, the official guidance has yet to be changed to reflect this, causing more confusion for schools. The Department for Education said it did not have any further information when approached by *Schools Week*.

YST said that after-school clubs that brought together "groups of young people who would not otherwise be spending time together" were still outlawed.

"Competition between different schools should not take place, in line with the wider restrictions on grassroots sport," the YST added in a statement on Tuesday.

YST joined Sport and Recreation Alliance, ukactive and Association for Physical Education in an attempt to clarify the guidance.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Why pupils should wait until year 11 for GCSEs

Early entry to GCSEs "does not always benefit pupils", the Department for Education has warned, as new research shows pupils in some subjects do worse if they take them in year 10.

A new "ad hoc" research paper published by the DfE yesterday shows that pupils who take English literature and religious studies a year early tend to do worse than those who take the subjects in year 11.

However, pupils who take statistics, which is the most popular subject for early entry, tend to do better when taking it early than those who wait.

The DfE has urged schools to review any plans for early entry in the summer of next year because of concerns about disruption to exams.

"It may be in the best interests of the pupil

to take their exams and assessments the following year when they are in year 11, if the curriculum can be adjusted to provide further teaching and study time in the summer term and academic year 2021 to 2022," the department's guidance states.

The research shows that statistics is by far the most popular subject for early entry, with more than 40 per cent of entries last year from year 10 pupils.

Early entries also accounted for about 8 per cent of religious studies entries last year, while English literature accounted for just over 20 per cent.

Other subjects such as classical Greek, Latin, electronics and ancient history also had early entry rates of more than 5 per cent, but the number of entries in these subjects was low.

The DfE split pupils into prior attainment bands. It found that in English literature, pupils in all bands achieved lower results taking the subject early than those who took it at the usual time.

In religious studies those in the highest prior attainment bands tended to do slightly better at early entry, but those with lower prior attainment did worse.

However, in statistics, pupils in most prior attainment bands appeared to perform better at early entry.

"Early entry to GCSEs does not always benefit pupils, as they tend to achieve lower grades than those who take exams at the end of Year 11 – schools should consider these findings when deciding exam entries in future," a spokesperson said.

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Political impartiality? Not for DfE's outspoken director

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Department for Education board member Nick Timothy has been accused of breaching impartiality rules over tweets expressing partisan views and criticising opposition parties.

The former chief of staff to Theresa May and New Schools Network director was appointed as non-executive director at the DfE in March.

Schools Week revealed last month that his appointment was rushed through without competition at the behest of education secretary Gavin Williamson, a close ally of Timothy's.

Cabinet Office guidance on the code of conduct for board members of public bodies states that all postholders "should be, and be seen to be, politically impartial".

But Timothy, an outspoken newspaper columnist who has previously failed in a bid to become a Conservative MP, has posted dozens of tweets in recent months that either specifically criticised other political parties or made his own political views clear.

In one instance he claimed that "much of the Labour Party is rotten" and in another he referred to "sneering remainers". Another tweet accused the Scottish National Party of having an "awful record".

Colin Talbot, emeritus professor of government at the University of Manchester and a research associate at the University of Cambridge, said Timothy's tweets "clearly" breached impartiality rules.

"It's clear where his political loyalties lie from that sort of tweet, and that creates a problem," he told Schools Week.

"Non-executive directors in government departments and other public bodies and agencies are very much on the administrative, civil service side of the equation, whereas politicians, ministers, special advisers and even tsars to a certain extent are on the politics and policy side."

The DfE would not say whether Timothy would face action for the tweets, despite having recently reminded teachers of their own duty to be impartial in new guidance on relationships and health education.

As well as attacking opposition parties, Timothy has also repeatedly criticised specific opposition politicians.

On October 31, responding to a tweet from MP Claudia Webbe, who currently has the Labour

Nick Timothy @NJ_Timothy

It would be really nice if one day he decided to just do his job, but on housing, crime and transport he's been worse than useless.

LBC @LBC · Nov 3

London Mayor Sadiq Khan describes Donald Trump as a 'hate-fuelled' president and backs Biden for a US 'filled with hope and unity' #ElectionDay

lbc.co.uk/politics/us-el...



3:04 PM · Nov 3, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Nick Timothy @NJ_Timothy

I agree stoking a culture war for electoral reasons is a bad (and immoral) idea. But if the Tories want to stand up for Red Wall values they will stand up to the nonsense coming from the identitarian left and reappraise their economic beliefs too.

James Johnson @jamesjohnson252 · Sep 30

Interesting piece by @katyballs today. As I wrote here for the @guardian, Tory MPs who think a culture war is the way to shore up their votes in the Red Wall are very much mistaken - theguardian.com/commentisfree/...

whip suspended, Timothy said: "Just like a Halloween movie trailer, just when you thought it was safe to even consider the Labour Party."

Timothy has also sent a number of tweets attacking London mayor Sadiq Khan. On November 3, Timothy responded to a video of Khan criticising Donald Trump, saying: "It would be really nice if one day he decided to just do his job, but on housing, crime and transport he's been worse than useless."

It wasn't just British political parties that Timothy spoke out against. On November 4, following the preliminary results of the American presidential election, Timothy tweeted: "Wonder how this would be going if the Democrats hadn't embraced BLM, denied and justified rioting, and toyed with defunding the police. The cultural left is a killer for social democrats."

The episode has also prompted concerns about what is seen as a wider politicisation of public appointments. One recent example is criticism of the decision to appoint Tory peer Dido Harding to head up the government's test, track and trace system.

The website Conservative Home recently put out a call for Conservatives to put themselves forward for public roles, with a non-executive directorship

Nick Timothy @NJ_Timothy

If unionists spent as much time making the case for the union, and scrutinising the SNP's awful record, as they do observing that unionists are failing to defend the union, the union might be in better nick.

Nick Timothy @NJ_Timothy

That Brexit isn't the Little England project sneering Remainers like to claim?

Mikey Smith @mikeysmith · Aug 25

Also, I think it perhaps says something about Brexit Britain that the best person we can find to bang the drum for it is an Australian.

Show this thread

Nick Timothy @NJ_Timothy

Wonder how this would be going if the Democrats hadn't embraced BLM, denied and justified rioting, and toyed with defunding the police. The cultural left is a killer for social democrats.

Nick Timothy @NJ_Timothy

Just like a Halloween movie trailer, just when you thought it was safe to even consider the Labour Party:

Claudia Webbe MP @ClaudiaWebbe · Oct 31

The Tory govt made an ideological choice to kill our most vulnerable friends, loved ones and relatives

Their incompetence & corruption is going to kill more care, health and frontline workers

They chose to reward their friends & associates with #NHS contracts worth billions

Show this thread

at the Department for Transport highlighted as a suggested vacancy.

It also comes after a number of high-ranking civil servants were reportedly forced out by the government. Jonathan Slater, the DfE's former permanent secretary, was told to go in September, months ahead of schedule.

Steve Barwick, deputy director of the Smith Institute think tank, said it was "paradoxical, insincere even, that the government all too readily complain about 'political' civil servants but then appoint their own supporters to roles that are covered by the rules of impartiality and say nothing when they tweet in a partisan fashion".

He also called for the government to "restate its commitment to impartiality and update the civil service code" to clarify its position.

However, he said the rules were "pretty clear".

"It seems therefore that if Nick wants to express his robust opinions, and of course I would defend his right to do so, he really should have thought twice before taking on the role of NED at the Department for Education."

Timothy did not want to comment. The DfE, despite repeated attempts, did not respond to a request for comment.

Major review makes the case (again) for post-qualification admissions

HÉLÈNE MULHOLLAND

@LNMULHOLLAND

A major review into university admissions is calling for places to be offered after students have been awarded grades – but it shot down proposals to shift start dates back to January.

Universities UK (UUK), the university umbrella body, suggests switching to a post-qualification admissions model from 2023, subject to full consultation, as part of a number of recommendations to bring greater transparency and trust in the admissions system.

Research by the Sutton Trust published last month showed that 66 per cent of students surveyed in September felt a post-qualification approach would be fairer than predicted grades.

The UUK's 18-month Fair Admissions Review, published today, has called for an end to the use of controversial "conditional unconditional" offers, where the place is conditional on an applicant accepting the university as their sole choice.

But, in the longer term, the report concludes a post-qualification offer model has the potential to provide greater fairness and transparency by giving students more choice for longer and reducing reliance on predicted grades.

However, it also highlighted issues that would need to be addressed, such as implications for school and university timetabling. UUK said that it would conduct more consultation and would work with schools, universities and the government to develop this approach.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said there is a "growing consensus in favour of ending the current reliance on predicted grades and moving to a system of post-qualification admissions".

"Teachers work hard and diligently to provide accurate predicted grades, but it is not an exact science, and never can be," he added. "Post-qualification admissions would be better and fairer."

The report was published just days after UCAS, the university admissions service,



separately put forward this proposal as one of two "radical new options" to shake up the admissions process.

UCAS's other option was a post-qualifications applications model that would allow students to apply for a place after A-level results day, and delay the start of the university term until January.

The UUK review, which involved school, college and university leaders – and UCAS – in its review, also explored this option. But it found that while it has the "potential to increase fairness", the proposal would "represent a possibly unmanageable overhaul to secondary education timetabling, exam sitting and exam marking, and possibly result in later starts for education courses".

Concerns were also raised about the level of disruption such a model could impose on education at a time when it has already been severely disrupted by the pandemic, the report added.

An UCAS spokesperson said the reform proposed by UUK is "the most practical and addresses concerns around predicted grades and unconditional offers".

However, the review does say that unconditional offers are appropriate in some circumstances, for instance, where applicants already have the required grade,

or for those applying to courses where decisions are informed by an interview.

But the UUK proposes a new code of practice to maintain standards and makes clear that "the use of any incentives in offer-making should not place any unnecessary pressure on applicants". Any failure to adhere to the proposed code of practice would result in sanctions, the review states.

Professor Quintin McKellar, review chair, said: "There isn't a perfect one-size-fits-all solution for the variety of courses and institutions, but the review has decided it would be fairer for students to receive university places based on exam results, not predictions."

"Any change to PQA must be taken forward carefully by universities, with further consultation with students, government and those working across the education sector. We need to be confident that any new process will allow for effective careers advice and support for applicants."

A Department for Education spokesperson said the government made an election promise to "improve the applications system for students. We have already been clear that reform is required and therefore welcome UUK's agreement on the need for change. We will set out more on the government's plans for university admissions shortly."

News

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£73k theft at academy not spotted for eight months, government probe reveals

HÉLÈNE MULHOLLAND

@LNMULHOLLAND

Over £73,000 was stolen from a single academy trust but the loss went unnoticed for eight months due to “weak internal controls”, according to a damning report into a London school.

The fraud came to light after Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) inspectors visited the London Enterprise Academy, run by the Tower Hamlets Enterprise Academy Ltd, in May last year following “wide-ranging” allegations relating to its financial management and governance.

The trust informed the ESFA team that over £73,000 had been stolen by an employee, who no longer works for trust. The theft occurred between July 2018 and February 2019 but was not picked up until March 2019.

The ESFA said weak internal controls led to the theft. The fact that no one noticed anything amiss for eight months put it in breach of the Academies Financial Handbook (AFH), which requires academy trusts to be aware of the risk of fraud, theft and irregularity and to address this risk by putting in place “proportionate controls”.

The report noted that “the theft that occurred is indicative of a failure by the trust to maintain sound internal controls. Had the trust taken urgent steps to address the findings raised by internal auditors, losses post-September 2018 of £43,230.34 could have been prevented.”

Overall, it found “a number of significant findings and breaches of the AFH have been identified, including weak internal controls in respect of procurement, processing and authorising payments, banking and reconciliations, management accounting and a lack of transparency in respect of reporting governance arrangements”. Urgent action was needed to resolve the issues, said the review.

The findings include:

- A former employee had linked their personal bank account to the trust on their banking app, which meant that they could still access the account information after leaving the trust.



- The trust had reimbursed spending on the previous employee’s personal credit card bill, including reimbursement for two months of Amazon Prime (£15.98) and two months of late payment fees (£24).
- A review of payroll arrangements found: a £4,500 salary overpayment was written off; an underpayment for a final salary calculation and missing and unsigned employment contracts.
- A mismatch between a list of current students in receipt of free school meals (I41) and the latest list provided by the local authority (I21)

Though significant control weaknesses had been reported by an internal auditor in 2018, the review team found no evidence that the reports had been presented to the trust’s audit committee or that the findings had been discussed.

Ashid Ali, principal of London Enterprise Academy, told Schools Week that he reported the theft to the police. The Metropolitan Police Service was unable to confirm that an investigation is taking place based on the details provided. However, Ali said the police had been in touch this week to update him on the

investigation.

Ali added that the school has been “working diligently with the ESFA to urgently respond to the issues raised” during the visit.

“We are fully focused on ensuring governance and financial processes are fully compliant with all the recommendations made in the report,” he added.

“Tower Hamlets Enterprise Academy feels it has now acted on and continues to implement the necessary steps to ensure that full compliance under the academies handbook is in place. As a trust we will always continue to seek and take advice from our auditors in implementing any further improvements to the strengthening of our trust’s processes and procedures.”

Meanwhile, the full loss from the fraud/theft has been recovered through insurers.

The school was rated as ‘inadequate’ in all areas by Ofsted in August last year. But inspectors said the school is “taking effective action towards the removal of special measures” in a monitoring visit report published in January.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “The trust has provided the department with action plans to rectify issues with financial management and governance. We continue to work closely with them to ensure they take the necessary actions to make improvements.”

We should have protected whistleblowers, says DfE

JOHN DICKENS
@JOHNDICKENSSW

The Department for Education has admitted it should have redacted the names of whistleblowers who gave evidence as part of an investigation into cheating at an academy trust.

Schools Week revealed in February that three whistleblowers had been named five times across 165 pages of a DfE response to a freedom of information (FOI) request relating to allegations of SATs cheating at the NET Academies Trust (NETAT).

The document was published on What Do They Know, a website run by the charity mySociety to make it easier for people to make requests and share the replies publicly.

The department claimed at the time the response was not published online. However, it has now admitted this was incorrect.

"Due to incorrect staff engaged, the wrong information was issued in the press release," said a submission in the department's annual accounts published last week.

"Although they [the whistleblowers] did not work for the trust involved, and as such are not legally classed as whistleblowers, the department recognised that they were undertaking whistleblowing activities and therefore should have been afforded additional protections."

The findings of an investigation launched by the department following "concerns" from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) were sent to the data protection watchdog in March.

A spokesperson for the ICO said: "As our investigation is ongoing, we cannot comment at the present time. We will not be making any further comment until it has concluded."



The department said it recognised that this incident "fell short of our policy and best practice. We have been working with the ICO to ensure that all lessons learnt from this incident are implemented across the department. The case with the ICO is ongoing."

The annual accounts said the DfE was "reviewing the guidance around FOI and redaction to ensure everyone understands what they need to do and the role of 'What do they know'".

The FOI request was submitted in November last year by Shaunagh Roberts, a parent at Waltham Holy Cross primary school in Essex.

Roberts sought all information held by the department relating to investigations at NETAT, which had recently been given the go-ahead to take over Waltham Holy Cross.

The trust, while supporting the school, was accused of encouraging staff to "over scaffold" support in key stage 1 and 2 writing by using Post-it notes to guide pupils.

The conversion was delayed while the government investigated the allegations, which were found to be "unsubstantiated".

Liz Gardiner, the acting chief executive of the whistleblowing charity Protect, said at the time: "Confidentiality should be a shield for whistleblowers. Removing that

shield endangers them, and sends a poor message to others who might consider coming forward."

The government attempted to improve whistleblowing protections across the sector by beefing up requirements in its 2019 Academies Financial Handbook. Trusts were

told to ensure that all staff were aware of the process, know what protection was available to them and know who to approach if they had concerns

The ICO is also investigating a potential breach relating to how gambling companies gained access to the Learning Records Service (LRS) database, which contains the names, ages and addresses of 28 million young people aged 14 and over in schools and colleges across the United Kingdom.

The Sunday Times found data intelligence firm GB Group, whose clients include 32Red and Betfair, had accessed the data. The DfE said Trustopia, a training provider, "wrongly provided access" to the LRS.



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Speed read



Round two: Ofsted on back-to-school visits

Ofsted has released its second report into the pilot “visits”, covering the findings of 380 visits between September 29 and October 23.

1 Pupils happy to be back, but welfare concerns

When asked about the mental wellbeing of pupils, school leaders “across several schools” reported increased cases of self-harming, mainly during the first lockdown.

More pupils were also suffering from eating disorders, “many of whom had not previously been identified as vulnerable”.

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted’s chief inspector, said a drop in social care referrals had led to concerns that “neglect, exploitation or abuse is going undetected”.

On the whole leaders reported that pupils were “happy to be back”, but said some were “fatigued, ‘disconnected’ from learning or struggling to stay awake and alert”.



2 Home education continues to rise

Almost half of schools reported that some parents had opted to electively home educate their children.

Sixty per cent had had more than one child removed since the start of the autumn term; sometimes more than one child from the same family. In Ofsted’s first analysis, about 33 per cent of schools reported parents opting for home education.

A *Schools Week* investigation last month found home education had increased 200 per cent in some areas.

Spielman said it was “clearer that this was being motivated by concerns around the virus, rather than from parents’ committed desire to home educate”, with “more of a pattern within minority ethnic communities and households including people who are deemed at greater risk from Covid”.



3 Leaders’ workload ‘overwhelming and unrealistic’

The chief inspector praised the “remarkable resilience” of school leaders as pressures increased during the pandemic.

“It is clear that senior leaders across the board are working more intensively than ever”, she said, adding some described this as “firefighting”.

She noted frustrations at “shifting guidelines” and said that extra workload pressures, such as covering staff absences and implementing daily safety procedures, led to more evening and weekend work.



Ofsted said leaders described the pressures as “unsustainable, overwhelming and unrealistic”.

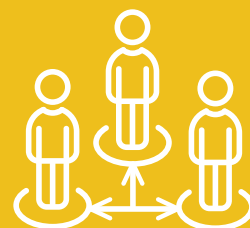
4 Exclusions rising in some schools because of ‘space restrictions’

Leaders were “very occasionally” reporting a rise in fixed-term exclusions as they could not go through their usual sanctions.

Pupils who disrupted learning could previously be placed in another lesson or into isolation. However, space restrictions and the need to keep pupils in bubbles meant that these types of measures were not practical, leaders told Ofsted.

But Spielman said that, on the whole, the “return to clear structures and boundaries at school has often resulted in an unexpected improvement in behaviour”.

One area of concern was that “online squabbles while schools were closed are now being played out in classrooms”.



5 Effectiveness of SEND support during lockdown dependent on pre-Covid relationships

Ofsted also released a briefing on SEND provision during the pandemic. As with mainstream pupils, the experiences of children with SEND was a mixed bag.

Spielman said the “simpler routines proved beneficial” for some children and remote learning was a more positive experience for those who enjoyed learning at their own pace.

Additional time with family or carers also improved language, literacy and communication.

However, she noted that pupils with SEND were also “seriously affected in both their care and education, as the services that families relied on, particularly speech and language services, were unavailable”.

The briefing found that the relationships between families, services and practitioners before March “impacted on the effectiveness of the support that families received during restrictions”.

If relationships were good “support was more likely to continue and be adapted well to a family’s needs”, whereas weak relationships “deteriorated even further” during lockdown.





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EDITORIAL

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Operation Moonshot: could PM finally deliver on a promise?

As the test and trace system went into meltdown earlier in September, leaving teachers and pupils unable to access tests, Boris Johnson's response to ignore the problems at hand and talk about some fanciful Operation Moonshot was rightly criticised.

Schools Week was among the most vocal – putting the prime minister's face on a moon under the headline "Operation Reality Check" on our front page that week.

Those problems with test and trace are, unforgivably, still rumbling on – meaning pupils are needlessly missing even more education. It's nothing short of a disgrace.

It is just one instance of how the government's woeful response to the pandemic has failed the profession.

But, to hear headteachers singing the praises of a government initiative – one that they say can be a "ground-breaking" development in keeping schools going – is music to our ears.

In the short term, mass testing using rapid antigen tests that provide results within 30

minutes, could keep thousands more pupils, and teachers, in the classroom.

It also comes just as the positive news of a vaccine has lifted all our hopes for the long term.

There are plenty of potential pitfalls. The heads were taking part in a small-scale trial, with plenty of resource (the army set up camp in sports halls to administer the tests).

While wider roll-out is now being started in some regions, we don't have many details about when this will go nationwide. Nor about where the people will come from to run the tests across the country.

But, after what seems like months of failed promises from failing initiatives, it's nice to have some hope.

If Johnson can make sure his Moonshot has a comfortable landing – he has a chance to at least halt some of the damage caused by the government's catastrophes.

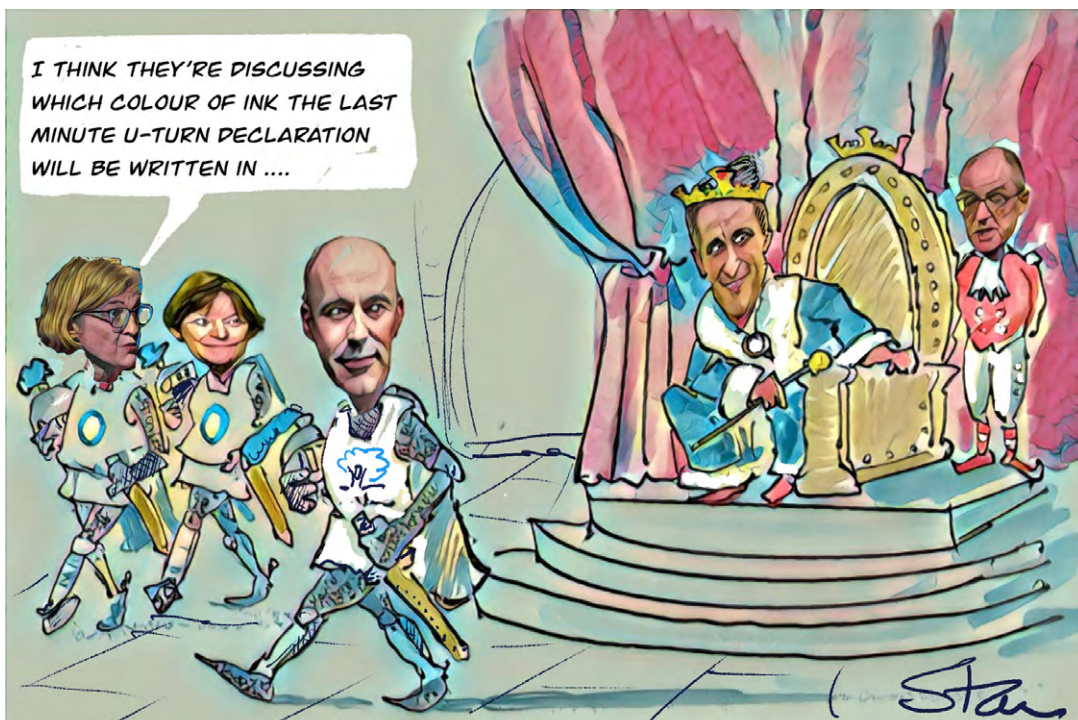
It's about time the government finally delivered on a promise.

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Restricting exams to core subjects 'under consideration', suggests Spielman

Teacher Toolkit

Core subjects. What an awful proposal for creative subjects and non-core disciplines. Who'd want to be a child of the pandemic hoping to pursue a career in drama or art right now?! We have to do better than this. Policymakers must be very careful of the impact of sweeping statements...

7 proposals to solve exams conundrum

Julie Featherstone

What measures are being considered for those students who were part of 2020 A-level fiasco but decided to take the A-level exams in June 2021 rather than Oct 2020?

These students are not in college now so will have no centre-assessed grades or mock exam results to fall back on should exams not take place in summer.

My daughter missed out on university this September due to it, and if exams don't happen in June she will miss out again if the system doesn't come up with a contingency plan, at great cost to her future and my purse as I have to pay for private tuition now!

Face coverings mandatory in communal areas of all secondary schools

Joanne Gibson

Why is a classroom not regarded as a communal area? If it is a space which is filled with young people of all ages during the course of the day, and where social distancing is not always possible, a teacher is subject to contact with in excess of a hundred students in any one day, with only their mask for protection.

Ofqual chief makes case for 'more generous' grades in 2021 and beyond

Helen Clark

I question how fair this grade inflation can possibly be for all those who suffered the introduction of both the new GCSEs in Maths and English, followed by the new A-levels, and who graduated in 2019. This cohort will be competing for jobs for years alongside

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Howard Bennett

7 proposals to solve exams conundrum

Hopefully, a vaccine might save us from a lot of this, although the time lost already and the unequal way that lost time has been distributed is a problem.

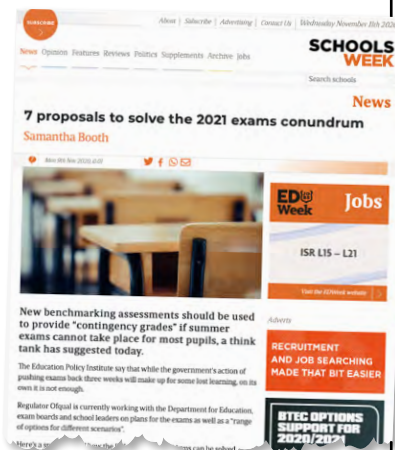
Can't see the appeal of "Benchmarking Assessments" –

unpaid exam marking

by teachers who haven't been trained to mark doesn't sound too clever and ultimately would be so open to abuse that it would be as chaotic as last summer.

This would ultimately end up being akin to teacher assessment – unreliable, silly, inflated grades in a messy free-for-all.

If the powers-that-be wish to create a system that encourages cheating, I feel honour-bound (to my pupils) to cheat the system and give inflated grades. I know that a substantial proportion of other teachers will do so. Why should my kids lose out if I choose to be honest?



THE REPLY OF THE WEEK WINS A MUG. CONTACT US AT NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK TO CLAIM

the "Covid Generation" and their inflated grades. I suspect universities and employers will come to label some of these results as "Covid results" when they find they have taken on someone with grades that prove to bear no resemblance to their actual abilities.

Unfortunately, such candidates may have already seen off their more able non-covid competitors at the paper stage of the recruitment process, due to their shiny, inflated, but potentially quite undeserved exam grades.

Inspections without grades – Ofsted plots January comeback

Terry McGovern

If Ofsted are genuine in wanting to help education in this time of national crisis why don't they make themselves available as a pool of voluntary supply teachers. i.e. something practical and useful. Be something you've never been before!

Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



‘I was on posters, I ended up in a magazine. It was bizarre’

Jess Staufenberg talks to one of the country’s youngest ever headteachers who then stayed put for almost 13 years

Liz Robinson, co-director, Big Education Trust

You get the feeling, talking to Liz Robinson, that were it not for her personal values she might have become a top-level Department for Education adviser or chief executive of an enormous multi-academy trust (only a handful of which are led by women).

At just 29 years old, Robinson landed her first headship at a south-east London primary school. It was 2006, funding was in abundance under New Labour, and the “education, education, education”

mantra still echoed around Whitehall. Robinson was one of the first alumna of the government’s competitive “Fast Track Teaching” leadership programme to bag a headship. She was in magazines and people expected big things.

“I still meet people who say, ‘You were the Fast Track teacher,’” Robinson tells me, shaking her head in embarrassment. “I was on posters, every bit of Fast Track memorabilia. There was lots of hoo-ha. I ended up in *Company* magazine, something about women under 30 who’ve broken the rules – bizarre.”

For two years the London School of Economics philosophy graduate had taught at a primary school in north London before joining the Fast Track programme and then spending three years as a deputy head at another primary. During the programme, Robinson had been sent to “flashy conferences” and big residencies, met ministers and been coached in system-level thinking. Now, she wasn’t even 30 and she had a headship at Surrey Square primary school in Southwark, south London. It was such an unusual situation that, when she was later pregnant, it turned out the

Profile: Liz Robinson



Robinson breastfeeding her younger daughter in a break between delivering leadership training

local authority didn't have a maternity policy for heads because it hadn't ever needed one before.

Robinson hoots as she recounts taking her parents to dinner to celebrate her new job and suggesting an impromptu drive down to the school at the end of the meal.

"It was very aesthetically challenging. You had to drive through an archway in a massive block of flats and the school was this big Victorian triple-decker with prison wire around the front wall. It looked like a poor-house from a Dickensian horror story. My parents were like, 'Oh that's lovely darling', obviously thinking, 'What is she doing?'"

The years that follow seem to reveal both Robinson's particular character, and a different time for teaching, when "celebrity heads" didn't build multi-academy trusts or have Twitter. She stayed. For almost 13 years.

After this stint, she is now co-director (note – not sole chief executive) at the Big Education multi-academy trust alongside the better-known Peter Hyman, a former strategist for Tony Blair. The trust is relatively young, with only three schools, including Surrey Square and the more media-renowned School 21. Robinson has turned down offers to take on other headships, more schools and new roles. Perhaps as a result (and also perhaps because of the shift in politics since 2010) she is not enormously well-known, with a modest Twitter following of around the 3,000 mark, and yet she is regarded by some as one of the best "progressive" school leaders of her generation. She baulks at using Ofsted judgments as a measure, but within three years of arriving she'd taken the school from a 'good' to an 'outstanding' judgment.

Robinson muses back to her first day. "If I had to



Robinson at the building site for the new nursery

"For good or ill in terms of my life and earning potential, I believe in doing things properly"

name one of the school's values when I arrived, it was smoking." I splutter at this – smoking? "All the teachers smoked. The staffroom was at the top of the stairs, and the smoke would billow down, so you could smell it when you came in. It was like the oldest, rankest pub."

It was a "joy" when the 2006 smoking ban indoors came in, she tells me, and to make it up to teachers she found money for a new staff room. Other clever financial decisions included selling off land to build a new nursery and securing funding for a "wonderful dining hall and kitchen, covered in grass". Robinson is clear about the importance of architecture for schools. In a rare moment between self-effacing laughter, she notes that getting new buildings "was a profound thing to have done".

Her other core focus was "values", which for Robinson meant answering the question for staff and pupils, "how do we behave?". "I wrote



Casting the school's values in concrete

my values on five or six handwritten bits of card and stuck them on the wall in my office." The values continue at the school to this day and have characters so young children can understand them: Percy for perseverance, Rafa for responsibility, Joy for enjoyment, Kofi for compassion and so on. To explain the link to behaviour, Robinson tells me what she calls a "hallmark Liz story". "A boy was brought into my office very early on by a teaching assistant. She sort of chucked him in and said, 'This child doesn't know how to behave'. And I thought, no, and neither do you. I think it is our job to teach these children how to behave, in the same way it is to teach them to read. The values became the backbone of our curriculum. It moved from a punitive, rules-based approach, to 'these are the values we want you to show'."

In 2006, eight months after Robinson was appointed, Ofsted inspectors said that "good standards of behaviour are achieved because adults strongly promote responsibility and respect" (although it should be noted inspectors graded behaviour as 'good' before her arrival, too). By the latest inspection report in 2016, behaviour was described as "exemplary".

Profile: Liz Robinson



Robinson at Surrey Square primary school

The focus on values is a lesson from Robinson's own childhood. Her mother was from a Methodist family and the first in her family to go to university, and her father was Jewish and from an impoverished background, who suffered anti-semitism growing up. They were brought together by a shared commitment to serving others, explains Robinson: her father started a youth centre in Bromley, where she and her older sister were brought up, and her mother was an assistant director of children's services. "It was a public service household. There was a powerful model of a working mum and deep values based around social justice."

Yet as she describes the most recent decade, one gets the sense Robinson's values have felt increasingly out of sync with those around her. I remark with surprise on the length of time she remained in her headship. "It is rare now. I've got very strong views on that. For good or ill in terms of my life and earning potential, I believe in doing things properly. I'm not interested in the quick wins or some of the bullshit that goes on." Only co-constructing "deep-rooted" relationships with a community over a long period of time brings about positive change for children and families, says Robinson, who estimates that she was asked to take on about ten schools during her headship. "But I knew what turnaround takes. I hated that takeover MAT model, it was too much about quick

"My parents were like, 'Oh that's lovely darling', obviously thinking, 'What is she doing'"

wins. It's the dick-swingingness about it, a kind of blokes' club thing of 'how big is yours?'"

It rather feels like the ever-smiling Robinson is brave enough to say what many teachers think in private but fear stating too bluntly. She doesn't air her views on Twitter, because it can become "quite toxic, and even though it's not the real world, real influencers are created and exist there". She is also utterly open about the fact one of the trust's three schools, the International Academy Greenwich, is set to close this year because a permanent site was never found. "In all seriousness, it was the most distressing, disappointing and stressful thing I've dealt with professionally. I had to be the voicepiece of DfE messaging, and I got endlessly trolled on social media." As a governor, Robinson is the only person from the school's original founding team who has stayed.

Since leaving headship in 2018, she has now finally turned her full attention to wider system leadership. Robinson oversees the trust's two-year

Big Leadership Adventure programme "to train

leaders as change-makers and disruptors", as she puts it. The trust is also linked to spin-off charity Voice 21 which shares the oracy-focused model particularly promoted at School 21 across the UK. Robinson is taking her values out to the sector. Why now?

"Why not shoot up the system sooner? I guess I didn't want to be part of it. I was searching for the right vehicle to work in this way. The extent to which competition is embedded in the system means you have to have some sort of governance around the group of people you are working with, to get the traction you want."

So did Robinson have to make a rare compromise on her values? She's clear the Big Education Trust does not expect its leaders to follow a centralised curriculum and says above all she and Hyman want leaders who truly understand their communities to make the decisions.

Now, with the Big Education Trust approved to open two all-through schools in the next few years, Robinson has an exceptionally interesting time ahead of her. Perhaps, just perhaps, her values and the times are coming back together once more.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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HAMID
PATEL

CEO, Star Academies

Exams 2021: Inequality grows with every positive test

The disparity of educational fortunes between some of our communities is ingrained. Covid-19 is making it a lot worse, writes Hamid Patel

Each morning is the same. The phones ring from 8am with parents reporting their children have tested positive overnight. A carefully orchestrated routine kicks in.

The headteacher and the "Covid Silver Team" speak to the student (who is hopefully at home) to check on their wellbeing and identify any social contacts, look at the seating plans – including on the school bus – and identify which pupils sat close to the "positive case", before going around the school and placing each into a holding room to be collected by their inconvenienced parents. Calls are made to the Trust Covid Response Unit (that's the "Gold Team"), the local authority, Public Health England and the Department for Education. Forms are completed and dispatched to each of these stakeholders – the same information presented in myriad ways. Every positive case is a small traumatic and bureaucratic event.

If you're incredulous, it might be because you are not living in an area

with a high infection rate.

In just one of the Star schools in the north there have been over 50 such cases this term. Almost half of their pupils have been sent home to isolate for up to two weeks. Over two-thirds have spent some time at home with symptoms, awaiting test results. Scores of supply teachers are brought in

“Youngster's prospects can't be further limited by 'Covid penalty'”

every day to supervise classes while staff anticipate test results of symptomatic members of their household. This is no longer a thriving, bustling, joyful school in any meaningful sense; it is more akin to a "zombie-school".

Again, if you think this is hyperbolic, it might be because you are not living in an area with a high infection rate.

In one of my London schools only one case has been reported, very few pupils are absent with symptoms and nobody understands what the fuss is about. If it wasn't for the hand-sanitising units at every turn and the frenzied cleaning of every surface, you wouldn't know it was anything other than a



normal year.

Pre-Covid, pupils in some of our impoverished coastal towns and inner cities already achieved lower GCSE grades than their more affluent peers. That was unacceptable, but the pandemic is making the situation far worse. So, while the government has rightly

mandated that schools stay open and deliver remotely where needed, this will only go so far to mitigate the harm caused by a resurgent virus.

We can't allow young people, already disadvantaged by the educational gap caused by deprivation, to have their prospects further limited by a "Covid penalty". While I disagree with the Northern Powerhouse's call to cancel exams, we need to recognise that they will not be completed on an equal footing. And, while I agree that it is not the job of exams but of schools and teachers to level the playing field, the simple truth is that completing exams under these circumstances is simply unfair.

That's why Ofqual must take bold steps to ensure exam grades are issued fairly and must guarantee that there will be no difference in the proportion of good grades awarded in areas that are blighted by Covid and those where there has been little disruption. They could achieve this by comparing exam marks only with peers within similarly affected parts of the country. Alternatively, they could issue all students across the country with the better of two grades: their raw exam grade or one moderated to guarantee their school's results in 2021 have the same proportion of grades 9, 7 and 5 as in their best year between 2017 and 2019. Doing either of these would avoid using teacher predictions while enabling our young people to strive hard to maximise their results, safe in the knowledge that any impact on their school would be mitigated.

Hundreds of thousands of young people risk having their results decided by the relative fortunes of their postcode and the willingness of their communities to adhere to government guidelines. Doing nothing will herald another summer of huge upset, with long-term consequences for their life chances, and that is simply not an option.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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England shouldn't cancel its exams but it should follow Wales's lead in one key regard – taking action now, writes Natalie Perera

The debate over what to do about exams next summer rumbles on. Earlier this week, the Welsh government confirmed that it would be scrapping GCSEs and A-levels for the second year in a row and instead plans to award grades based on "teacher-managed assessments". There are still lots of details to be ironed out, but the Welsh government has at least set out some clear tramlines.

No such clarity yet in England, however. One month after Gavin Williamson announced that exams would be delayed by three weeks, we're still none the wiser about whether further changes will be made.

In fairness to the Department for Education, this is not an easy set of decisions to take. The government will be juggling a number of conflicting priorities: fairness for pupils, maintaining standards, comparability across cohorts and implications for college and university admissions. Navigating competing objectives is par for the course in policy-making; but this particular quandary involves high-stakes outcomes, limited resources and a race against the clock.

Williamson cannot afford to spend much more time wringing his hands trying to marry these priorities and please everyone. There is no perfect solution and so he must focus on implementing the policies that get us as close as possible.

Fairness to pupils must be the overriding priority in reaching a



NATALIE PERERA

Executive director/head of research,
Education Policy Institute

Exams 2021: Wales now has a clear direction. What about us?

decision. We should make every effort to ensure that this cohort of young people are not unfairly treated because of the pandemic. Although Wales has clearly taken a different approach, the context in England means that a summer exam series is still the fairest way to assess pupils.

more between September and the October half-term. We know that absence rates were higher than this time last year and, in disadvantaged areas, such as Knowsley, Merseyside, attendance has been as low as 61 per cent.

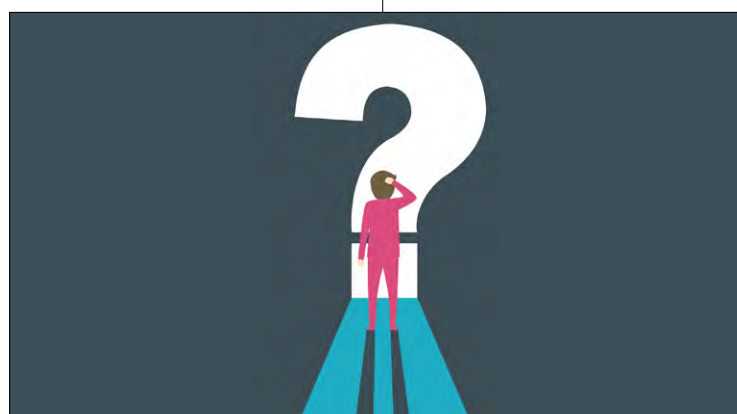
Summer exams need to include

“Williamson cannot afford to spend much more time wringing his hands

It gives them maximum learning time, is a process with which they're familiar and it provides greater comparability across cohorts.

But those exams need to be adapted to reflect the fact that pupils in England have lost up to 14 weeks of schooling as a result of the first national lockdown and potentially

more optionality for pupils – enabling them to answer questions on the content they've studied while not being penalised for omitting questions on the content they've missed. Designing exams in this way is difficult and complex, we don't doubt that. But the alternative of doing nothing is unpalatable.



Further, exams covering a single subject should be as spaced out as possible during the exam period, to ensure that if pupils miss an exam to comply with Covid-19 guidance, they have another to fall back on.

There also needs to be a Plan B if exams cannot go ahead for some pupils. We have recommended a series of benchmarking assessments in the spring term which would have some degree of formality and would replace the existing mock exam series. The grades from these assessments would provide a contingency so that we don't end up with the uncertainty and chaos of summer 2020. Again, this will be challenging to implement and will require exam boards and schools to work quickly to adapt and deliver these assessments.

Importantly, the government needs to provide more support now to help pupils to catch up. It will be a while before we know the true extent of the impact of lost learning time but we cannot afford to wait before taking further action. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers at age 16 was already 18 months pre-Covid, and the pandemic is highly likely to have exacerbated this. Colleges and universities will also need to be more discerning when considering applications next year so that pupils don't miss out on a place that they deserve.

Formulating policy at a time of national crisis will never be easy. Implementing those policies will be even more challenging. But, if it means securing a fairer deal for young people who have already experienced significant disruption, then we owe it to them to step up.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Tutoring alone is insufficient to help pupils emerge from the collective trauma of the past year, writes Sue O'Brien

With news today of a vaccine on the horizon, it is clearer by the day that the situation of the past year is redeemable. But as we experience a second national lockdown, our children and young people continue to face disruption to their education and home lives.

The BBC recently reported that almost half of secondary schools in England had sent home one or more pupils due to Covid-19, and the Northern Powerhouse Partnership has now called for exams to be scrapped amid concerns that northern pupils were the most affected by ongoing disruptions.

In an attempt to counteract the disruption and in light of clear evidence from the first lockdown of a widening attainment gap, the government has launched its National Tutoring Programme. This is a welcome initiative, not only because pupils can make excellent progress in response to subject tutoring, but perhaps even more importantly because pupils in more disadvantaged areas, particularly in areas in the north of England, are less likely to be able to access high-quality tutoring.

In truth, though, tutoring alone is unlikely to be sufficient. In fact, in some cases it could even add to academic pressure. A study carried out in September 2020 by Young Minds, an organisation whose mission



SUE O'BRIEN

Strategic lead, South Yorkshire Futures, Sheffield Hallam University

Students need more than tutoring to move past Covid

is to support children and young people's mental health, showed that after the initial benefits of returning to school, seeing their friends and re-establishing routines, "the rapid

We teamed up with the Northern Powerhouse Partnership and set up a mentoring programme with Class of 2020 undergraduates working directly with year 11 pupils in schools

"A one-size-fits-all approach will not be enough to help them all bounce back"

return to academic pressure, after six months away, was having a negative impact". Having experienced turbulent and often overwhelming experiences since March 2020, a one-size-fits-all approach to meeting the needs of children and young people will not be enough to help them all bounce back.

This is why, when we started discussing how we as a university could support young people as they began to re-engage with school we were convinced that any support we offered must be bespoke, validating and understanding their experiences of lockdown and building from there. It had to focus on the whole person and understand their specific needs.

across South Yorkshire. Its aim: to help them to re-engage with learning, discuss their future aspirations and give them permission and motivation to think beyond Covid. On November 16, we begin our first cycle of support for ten schools across our region, employing 20 class of 2020 Sheffield Hallam graduates who will support 300 pupils over seven weeks.

We knew these pupils would benefit from support from relatable role models who had similar experiences and backgrounds. Our graduates do and, following an intensive training programme, provide individual mentoring that holds the pupils in a safe place to

explore their short- and longer-term future and the support and skills to help them through the next steps.

Crucially, the schools themselves choose the pupils who will receive the support. Usual measures are used but are not definitive. We know that the schools know their pupils best – who has been most affected by lockdowns and ongoing disruption, and who will benefit most from focused mentoring.

The curriculum is designed to enable pupils to reconnect with education through the support of an enabling adult. It is founded on trauma-informed principles and supported by Trauma Informed Schools UK. Our mentors, recruited among recent Sheffield Hallam University and University of Sheffield graduates, coach pupils in habits and skills for learning as well as identifying areas for individual support. They encourage a view of the world beyond Covid, supporting the pupils to revisit and reimagine their aspirations for the future.

As we emerge from the collective trauma of the past year, the right support will ensure our young people find their way back on to the path to realising their ambitions and come back stronger. If our recovery is to be an equal one, that support must be local, bespoke, intelligence-led (not data-led) and broaden its scope beyond the immediately evident learning gaps.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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HULSON

Founder, Birch HR

Trustees need better data to meet tougher executive pay guidelines

Government must step in to support MAT trustees to validate executive pay, or face trying to fix a distorted market later, writes Samantha Hulson

The ability of schools to unshackle themselves from local authority control and become academies can feel invigorating but intoxicating. Alongside new freedoms to set their own curricula, academies and MATs have powers they've longed for – to attract leadership talent by setting their own pay and benefits.

While this might have worked for heads of single schools, or for a CEO managing a handful of schools, the inexorable march of the MAT is thrusting determining fair and appropriate executive pay into uncharted territory. The Nolan Principles for public life (including selflessness and accountability), performance management and national pay scales are no longer sufficient. Suddenly MATs have to compare themselves with others where parallels are hard to find. It's asking for skills and knowledge from trust boards that they simply do not always have.

The problem is that to comply with ESFA requirements, MATs must have a formal policy for explaining

how they determine leadership pay, or they could be in breach of those requirements.

Yet questions around how to even set executive pay only get harder. Are pay premiums acceptable to encourage or justify retention and to create stability? What should

performance bonuses even look like? What should they be paid for, and are they comparable to others? There are considerations around pay multipliers and questions about affordability, performance and how budgets and talent pipelines are impacted. And this doesn't even include concerns about whether any executive pay decisions perpetuate gender or ethnicity biases, and how pay structures could see unions pile on pressure about excessive executive pay at a time when MATs might be making redundancies.

To be able to answer all the above questions, all new and existing MATs have to revisit their leadership pay policy to ensure it is fit for purpose. HR and trust board processes must be set up to judge proportionality of pay and benefits and to determine if



they represent good value for money, are justified and proportionate. Pay decisions must also be defensible relative to other sectors and consider the framework for ethical leadership in education.

It is the factors that determine how decisions are made (rather than necessarily the decisions themselves)

“Lack of robust data risks creating a distorted CEO pay market

that need to be able to stand up to scrutiny. For instance, trustees should ideally work on the basic presumption that executive pay and benefits are defensible relative to the public market. Crucially, though, all these decisions must be discharged by the board effectively as rules on executive pay have been significantly strengthened by the ESFA in recent years and need to be in line with *Academies Financial Handbook* guidance and withstand scrutiny.

All of this must be done through the use of evidence, such as data, ethics frameworks, affordability, pupil outcomes, MAT context, performance management, benchmarking, pay ratios, individual expertise, public scrutiny, equalities, succession planning and the “Goldilocks formula”.

However, lack of robust, comparable data combined with some governor/trustee inexperience risks creating a distorted market of MAT CEO pay open to challenge. The problem most schools have is that their own access to pay market data is limited. Deciding whether pay is too high, too low or competitive enough (while having the vision to consider reputational and other risks) requires the insight that access to up-to-date and impartial national and regional pay and benefits data can offer. Only a regulatory body such as the ESFA and/or the DfE can, and should, make this available to boards.

No one claimed setting executive pay was easy, and with the onus on trust boards to take a holistic and organisation-specific view of remuneration (including whether they unwittingly create gender or other disproportionate pay gaps), the crucial message is clear: not having an understanding of the market or the evidence to justify decisions is no longer acceptable. But until the DfE and the ESFA sharpen their policy teeth and make the necessary information freely available, pay issues and inequalities will continue to loom over the sector, and ultimately it will be the trustees who are accountable when justifying exec pay.

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



The Fascist Painting: What is Cultural Capital?

Author: Phil Beadle

Publisher: John Catt Educational

Reviewer: Gerry Robinson, executive headteacher, Haringey Learning Partnership

Cultural capital". Since its inclusion in Ofsted's inspection handbook, it has become a well-worn phrase in schools. But what is it really? Phil Beadle's latest book opens by addressing Ofsted's assertion that schools should "[equip] pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life" and forces us to reconsider our assumptions.

A complex, insightful read, with several humorous interjections, this book could not be more timely. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests both nationally and internationally, many schools decided during the first lockdown to reflect on and decolonise their curriculum offer, in order to better meet the needs of their students.

Subsequent guidance introduced by the UK government, however, which deems "anti-capitalist" ideas as an "extreme political stance" and discourages the use of materials by any organisation that promotes such views, seems to have sent some schools running back to the apparent safety of teaching what Beadle calls "the approved high culture, the producers of which... are white, male and dead".

How, then, can educators support students to celebrate their identities without risking their own careers? Beadle's book, written before the new guidance came into effect, offers a possible pathway to "do something real and valuable about culture that also gets Ofsted off your back".

Much of Beadle's book centres around the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the "radical sociologist" who first coined the term "cultural capital" and highlighted the connection between our (supposedly) neutral pursuit of beauty and our

economic and political system. Ofsted, Beadle asserts, has "misrecognised what cultural capital is", which is simultaneously ironic and problematic. Beadle breaks down exactly how and why this has come about in the first three chapters of his book, building a convincing, detailed and thoroughly researched argument before proposing practical solutions.

I particularly enjoyed Beadle's argument, in the chapter entitled "The Uses of Language", that mastery of language is "the most primally important thing we can give our children in terms of their schooling". A crucial point in this chapter is the importance of valuing the language of the working class (and, though this point is less pronounced, that of other marginalised groups).

Countless studies have shown that Standard English does not require greater cognitive ability to grasp than Cockney rhyming slang. And yet, Beadle correctly points out, we condition students to believe that Standard English is intrinsically better. The crucial point here is that Standard English is perceived to be "more than" because it is the language of the dominant class. Beadle therefore promotes a balance of learning the language of "your oppressors" in order to challenge the status quo while keeping one's own modes of language. He astutely writes: "Without access to the language of the dominant, they will have been left silent; with access to it, they can call

the bluffers out for what they are."

This is what is so brilliant about Beadle's writing: he moves fluidly from academic discourse to colloquialisms, all the while demonstrating that a working-class person can master the ability to move confidently between cultural registers and therefore challenge social hierarchies.

Beadle acknowledges multiple times that readers may be put off by his assertions that schools are reinforcing damaging social systems, especially given the fact that many teachers regularly, and with the best of intentions, espouse the importance of cultural capital — albeit Ofsted's version rather than Bourdieu's. But Beadle's writing is enticing and even those who disagree with his thesis will find it hard not to keep reading and reflecting on their own ideas of what it means to empower students through education.

In any case, as a teacher himself, it is clear that Beadle is wholly in support of school staff; it is the school system he wishes to challenge. In fact, Beadle

notes that teachers, above all others, are the group who have "the most cultural capital but have benefited the least from it in financial terms", putting us in the perfect position to use "the radical tool" Ofsted has "accidentally given us... to change education for the better".



Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is **Jon Hutchinson**, assistant head, Reach Academy Feltham and visiting fellow, Ambition Institute

@JON_HUTCHINSON_

Talking about racism in schools

@nickdennis

Many schools were left rather perplexed a few weeks ago when the Minister for Equalities stood up in parliament to deride the teaching of critical race theory, which underpins much of the drive for greater equality in schools. Amid heated social media debate, teachers and leaders felt like they were caught in the middle of a political duel, with the accusation of law-breaking being thrown around with abandon. So, just what can we do and say about racism in the classroom? What should we do and say? Thankfully, a cool-headed but appropriately forthright blog by Nick Dennis puts the record straight, reassuring us that "discussing how racism works, how to overcome it and how to ensure against it is a necessary part of our democracy".

Beyond Black History Month: Integrating the Study of Black Historical Figures into the Mainstream Primary Curriculum through Literature

@storyriver

October has now come and gone, and with it Black History Month. Increasingly, schools are coming to understand that

TOP BLOGS of the week

although the dedicated month is "a valuable way of raising the profile of important historical figures, movements and moments from across British Black communities over time" it carries the danger of "the study of Black perspectives being confined exclusively to October". This blog helps teachers to think about how to integrate black voices throughout the curriculum, offering a broader, richer, more complete understanding of the world. An examination of the national curriculum highlights where we might focus particular attention, and incredibly useful reflective questions allow you to audit your own curriculum offer. This blog is top of the agenda in our SLT meeting this week.

Carrots

@MrMountstevens

I've long been a fan of Jonathan Mountstevens' writing on educational leadership and curriculum. He challenges unexamined and often cherished belief with a grace, pragmatism and non-partisanship that is rare on social media. The subject matter of this blogpost is a good case in point: the heated matter of whether or not exams should go forward this summer. Jonathan uses the analogy of a carrot farmer whose fields have been struck with a terrible case of carrot-fly, so that his crops don't match up to those of previous years. Should he simply throw out his scales? An unconventional and powerful contribution to the debate.

Primary Maths Diagnostic Assessment - Making a Choice: multiple choice questions = multiple benefits?

@HertsLearning

Herts for Learning regularly publishes exceptionally useful literacy blogs for primary school teachers, which I've often signposted in this feature. It is a cause for great celebration, then, that maths is getting the same expert treatment from Charlie Harber at the Herts team. Multiple choice questions are under the microscope here, and Harber admits that they have a bit of a PR problem in many primary classrooms. Don't pupils just guess? Isn't the answer always really obvious? Aren't they dull? Don't they embed misconceptions? Possibly, but only if you're not using them correctly, and Harber sets out exactly how to use them correctly, with tons of really helpful examples. I had to stop halfway to adapt my planning for the following day and fit some new, improved and targeted MCQs into my lesson.

Pastoral Leaders: Cultural Capital and Connection

@MsReidRE

Teachers' pastoral and the academic responsibilities sometimes feel like two horses pulling in opposite directions. Of course, in reality they mutually reinforce each other. But the importance of pastoral leadership has never been more important, with stark division raging through communities abroad and at home, and social media supercharging an "us vs them" worldview. Here, Aurora Reid argues that getting this important job right requires domain-specific knowledge and asks what that might be with respect to pastoral leadership. Alongside safeguarding legislation, SEND code practice, and psycho-behavioural knowledge, Reid argues that we mustn't forget cultural capital. No, not the Ofsted aberration, but instead an understanding of the cultures of the families we serve. We must stop seeing cultural capital "as a one-way street", and instead "connect into the rich worlds that make up our school communities".

Research

UCL Institute of Education will review a new research development each half term. Contact them @IOE_London if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

Does class size matter? Rethinking the debate

Peter Blatchford, Emeritus professor in psychology and education, UCL Institute of Education

According to our surveys of teachers' views and experiences, teachers worry about large classes, arguing that they adversely affect teaching and learning. However, many researchers and commentators have a different view. For them, the class size debate equates to the question: does class size affect pupil attainment?

Given reports of some schools being forced to create supersized classes of 60 pupils as a result of teacher absences in the wake of the pandemic, the question is a particularly important one. In my new book, *Rethinking Class Size: The Complex Story of Impact on Teaching and Learning*, co-written with Anthony Russell, we present results from our own 20-year research programme involving extensive classroom observations, national questionnaire surveys and detailed case studies. It's probably the largest dedicated study of class size effects there has been worldwide.

Researchers, contrary to practitioners' views, commonly find that the statistical association between class size and attainment is not marked and so conclude that class size does not matter much. This has led some to even suggest that we could raise class sizes and instead invest savings in professional development for teachers.

Our research identifies three problems with this point of view. One is that research into the association between class size and academic attainment in pupils' first language and mathematics is limited. It may be that teachers in large classes prioritise the teaching of these subjects (and this may help account for the relatively small difference in pupil



academic outcomes, compared to smaller classes); but large classes may affect other pupil "outcomes", for example, creativity, independent and critical thinking, motivation to learn and so on. We have, unfortunately, very little research that addresses this question.

Second, class size is not an "intervention" in the same way as the distinct pedagogical approaches with which it is commonly compared. It is not something one adds to the classroom, like a reading scheme, but rather one aspect of the classroom context to which teachers and pupils must adapt.

The third and most important problem with the usual research approach is that it does not take into account ways in which class size affects classroom processes, particularly teaching. At the heart of the claim that class size does not matter is the assumption that teaching is essentially about conveying information to students. If teaching was just about lecturing, then class size is much less important. Indeed, in higher education we routinely

see lecture classes of over 100.

There are no doubt some who would argue that this kind of teacher-directed, didactic style of teaching is preferable anyway. But this is a very narrow view of teaching, perhaps especially at primary school.

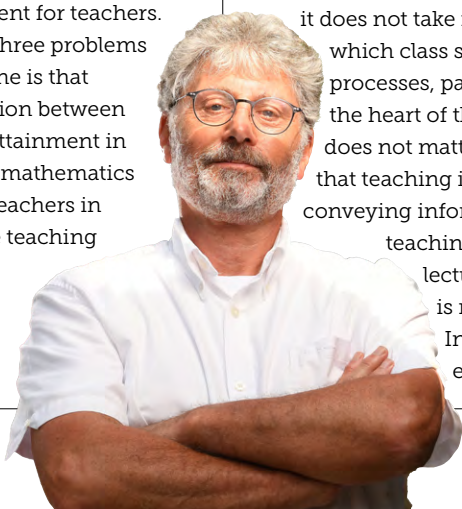
Our research shows that large classes:

1. make differentiated teaching and individual support more difficult;
2. result in reduced knowledge about individual pupils;
3. make classroom management more demanding;
4. reduce the amount of educationally valuable activities;
5. increase the demands of marking, report writing, planning and preparation, and
6. increase teacher stress.

Large classes are particularly demanding given the diverse pupil intake found in many UK schools, as well as policies of inclusion, which mean more individual support is often needed. Worryingly, we found that it is low-attaining pupils and those with SEND who are most disadvantaged in large classes, for example, in terms of classroom engagement.

Our central conclusion is that the effect of class size on academic attainment is not a direct one, as is assumed in much research, but interconnects in complex ways with classroom processes like the balance of whole-class, group and individual teaching, classroom management, relations between pupils, classroom tasks and administrative activities such as marking.

At a time of national emergency, staff in schools have to adapt to staff and pupil numbers as best they can, and large classes may be necessary in the short term. Teachers will also find inventive ways of teaching large groups. But we should not assume this is a long-term solution. We need to be aware of the implications for the quality of teaching and the breadth of learning – especially for the most vulnerable.



WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

TUESDAY

Chief inspector Amanda Spielman was given a royally hard time when she appeared in front of the education select committee to answer questions about, among other things, Ofsted's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Committee chair Robert Halfon had a big old bee in his bonnet about why the inspectorate didn't do more to check the remote learning schools were providing during the first lockdown.

Many of us would've been tempted to point out the obvious – that inspections were suspended by ministers – but Spielman patiently defended the watchdog not inspecting schools during a time of national crisis. Instead she explained what Ofsted HAD been doing to help with the recovery effort, namely sending its staff out to other government departments and local authorities.

Halfon's tirade is an interesting insight into the political pressure being heaped on Ofsted to get stuck back into schools again. Could it be that the only thing stopping ministers bringing back inspections in January is actually, er, Ofsted?! We are strange times.

Spielman also batted away a bizarre question from Halfon about whether Ofsted wanted to inspect provision funded by the Careers and Enterprise Company. She had to set the MP straight after he claimed Ofsted regulated the National Careers Service, which of course it does not. Still, we can forgive Halfon for not

knowing that – it's not like he's a former skills minister or anything...

WEDNESDAY

School leaders were this week brought back to using profanities to describe Edenred, the company that ran the government's free school meals voucher scheme.

The company posted on Twitter how it was "delighted" to have won the "Best Covid Response Initiative" and "Best Lockdown Team" at the Gift Card and Voucher Association awards for its work delivering the scheme.

"We were grateful to play a part in helping families through this difficult time", the post, rather incredulously, added.

Never mind making school business managers having to work through the night just so they could log onto the malfunctioning website – the company's damning failure to deliver vouchers on time, some weeks late in the early days, left poor children without food.

What next? A "most engaged politician" award for Gavin Williamson? Or a "most loved by schools" award for Ofsted?

The Department for Education was also singing its own praises this week after it rose from 22nd to 15th in the rankings of the social mobility index, which recognises the top organisations in the country in terms of social mobility. Given the Covid pandemic is expected to have widened the attainment gap between poorer

pupils and their richer counterparts, and given the DfE's catch up plans are still in their infancy, we would have thought the department might want to skip this opportunity to gloat.

The Social Mobility Commission, an agency that is sponsored by the DfE, also recently lost its second chair in just a few years, which hardly gives the impression of a social mobility strategy that's going according to plan...

The government announced this week that private schools will be allowed a "phased withdrawal" from the teachers' pension scheme from next spring. Current teachers will stay in, but alternative schemes can be offered to new entrants.

However, the confirmation appears to have come a little late: over 170 private schools have already left the TPS since increased employer contributions were introduced last year, leading to strikes in some schools and fears state schools could have to fill a "black hole" in the scheme.

THURSDAY

If anyone was in any doubt of the huge impact the government's historic exams U-turn had on grades this year, then Ofqual has produced a set of helpful graphics that show exactly how much things changed. The mean change from year to year in schools for the proportion of grade 4s and above at GCSEs is usually around zero.

This year it was 11.1!



DEPUTY HEADTEACHER

Lion Academy Trust - Wellingborough - Olympic & Warwick Primary

A key element of our success as a trust is our consistency in our approach, models, policies and practices. Visiting any of our schools on any given day you will observe the same high expectations, the same teaching and learning strategies and the same welcoming, positive and supportive atmospheres. Working with the Executive headteacher, you will be based at Olympic and Warwick Primary Schools, Wellingborough and be responsible for leading teaching and learning alongside a team of leaders. This is an exciting opportunity to join a committed team to further develop the schools in their educational offer.

Closing Date: Friday 4th December 2020 12.00 pm

Interviews Week.comm: Monday 7th December 2020

All initial enquiries should be made to Kerry Ridge, Operations Manager

kerry@lionacademytrust.net

Any offer of employment for this post will be subject to a satisfactory Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service, medical checks and two positive reference checks.



Olive Academies

Are you an experienced marketing and communication professional who has a passion for education?

Our network of academies is growing and we need a Marketing and Communications Manager to work closely with our senior leaders, to lead and develop our marketing and communications strategy, plan and deliver multi-channel campaigns, social media activity, internal communications and proactive PR for OA's academies, ensure we provide the best support to all our staff, and engage with our key stakeholders effectively.

Headteacher posts at two Trust schools in Dudley, West Midlands.



Hob Green Primary School ●●● **The Bromley Pensnett Primary School**

Organisation type: Academy Trust
Contract: Permanent/Full time
Salary description: Leadership Group Pay Scale: L15 to L21 subject to experience and negotiation

Closing date: 27 November 2020

Visit to schools and Trust: Due to Covid-19 restrictions this will not be possible.

Interview dates: 7 and 8 December 2020

Taking up post: Easter 2021 or September 2021 for the right candidate.

Trust Headteacher

drb Ignite Academy Trust, Birmingham (nine primary schools in Birmingham and Dudley, West Midlands)

These are exciting times for our Trust. We are developing a committed team of talented staff, supportive parents and a strong board of trustees. We require exceptional school leaders to lead improvement in two of our Dudley schools and to play an influential role in wider Trust developments.

We need leaders with:

- a deep commitment to and knowledge of the education and well-being needs of all pupils.
- a clear vision for a dynamic, engaging and inclusive primary curriculum.
- extensive experience of EYFS, KS1 and KS2.

- a proven track record of successful leadership, delivering results and improving outcomes.
- a commitment to working collaboratively.
- the ability to inspire staff and pupils and champion success for all.

You will be supported by a strong central school improvement team and dedicated group of fellow headteachers who work together through a culture of collaborative effort and trust.

We can offer you:

- a dynamic professional development experience.
- opportunity to make a major contribution to the development of a growing and ambitious organisation.
- a values-led culture that underpins the attitudes and behaviour of all involved with the Trust.

Download application form and Information Pack: www.drbignitemat.org
Return completed application form to: rhawkins@drbignitemat.org

Closing date: 27 November 2020

Contact details: drb Ignite Academy Trust

Telephone number: 0121 231 7131

Contact: James Hill – Trust Executive Director of School Improvement



Timbertree Academy is part of United Learning, a national group of academies and independent schools. It's a happy, lively, forward thinking school that secures good outcomes for its pupils by offering the very best education, care and services to its children and families.

Our developing West Midlands cluster comprises Timbertree, Corngreaves and Ham Dingle Primary Schools, with all three being led by an Executive Headteacher.

An excellent opportunity for a leader looking to combine the running of

their own school with the benefit of working closely with an Executive Headteacher as well as within a developing cluster enabling high quality, bespoke school improvement and wider opportunities for both staff and students to work collaboratively.

If you are looking for an exciting and highly rewarding role, offering excellent professional development, and if you have a strong commitment to improving the lives of all young people, we encourage you to visit us.



Beacon View Primary Academy
The best in everyone™
Part of United Learning

An excellent opportunity to build on your previous experience and lead Beacon View through the process of collaborative school improvement.

As the Principal, you will combine the autonomy of leading the school, with the benefit of being part of a successful national group of academies and independent schools which share a mission to bring out 'the best in everyone' and improve the life chances of the children and young people.

Beacon View is one of three schools within a local cluster within the Paulsgrove area in Portsmouth, with all schools being within walking

distance of each other. Cluster partnership will enable high quality, bespoke school improvement and wider opportunities for both staff and pupils to work collaboratively across the schools.

If you are looking for an exciting, challenging and highly rewarding role within a Group that offers excellent professional development, and you have an unshakeable commitment to improving the lives of children and families, we look forward to hearing from you.



**COBHOLM
PRIMARY ACADEMY**

YEAR 6 LEAD TEACHER
SALARY: MPR/UPR + TLR 2A (£2,796)
PERMANENT, FULL TIME
STARTING AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

Cobholm Primary Academy is a small school with a big heart and we're looking for an enthusiastic and inspiring Year 6 Lead Teacher to join our leadership team.

This key leadership role will take responsibility for assessment within the primary school and will be a lead teacher, modelling exceptional practice. The successful candidate will ensure that:

- Student attainment, progress and achievement are effectively analysed and used to inform decision making and curriculum planning;
- Learning outcomes are triangulated and referenced with benchmarks;
- Supporting teachers to understand and make effective use of assessment to address the needs of students.

The successful candidate will be an active part of the school leadership team. They will be deployed into Year 6 as a teacher, working alongside Year 6 colleagues.



**Blatchington
Mill School**
Involvement, Achievement & Care

SENCo (Permanent)
Leadership ISR 7-11/SCP 11-£52,643

From January 2021

An exciting and highly rewarding opportunity to lead in an innovative and exciting environment managing the provision of SEND students and improving educational outcomes. You would oversee our provision for SEND and be part of the extended senior leadership team which would provide an excellent career progression route into senior leadership for the right candidate.

If you would like to join us, and feel you could thrive in a collegiate and positive atmosphere then visit our website for further details:

<https://www.blatchingtonmill.org.uk/key-information/vacancies/>

Closing date: 3rd Dec – Midday

Blatchington Mill is committed to safeguarding our students; we expect all staff and volunteers to support this commitment. Criminal record checks will be carried out and a full, enhanced DBS clearance is required for all positions.

Applications are encouraged from black and ethnic minority candidates, as these groups are under-represented on the school's staff. (Race Relations Act sections 35-38 apply).



Hollygirt
SCHOOL

Peridot



HEADTEACHER

About the role

Hollygirt School has been striving to maintain its unique position within the Nottingham independent sector and the relatively new Trustee Board are keen to build on the significant achievements to date, and develop a strategy to increase capacity and income for future years. The Headteacher will work with the Board of Trustees and the Senior Leadership Team to provide leadership, vision, and direction for the school. The new Headteacher will be the key driver in further improving the offer and making it the "school of choice" for Nottinghamshire families.

The Headteacher will be responsible for the day-to-day management of all school operations encouraging a culture that balances the promotion of excellence, equality and high expectations for all with a commitment to structured pastoral support. The Headteacher will lead the SLT in delivering a curriculum aimed at continuous improvement for all pupils, including those with SEND. At Hollygirt, we celebrate the achievements and progress of all. The Headteacher will work with the Bursar to manage resources effectively and efficiently and look for opportunities to increase revenue streams to improve teaching and learning and to provide a safe and harmonious school environment.

Who we are looking for

We are seeking a candidate with successful experience of leading and managing improvement strategies and successful change programmes. This is a great opportunity to use your skills in strategic planning, and to develop and implement initiatives to increase numbers on roll and revenue streams. The school is looking for DfE recognised qualified teacher status and experience of leadership in an educational setting. The candidate will demonstrate a proven track record of either raising attainment or sustaining good or outstanding achievement and progress in a whole school environment. In keeping with the school's strong ethos, you must understand the needs of all pupils aged 3-16 to facilitate an inclusive school approach.

You will be expected to have high order analytical and problem-solving skills and the ability to make informed judgements. In consultation with the SLT, you will be required to make and present strategic recommendations to the board. A key part of the role will be marketing the school and promoting all the benefits that we have to offer – you will be representing the school to all stakeholders, prospective parents, the local community, press and the independent school sector. Therefore, the successful individual will be a natural and a compelling communicator who is able to present confidently and professionally in a variety of media to a range of audiences.

For more information and to apply, please visit the job page on Peridot Partners' website: <https://bit.ly/3d2YJTR>

To arrange a confidential chat, please contact our lead consultants at Peridot Partners:

Sally Lawson-Ritchie | sally@peridotpartners.co.uk | 07904 158737

Drew Richardson-Walsh | drew@peridotpartners.co.uk | 07739 364033

Closing date: 12pm, Monday 23rd November 2020 | Salary: £65,000 - £75,000

Hollygirt School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment and undergo appropriate checks.



University Collegiate School Learning Innovation Opportunity

QUEST is seeking a Principal who has passion, determination and enthusiasm to lead our expert team at the UCS in Bolton.

This once in a lifetime opportunity is for a leader who wants to shape the future of our new University Collegiate School as it grows and transforms the lives of our students.

Join US to Unlock your Potential.

Do you have:

- High expectations and share our Spirit of Purpose
- Successful Leadership experience
- Commitment, dedication and drive to succeed
- Digital expertise to deliver our cutting-edge vision
- A desire to support and secure achievement for all, staff and students alike

Are you:

- Values-led, research-informed and impact-focussed
- Inspirational
- Motivational
- Forward thinking & curious

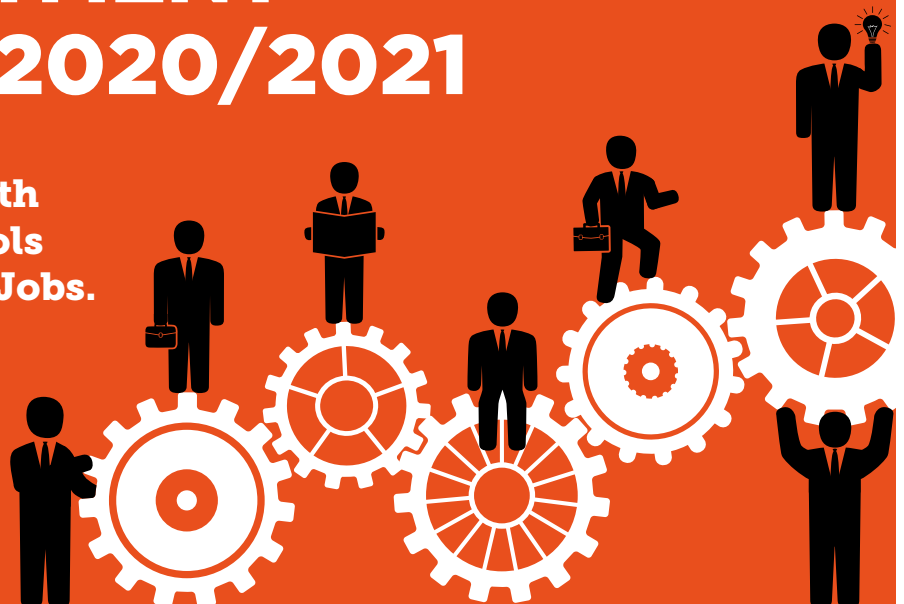
If you want to make a difference and transform lives, you'll fit right in. We seek those that have a determination for success, a thirst for continued learning and a drive to be relentlessly ambitious for the students and communities they serve.

If you are interested in joining our family, we'd love to hear from you!

Please contact Tonianne Hewitt at t.hewitt@QUESTTrust.org.uk or call 01942 834000 / 07881363436 for further information.

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Organise your school's
recruitment advertising with
packages available at Schools
Week and Education Week Jobs.



PEER TUTOR: CLOSING THE LEARNING GAP AND TACKLING EDUCATION INEQUALITY THROUGH THE POWER OF PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING



As we find ourselves in the midst of a second national lockdown, Dr Wayne Harrison (Founder and MD of Peer Tutor) reflects on the impact of COVID-19 on education inequality and how the learning gap it created can be shortened through the power of peer-to-peer learning.

Prior to lockdown and the global pandemic, 2019 research by The Education Policy Institute highlighted up to an 18-month academic divide between students from lower income backgrounds and their classmates. Research from the UCL Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research shows that during the first lockdown there was an increasing divide between state and private students' access to online learning.

The Government has responded through a £1 billion catch-up programme and by delaying GCSE exams for three weeks. However, as we now find ourselves in a second wave and lockdown, schools face a monumental challenge to support learners. Even though schools are allowed to remain open, catch-up in the current academic year will not be straight forward. The hidden impact of year group bubbles going into isolation and teachers planning for home learning and classroom delivery simultaneously is creating an uphill battle.

We strongly believe that teachers and classroom assistants are best placed within

schools to deliver interventions. However, as students struggle to catch up against the backdrop of partial school closure and more demand than ever being placed on teachers, Peer Tutor's catch-up programme supports students and helps to build back their confidence through the power of peer-to-peer learning.

What is Peer Tutor?

Owned by national educational charity and awarding organisation NCFE, Peer Tutor is a unique mobile app which can support students reach their goals, without increasing teachers' workload. It provides students with personalised support for homework and revision, accessible 24/7 from verified, high achieving peers.

Safe and secure

Peer Tutor's secure digital platform is the first of its kind, offering personalised tuition tailored to each individual's needs. The live lessons don't use cameras and are recorded for safeguarding. All live lessons are delivered by tutors of the highest quality, having all achieved Grade 6 and above in their own exams as well as being DBS checked and verified. We utilise the latest AI screening technologies to moderate questions and feedback to ensure that young people stay safe while using the app.

Peer Tutor catch-up programme

Designed to provide a low cost, high quality alternative to traditional tutoring, Peer Tutor has been created with accessibility in mind, to help provide equal opportunities for remote and out-of-hours learning for everyone.

The catch-up programme is designed for students in years 9 – 11 studying for their GCSEs in Maths, English Language, English Literature, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, History, and Geography. Operated on a credit-based, pay as you learn system,



DR WAYNE HARRISON

MD and Founder at Peer Tutor

students and schools can purchase 'gems' to access Peer Tutor's real time Q&A platform, interactive live lessons with Collins' resources and personalised feedback service. Students simply upload a photo of the question that they're struggling with, or work they require feedback on and a dedicated peer tutor will answer.

What next?

At Peer Tutor, we understand the logistical barriers for delivering in school programmes, even when we are not in the middle of a global pandemic! Therefore, our catch-up programme can be quickly implemented in schools within just one week with a simple virtual launch process and monthly reporting to schools to track usage.

To find out more about our catch-up programme visit www.ncfe.org.uk/peer-tutor-catch-up-programme or contact us directly by emailing info@peertutor.com or calling us on 0330 057 3186.