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New league tables will be 'relief map of pandemic'



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REACT: A Covid strategy quietly healing the system's fractures?

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Exam tweaks won't solve regional learning loss, Ofqual chief warns

- Stacey issues sobering warning as experts told to find a solution
- New exams measures 'bake in fundamental inequalities', say critics
- But Williamson insists students now have 'clarity and confidence'

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

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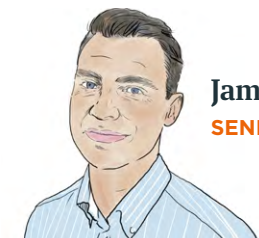
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The 2021 plan: Speed read



Exams, Ofsted, league tables ... what's happening in 2021

The government has finally announced its plans for next year's exams, when Ofsted will resume and other outstanding issues such as league tables and primary assessment.

But some of the finer details are still missing. Information on exams won't come until the new year, for example.

Either way, here's your speed read of every announcement and what we know so far (all on one page so it's easy to share!).

Exams:

1. Grades to be as generous as this year, but with the same level of generosity for each subject.
2. Advance notice of some topics in GCSE, AS and A-levels to focus revision (no details of which yet).
4. Allow exam aids, such as formula sheets, in "some exams" to give students "more confidence and reducing the amount of information they need to memorise".
5. Additional exams as a second chance for students to sit a paper if they miss the main test because of illness or self-isolation.
6. In "extreme cases" where a student has a "legitimate reason to miss all their papers", then a "validated teacher informed assessment" can be used.
7. A new expert group to look at "differential learning and monitor the variation in the impact of the pandemic on students across the country".
8. Adaptions to "ensure parity" in vocational and technical qualifications.

Ofsted:

1. Full, graded inspections will not resume until the summer term at the earliest.
2. From January, Ofsted will run "supportive" monitoring inspections to schools and colleges rated 'inadequate', and some that are 'requires improvement'.
3. The inspections will focus on "important issues like curriculum, remote education and pupil attendance, particularly of vulnerable children".
4. Ofsted will have the power to inspect schools if they have "serious concerns", including over safeguarding and remote education.

Primary assessments:

1. At key stage 1: SATs in reading and maths and the grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) test will be removed, as will the teacher assessment in science. But teacher assessments in reading, writing and maths will go ahead.
2. At key stage 2: the GPS test and science teacher assessment will also be removed, but all other tests and assessments will go ahead.
3. The phonics screening check for year 1 pupils and any year 2 pupils who didn't reach the expected standard in the special autumn check this year will go ahead.
4. But schools can extend the timetable for the key stage 2 tests and phonics check by a week (until May 26 and June 25, respectively).
5. The multiplication tables check, due to be rolled out nationally next year, will be optional.
6. Primary performance data will not be published.
7. Schools will have to complete the early years foundation stage profile.
8. Schools can run the reception baseline assessment if they want, but not mandatory.

League tables:

1. Exam results will not be included in performance tables this year.
2. The government will instead publish attendance information, student destinations and subjects taken at key stage 4 and 5.

Remote education:

1. Primary schools to provide at least three hours of work a day for isolating pupils.
2. Secondary schools to provide at least four hours' work, with "more" for exam pupils.
3. Requirement of "ideally daily" contact with pupils dropped.
4. Instead schools should have systems for checking "at least weekly" whether pupils are engaging with work.
5. Where engagement is a concern, parents should be "informed immediately".
6. A requirement for schools to publish information online about their remote education offer will be brought forward to the spring term.

The 2021 plan



No good solution for regional lost learning, Ofqual warns

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

The gap in learning loss across different regions is “one of the most intractable issues” and any potential solutions are “fraught with difficulty”, Ofqual has warned.

The sobering assessment on the potential for government to come up with a plan to make exams fair for pupils in the hardest hit Covid areas follows the government admitting it had yet to find a solution.

Instead, an expert group will be set up to examine proposals to level the playing field, but they won't report until the spring.

Dame Glenys Stacey, the interim chief regulator, warned this week that differential learning loss is “one of the most intractable issues”.

In a letter to education secretary Gavin Williamson yesterday, she added: “Any further steps to address this issue through exams and assessments are fraught with difficulty, and yet changes to the exam and assessment system alone are not enough to address the significant risks to public confidence this presents.”

The government announced a package of measures this week to ensure exams are as fair as possible next year and to avoid another fiasco.

Pupils will be awarded grades as generous as in 2020, will get advance notice of topics in certain subjects and will be allowed to take exam aids, such as formula sheets, into exams.

But the sector will have to wait until the New Year for specific details on the proposals.



Williamson said he “hoped measures like more generous grading and advance notice of some topic areas will give young people the clarity and confidence they need to achieve every success”.

But Kate Green, Labour's shadow education secretary, said the plans still bake in “fundamental inequities between students who have suffered different levels of disruption to their learning”.

The expert group may look into such ideas as issuing an asterisk on results to indicate pupils who had lost learning, or urging universities to lower entry requirements. But the government has ruled out looking at regional grading variations.

Stacey said this would create “different kinds of unfairness... Even in areas with high infection rates, there are schools where students have access to high-quality remote learning, and some schools report not being behind at all.”

She also warned of generous grading “undermining public confidence in the credibility of grades. It will be important that grade boundaries – particularly at the lower grades – are not so low as to be implausible,” she added.

Ofqual said that exam boards will use prior attainment data – from national key stage 2 or GCSE data – to set grade boundaries to produce outcomes in line with 2020.

In terms of contingency plans, if a student misses one or more exams due to self-isolation or sickness, but has still completed a proportion of their qualification, they will still receive a grade.

If a student misses all of their assessments in a subject, they will have the opportunity to sit a contingency paper, one in each subject, “shortly” after the main exams. It is expected that the most exams will take place in the first two weeks of July.

In the “extreme” case where a student has a “legitimate reason to miss all of their papers” then a “validated teacher-informed assessment” can be used.

But Stacey said developing contingency papers in such short time scales “increases the risks of errors” and may see results delivered slightly later.

Conservative MP Robert Halfon, chair of the education select committee, questioned whether the government was “baking” grade inflation “into the system” by allowing more generous grades.

But Williamson said it would have been “unjust” for students to have grades that were substantially lower than 2020.

Stacey also signalled that attention is now being turned to the “potential” impact on 2022 students, adding: “We are considering the resilience of the system in the longer term.”

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Daily checks ditched in new remote education advice

The government has ditched its official advice that teachers should “ideally” check in with isolating pupils every day.

Instead, schools are expected to check on whether children are engaging with work “at least weekly”.

New guidance on remote learning also says that primary schools should set, on average, a minimum of three hours a day of remote education for isolating pupils.

This is increased to four hours at secondary, with “more” for pupils working towards formal qualifications this year.

Previous guidance said that schools were expected to “ideally” provide “daily contact with teachers”. *Schools Week* reported last month that this expectation was also included in the draft form of the new guidance.

However, it has been ditched from the final version.

Instead, schools are told to “have systems for checking, at least weekly, whether pupils are engaging with their work, and inform parents immediately where engagement is a concern”.

They should also “gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum using questions and other suitable tasks, and provide feedback, at least weekly, using digitally facilitated or whole-class feedback where appropriate”.

Speaking in the House of Commons today, Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, said that the department would ask schools to set out details on their websites “so that parents can better understand their schools’ remote education offer” in the spring term.

The 2021 plan



Ofsted promises 'supportive' inspections in gradual return

JAMES CARR

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Ofsted will next month embark on a series of "supportive" monitoring inspections for schools with the lowest rating, as full inspections are pushed back until the summer term.

Full inspections, paused since the outbreak of Covid-19 in March, had been due to return at the start of next year.

Instead, the watchdog will begin a gradual return, with "supportive" monitoring inspections to schools and colleges currently judged 'inadequate', and to some schools judged as 'requires improvement'.

Reports will be published online, but a grade will not be issued. They will take a similar form to current monitoring inspections, which include a judgment on whether school leaders are "taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement".

However, Ofsted refused to clarify if the judgments in the new monitoring inspections would follow the same format, or how it would decide which 'RI' schools to inspect. A spokesperson said an operations document



Amanda Spielman

on these details would be published "in due course".

The return of full inspections has been suspended until the summer term, but in the coming months Ofsted will "discuss the approach to routine inspection in 2021 with sector representatives and test it through a series of pilot visits, where necessary".

On the reintroduction of monitoring inspections – revealed last month by Schools Week – Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector, said: "These plans will help us support the providers who are facing the greatest challenges during these difficult times."

The Department for Education said the inspections would "focus on important issues like curriculum, remote education and pupil attendance, particularly of vulnerable children".

While remote education will not be specifically judged, inspectors will have conversations with leaders about progress made since the school's last report, taking into account the pandemic and questioning how schools have adapted their teaching.

The inspectorate continues to have the power to inspect a school if it has serious concerns – such as safeguarding and provision of remote education.

During the spring term, inspections of independent schools will be at the request of the DfE while interim visits to special education needs and disabilities (SEND) schools will resume in January.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), welcomed the delay of full inspections and said it was vital schools focused on learning, catch-up support and Covid safety measures "without the added burden of having to worry about inspections".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Attendance league tables will be 'relief map of pandemic'

Ranking schools in league tables based on their attendance will just become a "relief map of the pandemic", one head has warned.

The government announced this week that exam results will not be included in league tables this year.

Instead, the department will publish performance tables to "provide a transparent set of information for parents" on subjects taken, destinations of pupils and attendance data.

But Nick Soar, executive principal of Harris Academy St John's Wood in North London, said: "It won't be a league table; it'll be a relief map of the pandemic."

Previous TeacherTapp data suggests schools in poorer areas are more likely to have lower attendance.

Loic Menzies, chief executive of the Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY), said a "heightened focus on attendance within league tables is a potential double blow for

schools at the sharp end of Covid's unequal impact on schools."

Another academy trust leader said all the current problems with league tables based on results will now be "replicated – lack of contextual awareness, blunt measures and an insensitivity to school context. This measure will probably tell you more about a school's community than its systems and success."

Menzies also added that confusion over different attendance codes to record covid-linked absences this year will mean "parents will not be able to read next year's league tables with any confidence in their validity or reliability".

School exam data will be shared with Ofsted to help inform routine inspections when they resume. The data will also be made available to the Department for Education and schools themselves to "support improvement".

Ministers have also decided that a number of primary assessments will be scrapped in

2021, though key stage 2 SATs will go ahead.

At key stage 1, reading, maths and grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) tests will be removed, but teacher assessments in reading, writing and maths will go ahead. Teacher assessments in science at key stage 1 have also been removed.

There will be no GPS test at key stage 2, but all other tests and teacher assessments except science teacher assessments will go ahead.

However, the timetable for key stage 2 SATs and the phonics check will be extended until May 26 and June 25 respectively, to allow a "flexible approach".

The DfE said that continuing with some of the assessment "will help to understand pupils' lost time in education and support those that need it most, providing vital information to parents and assisting with pupils' transition to secondary schools".

Covid

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Festive cheer on hold as schools 'on call' for test and trace

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EXCLUSIVE

Schools have been told they must be "on call" to help with contact tracing into the Christmas holidays, with councils warning heads they may have to be available until Christmas Eve.

Leaders reacted with dismay this week as Schools Week revealed the Department for Education was preparing to issue the edict to schools. Some heads have even suggested on social media that they will refuse to cooperate.

The issue emerged after Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council emailed headteachers claiming the DfE was "insisting" that schools remain open until December 18 "and that you will effectively be on call to the 24th".

Councils in neighbouring Devon and Dorset given made similar warnings, while one head in the West Midlands has reported being told they will need to be around for the whole break.

BCP Council told its heads a "worst-case scenario" would be that school admin teams "would be on call until the bank holidays".

But leaders fear they may have to pick up the slack because teachers and a large proportion of support staff aren't contracted to work, with some heads even suggesting on social media that they will refuse to cooperate.

The DfE has said it will publish guidance for schools on the "short period after the end of term where their support may be required with contact tracing", but has given no specific timeframe.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the ASCL school leaders' union, said his organisation had



told the government that schools "should not be expected to carry out contact tracing beyond Tuesday December 22".

"We believe this builds in a reasonable amount of time after the end of term on Friday December 18 for contacts to be traced in the event of any positive cases, while giving staff certainty that they will be able to stand down from Wednesday December 23 and enjoy their Christmas break."

James Bowen, head of policy at school leaders' union NAHT, has been asking for a solution to the issue "for a number of weeks".

The Unison trade union estimates that around 85 per cent of school support staff are on term-time only contracts, meaning schools would have to pay them extra to have them work up until Christmas eve.

Craig Vincent, an HR consultant and education specialist with law firm Stone King, said although academy trusts may have central staff contracted to work in the holidays, headteachers are

responsible for health and safety issues in their individual schools.

"The guidance will be interesting," he told Schools Week. "I just hope it's [out] soon to allow some adjustment if schools do have to do something."

On whether heads could legally refuse to help out, Vincent said it would depend on their contract.

"They may technically be able to be instructed to be available by their governing body, but I would be very surprised, given the year heads have had, if that did occur. I would hope the wellbeing aspect would be very strongly considered before such instruction was made."

A spokesperson for the DfE said guidance on the matter would come shortly, but that its approach "will reduce the demands on staff as far as possible, while continuing to do what is necessary to fight the virus and keep communities as safe as possible".

EXCLUSIVE

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Come clean on regional absence data, ministers told

Ministers have been told to "come clean" and reveal the regional disparity in pupil attendance following the outbreak of Covid-19.

On November 16, Labour MP Wes Streeting submitted a request asking for the number and proportion of pupils across England missing school due to Covid.

As a named day question, the Department for Education was required to respond by November 19.

However, it responded on Tuesday – nearly two weeks late – refusing the request. Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said the

department intended instead to publish regional and local authority data in the last week of term alongside its weekly data publication.

But this will only be each half-term – rather than each week like the national attendance data.

Streeting said: "It's no good ministers hiding the reality. They need to come clean with the data and an action plan to address this serious educational inequality."

Previous regional attendance data revealed huge disparities – with worst-hit regions

such as Liverpool, Calderdale and Knowsley, reporting secondary school attendance rates of just 67, 64 and 61 per cent respectively in October.

Streeting added a failure to provide support for schools to keep pupils learning "risks reinforcing the north-south divide".

The DfE's latest attendance data found up to 798,000 pupils – between 8 and 10 per cent of the total population – did not attend school for Covid-19 related reasons on November 26.

Gibb said the frequency of the attendance data was set to be reviewed in the new year.



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News

INVESTIGATES



Ofsted flags potential off-rolling after council visit

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Ofsted has rapped a council after discovering potential off-rolling of children in care, with the number of pupils educated at home shooting up more than 20 per cent.

The watchdog does not name the schools and will only report on the alleged practices if they continue once full inspections resume in the summer term.

Ofsted's remote visit of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council's children's services in October culminated in a critical letter published this week.

It said there were "too many children in care being excluded from schools, and some are excluded permanently" and there was "not an established culture in which schools hold one another to account for the use of exclusion".

Between September 2019 and the time of the visit, the number of children educated at home jumped from 478 to 580 – more than 20 per cent.

Ofsted concluded there was "no evidence that the local authority is challenging schools with higher numbers of pupils moving into elective home education that could, potentially, be off-rolling pupils".

It told the council it could improve by developing plans to "prevent exclusions from school for children in care", and noted the council's inclusion team was establishing a "preventing exclusion panel".

Previous inspection reports did not contribute to the team's findings, it said.

Ofsted has been carrying out assurance visits to local authorities since September to

consider if they are making the best decisions for children in care during the pandemic.

Analysis from *Schools Week* found that nine of the ten children's services visits conducted since September mentioned a rise in the number of children being home-educated, although, the watchdog recognised many councils had effective processes in place to track such changes.

For example at Slough Borough Council, it was noted "a more rigorous system for identifying children who are not in formal education" had been introduced. This identified more children missing education and the improved tracking systems were "increasingly effective in promoting children's return to attending school".

Last month the Association of Directors of Children's Services revealed that the number of children withdrawn from school for elective home education had soared by 38 per cent in the past year – jumping from 54,656 to 75,668.

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's chief inspector, previously warned that "fake news" around Covid-19 fuelled the rise in home-education as "parents were concerned about the safety of their children".

A BCP spokesperson said the number of exclusions in its schools were beginning to reduce this term. It has also reduced the number of children in care missing out on education from 42 in July to 8 in October.

They added the council takes allegations of off-rolling seriously and had increased the capacity of its inclusion service to "enhance our challenge of schools and support to parents where" home education is being considered.

Staff strike over lack of running water

JAMES CARR

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INVESTIGATES

Teachers at a Wirral primary school are set to go on strike after claiming that senior staff repeatedly ignored health and safety concerns surrounding Covid-19.

Staff at Kingsway Primary School will walk out for six days across December and January in what is believed to be the first school industrial action linked to the virus.

They claim the school was left without adequate running water between May and July, which hindered the ability of staff and pupils to undertake basic hygiene at the height of the pandemic.

A teacher at the school, who wished to remain anonymous, said that sporadic water pressure meant that the staff toilets would not flush and pupils were unable to wash their hands.

"Children were ... walking through different areas of the school having not washed their hand. We were concerned about the spread of the virus and the safety of our pupils."

Staff say they were ignored when they raised issues with management.

Elsewhere it is claimed staff were denied risk assessments and school leaders failed to respond to repeated safeguarding and behaviour management concerns.

Bora Oktas, a regional officer for the National Education Union (NEU), said: "The main issue is that management constantly ignores our members' concerns and does not allow a healthy dialogue of workplace discussion."

But a spokesperson for Wirral Council said it had met affected staff and provided support. Officers had fixed a faulty water valve and no other health and safety concerns had been reported.

Last month the NEU launched its Escalation App, which provides teachers with a checklist to track their Covid-19 safety concerns.

If teachers feel their concerns are not addressed they can opt to withdraw their labour or seek a union ballot for strike action.

But Kevin Courtney, the union's joint general secretary, said it would always seek to resolve concerns without industrial action.

There were concerns around communication and treatment of staff before the pandemic, but it is understood they have been exacerbated by the onset of Covid-19.

News

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Want flexible working? We need a 'culture shift' first

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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A "culture shift" is needed to encourage school leaders to be more open to flexible working, a government-commissioned report has found.

It comes as a former co-head said the coronavirus pandemic had "shone a light" on different working practices in schools.

The Department for Education commissioned research, published last week, found that senior education professionals would be key to any "cultural shift" on flexible working, which would include part-time, job shares or staggered hours.

It found that while most senior leaders were willing to listen to requests, they would often only agree to changes for non-teaching staff or those without leadership responsibility.

Fifty schools were included in the research, which was completed before the pandemic. There was a need to reinforce messages that flexible working could be approached as "an opportunity, rather than a risk", said the report.

"This includes support for senior leaders, governors and executive leaders in recognising the benefits of flexible working, and the ways in which it can be effectively implemented and managed."

Emma Turner, half of one of the UK's first

all-female co-headships, said working practices this year had "shone a light on the possibility" that there was more flexibility in rigid set-ups in schools.

Turner, the author of *Let's Talk About Flex*, added: "There are a lot of people for whom the argument is 'this is the way we've always done it, therefore we are always going to do it like this'. That kind of argument has been smashed into dust as it's been shown that absolutely nothing is set in stone."

The DfE's most recent school workforce census shows the rate of teachers leaving the sector fell from 9.6 per cent in 2018 to 9.2 per cent last year. However, the five-year retention rate fell from 68 to 67.4 per cent.

Schools Week previously reported that 28 per cent of women teachers work part-time, compared with the 40 per cent average for all UK female employees.

Male teachers also lag behind the national average with 8 per cent working part-time, compared with 12 per cent of men nationally.

The government has targeted flexible working as a way to boost retention.

This term, the DfE announced its flexible working ambassador schools programme



Emma Turner

in which eight schools will share almost £500,000 as part of its work to improve staff retention.

It is also seeking providers for a £57,000 contract to train school leaders on how to implement effective flexible practices.

In a pilot between March and October last year, six schools were given support, including human resources and education consultants, to explore flexible working.

Researchers said up-to-date and accurate HR advice on

flexible working was important. Training for HR personnel, external HR providers and school improvement partners "could be beneficial".

Ian Hartwright, the senior policy adviser for the NAHT school leaders' union, said that delivering flexible working was not "simply a matter of culture change".

"A considered and joined-up policy approach from government is needed to deliver flexible working across a wide range of roles and across different career stages. This requires better system design, investment and the identification and removal of barriers to flexible working."

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Relaunch forces policy experts to reapply for posts

The Department for Education is "refreshing" its team of experts who inform policy-making – just 18 months after recruiting them.

The department started recruiting 200 "external experts" two years ago under a £10 million contract that was labelled at the time as a "waste of public money".

About 100 experts have been recruited. But the department is reopening bidding for the Register of External Experts – with new areas of expertise and those on the list having to reapply.

New categories include alternative provision, special educational needs and behaviour, on top of pre-existing policy areas

that include general education and university technical colleges.

But the DfE said the estimated £10 million of the original contract had been reduced to £4 million this time.

It had reduced costs as a result of improved procurement and, in the context of Covid-19, it was using far fewer experts in deployments.

On top of the framework's four areas, the DfE said in a tender document it wanted to recruit in more than 60 areas of expertise.

It was looking for "demonstrable experience specifically gained in the education sector, including school

improvement, governance, curriculum, risk, safeguarding, financial and behaviour management and recruitment".

It also wanted "high-quality expertise" in managing schools estates, early years, alternative provisions, special educational needs and higher and further education.

Appointment to the register did not guarantee the award of any work, the tender reads.

In 2018, the DfE rebutted criticism of the use of money – stating it is "doing exactly as suggested" by "using experts from the education profession to support the department's decision-making".

Finance warning redacted over ESFA probe

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH EXCLUSIVE

The government is investigating alleged financial irregularities at an academy trust in south London that was issued a redacted finance warning notice earlier this year.

A financial notice from March, published last Friday, ordered the Trinity Academy London Trust – which ran the Trinity Academy in Brixton – to hand over full minutes and notes from board meetings, alongside a string of finance conditions.

However, parts of the report were redacted. Schools Week understands this relates to an ongoing investigation by the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) into allegations of financial irregularities.

The trust launched an investigation in autumn last year into a “number of transactions flagged up as suspicious by auditors”.

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said the notice was issued due to concerns about “governance at the trust, resulting from allegations of financial irregularities”.

It added it was unable to comment on an ongoing investigation.

Meanwhile, the school this week was transferred to the Future Academies Trust, which was founded by Lord Nash, the former academies minister.

This means the conditions attached to the notice no longer apply, as the school is under a new trust.



Trinity Academy in Brixton



TRINITY ACADEMY

Trinity hit the headlines in 2015 when Schools Week revealed the free school had just 17 pupils on site when it opened. A year on it had grown to near capacity.

A spokesperson for Future said this week that the academy’s finances were now run in “a more professional way, with support from experts”.

“The FNTI relates to events during a period that ended in September 2019... The irregularities related mainly to procurement procedures and the academy trust has not found any financial losses,” the spokesperson added. “The academy has a healthy financial surplus.”

Annual accounts for the Trinity trust, which will now be dissolved, state that “trustees believe the trust purchased goods and services” from companies connected to a staff member,

However, it added that “the trustees have been unable to verify the connection”.

An internal investigation found that breaches of the academy’s procurement policies and the trust’s internal financial controls had occurred.

But a trust spokesperson said in a statement, issued to Schools Week in February, that it did not believe there had been a net loss to the trust as a result of the contracts.

The matter was reported to the police in mid-November. The Metropolitan Police decided after initial inquiries that it was not in the public interest to pursue it.

In the financial notice, Mike Pettifer, ESFA’s then director of academies and maintained schools, said that while he recognised the “cooperation and discussions” between the trust and officials, his concerns remained over “governance and financial oversight at the trust”.

The notice listed 19 conditions, including requesting the trust to hand over full minutes and notes of all board meetings held during 2018-19 and ensure that “all current and historic related party transactions are fully accounted for”.

The DfE said the information redacted was done in line with the ESFA policy to remove confidential details.

A spokesperson for the DfE added it had “supported the trust to transfer Trinity Academy to Future Academies Trust, which represents the best outcome for the school’s pupils”.

EXCLUSIVE

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Covid advisory group agrees to gagging orders

Twelve members of a group advising the Department for Education on its Covid-19 response have signed gagging orders.

Schools Week revealed in May that the recovery advisory group, made up of academy leaders, charity bosses and others, had been formed to help the department.

It has now emerged that the group members signed personal confidentiality agreements.

The development came to light in a parliamentary written question from Lord Watson, Labour’s education spokesperson in the Lords, which was answered by Baroness Berridge, the academies minister.

“It beggars belief that the government is gagging experts who are providing advice to ministers,” Watson told *Schools Week*.

“We need an open and transparent process for our recovery from coronavirus. We should not allow government secrecy to potentially damage children’s futures.”

Academy leaders Sir Jon Coles, Martyn Oliver, Ian Bauckham, Richard Gill, Ed Vainker, Rowena Hackwood and Susan Douglas are members of the group.

Becky Francis, the chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, and Jonathan Simons from lobbyists Public First

are also on the group, as are Martin Pratt from Camden Council, Angela Cox, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds and Mrunal Sisodia from the National Network of Parent Carer Forums.

The group is separate from the DfE’s Covid-19 response school stakeholder advisory group, which includes education unions and other national bodies.

The *TES* reported earlier this year that the DfE had attempted to get the stakeholder group to sign confidentiality agreements, but Berridge has since confirmed that none did.

The DfE was approached for comment.

DfE finally confirms unspent £140m to fund NTP extension

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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INVESTIGATES

The government has been accused of misleading school leaders, pupils and parents after finally admitting that the £350 million for the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) is for two years, not one.

An investigation by Schools Week earlier this year showed that £140 million of the promised £350 million for the NTP to run across this academic year remained unspent.

Last week we revealed the programme would be extended and now the Department for Education has confirmed this unspent cash will fund the programme next year.

Ministers have promised £350 million for the NTP this year at least six times in official communications since June.

Wes Streeting, the shadow schools minister, said they had “misled pupils, parents and school leaders... With a million children out of school last week and the attainment gap widening under this government, urgent action is needed now to help pupils catch up on their lost learning.

“By effectively halving the funding available this year the government is seriously letting down pupils and their parents.”

The NTP was unveiled in June as part of a £1 billion package to help pupils catch up following partial school closures. But even the announcement was fraught with problems.

On June 18, ahead of the official unveiling, the DfE told journalists that the catch-up package



included £300 million for a “multi-year national tutoring programme”.

But it reissued its press release just over two hours later to say that the NTP would have £350 million in funding and provide support “over the 2020-21 academic year”.

Schools Week understands the change was made after Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, lost an argument with the Treasury over the programme’s length. Williamson had argued for multi-year funding, but the Treasury insisted it all be spent in one year.

Schools Week understands that officials in the department were expecting the funding to cover multiple years, but were waiting for confirmation in the spending review.

Despite this, DfE ministers subsequently claimed six times in responses to written questions from MPs that the NTP was a one-year programme.

The department claims the statements weren’t

false at the time they were made, because the programme’s extension wasn’t announced until the spending review.

During a parliamentary debate on Thursday, Robert Halfon, the chair of the education committee, called on Williamson to instead use the unspent £140 million on ensuring every pupil was prepared for exams this year.

The NTP has been criticised since its launch. School leaders have complained it only allows tutoring for pupils in one subject and mostly has to be done in school, causing issues during the pandemic.

Williamson did not address the question in his response.

Schools Week can also now confirm that a £400 million figure listed as for education spending in 2021-22, buried in spending review papers, is not new money.

This figure relates to money already promised from June’s £1 billion catch-up fund.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Deprived schools ‘hit hardest’ in meeting Covid costs

One in four schools may not be able to meet Covid-related costs despite increased funding from government, and deprived schools will be among the hardest-hit, a new report has found.

Analysis by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that existing inflationary pressures, such as teacher pay rises, mean the £2.6 billion increase in school funding this year will leave little left over for some schools to pay for increased costs.

Ministers have said they expect schools to meet the costs from their existing budgets, and have repeatedly pointed to plans to increase school spending by £7.1 billion by 2022/23.

Despite these rises, NFER identified 1,500

schools that were “particularly at risk of great financial hardship”, as they entered the pandemic with either a deficit or small surplus.

The research also found that more deprived schools, which face the biggest challenge in supporting pupils to catch up, stand to see smaller increases under the government’s national funding formula (NFF) because they have historically received higher levels.

Schools have lost hundreds of millions of pounds from a combination of lost income and increased costs since the pandemic began. Although the government launched an exceptional costs fund, its scope was limited and it only covered the tail end of the last

academic year.

Ministers also announced a £650 million Covid catch-up grant for schools to help pupils make up for lost learning, but the NFER warned resource pressures “may mean that some schools divert this catch-up premium to other purposes”.

The government has also announced a Covid workforce fund to help schools cover teacher vacancies. But NFER found the fund was “unlikely to ease pressures” on school finances because of its limited eligibility criteria and coverage.

The organisation called for emergency support for the hardest-up schools, and demanded a “more progressive approach” to the NFF during this “unprecedented time”.

Explainer



DfE's poor oversight of school meal voucher scheme exposed

The National Audit Office this week published its investigation into the Department for Education's national free school meal voucher scheme. It exposed little new about the scheme's failures, but did reveal a worrying lack of oversight from the DfE.

1 No idea of Edenred's profit, or how many children were helped

The firm issued 10.1 million vouchers in total, but these could cover more than one child in a family or last for more than one week. The DfE forecast the final cost of the scheme would be no more than £384 million.

However the DfE "does not know precisely how many children have been supported by the voucher scheme". This is because schools weren't required to submit pupil details to avoid Edenred "having to handle a large volume of sensitive personal information".

The DfE has an "open book arrangement" granting it access to Edenred's income and costs relating to the scheme. But the department chose not to use them, admitting it "did not know details of the potential profit or loss Edenred may have made".

2 Contract awarded despite 'financial' concerns

Prior to awarding the contract, the DfE's economic and financial assessment concluded that Edenred's UK business "did not have the financial standing that would normally be required for a contract of this value".

But due to the speed required to launch the vouchers, the DfE went ahead anyway (the firm was already registered on a framework with the government's Crown Commercial Service and was handed the voucher contract without the usual tender process).

Such a situation would normally require a "parent company guarantee" (a form of security to protect the government should Edenred not deliver under the contract). But this was also waived as it "would not be possible in the time available", despite the department admitting it had been "mindful that Edenred might need additional financial support, particularly to put right problems at the start of the scheme".

3 Gove extended vouchers over Easter WITHOUT Edenred knowing

Despite coming under huge pressure, the government insisted for weeks it would not fund vouchers over the Easter holidays. Edenred had been planning to use the period to "process outstanding orders and make adjustments to its systems to improve performance" – after the troubled start.

However, former education secretary Michael Gove announced on the first Saturday of the Easter holidays the government would in fact fund the vouchers, which the NAO said meant the "pressure of the system continued".

Edenred told the NAO it "was not informed in advance of this announcement" – throwing its plans to catch up off course and somewhat explaining the ensuing problems over the following weeks.

4 Parents waited 5 days for vouchers in April

The time it took Edenred to process orders for eCodes (schools ordered eCodes which were then converted into vouchers) dropped from an average of 4.93 days in April, to 0.16 days in July. Average waiting times for schools fell from 42 minutes in late April to "virtually zero" by July. The NAO report stated this "indicates poor performance" at the start of the contract.

The report flagged up school staff logging on late at night to order codes, and found parents couldn't get prompt support (calls to the firm's helpline "increased rapidly" from 727 on April 1 to 3,940 on April 14).

5 DfE promised vouchers in 4 days – but didn't check performance

When the early problems surfaced, the department considered buying vouchers from another supplier. But, instead, they "relied heavily" on day-to-day "liaison" with Edenred to oversee the scheme (including ministers "intervening directly").

However, despite telling schools vouchers would be issued within four days, the department "did not systematically collect data on processing times that could be used to measure performance against the undertaking".

One of the firm's performance indicators was that it should answer 90 per cent of telephone calls within 30 seconds. However, the DfE "did not monitor performance against this measure" in the early weeks of the contract, the report found.

When the DfE did start collecting data, from May, Edenred answered just 76.5 per cent of calls that month.

6 Email errors meant 36,000 parents not given help

The report also details issues with schools providing incorrect email addresses for parents. Over the life of the contract, 134,000 eCodes were undelivered because of incorrect email addresses, affecting more than 36,000 parents.

A further £37 million worth of eCodes had expired or been cancelled, too. Edenred upgraded its website in July to allow parents to cancel "lost" eCodes and get them resent.



New contingency guidance divides leaders

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

The government's decision to seize control of schools' Covid restrictive measures has divided leaders, with some welcoming "much-needed clarity" and others saying the changes are "unnecessary".

The Department for Education on Friday published a new contingency framework for schools to manage exceptional circumstances in which education is restricted.

The guidance says primary schools "should continue allowing children to attend" unless evidence supports limited attendance. Only vulnerable children and children of critical workers should then attend.

Secondary schools would close to all except vulnerable children, children of critical workers, pupils in years 11 and 13 and other pupils due to take external exams this academic year.

This makes the four-tier system for schools – which included moving to a rota system – defunct.

However, the guidance warns that schools "should not move to implement



restrictive measures of the kind set out in the contingency framework without the explicit agreement of the DfE".

Mike Kilbride, the chief executive of the BePART Educational Trust and chair of the Wirral Association of Secondary Heads, said the framework was "probably unnecessary as virtually all headteachers are determined to keep their schools and colleges as open as possible".

Any move to close schools and colleges was "driven by necessity" or after discussion with local public health authorities.

"We know how important education is, it's why we devote our lives to it and we will all keep our places open as long as our

mitigations make it safe to do so."

The guidance said pupils and adults in secondary schools in tiers 2 or 3 still had to follow face mask rules.

Special schools have been told they should "continue to allow pupils to attend full-time" but, unlike mainstream schools, attendance is not mandatory and parents will not be penalised if they keep their child at home.

Schools should also remain open for exams, but may introduce extra safeguards such as face coverings and more space between desks.

In exceptional circumstances, school leaders will be allowed to determine if exams should be provided at a candidate's home.

Wayne Norrie, the chief executive of Greenwood Academies Trust, said the guidance helped to provide "much-needed clarity", but must "continue to empower local school leaders with a degree of flexibility in order to implement a response that best suits their school's individual needs and continues to protect the communities they serve".

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT school leaders' union, said the update was the latest example of the government moving the goalposts.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

'Too many caveats' on cash to cover absent staff

Extra government cash to help cover staff absences won't "fully address the severe financial pressure on schools", say school leaders.

The Department for Education last Friday announced a "Covid workforce fund", which will be backdated to November 1 and will cover the current half-term. Officials have not said how much will be available, but that they will pay "all valid claims".

However, schools have been told they must deplete their reserves to 4 per cent of their income and reach a certain absence threshold to be eligible.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL leadership union, said that while welcome, the funding "comes with many caveats and will not fully address the severe financial pressure on schools and colleges caused by the Covid pandemic".

"It provides only for staffing cover in the current half-term, and does not take account

of the fact that schools and colleges have been plugging staffing gaps since reopening in September."

Paul Whiteman, the leader of the NAHT school leaders' union, was more optimistic, calling the funding a "glimmer of hope for some schools". But he said his organisation "would like to see the government go further".

Mainstream schools will only be eligible for the fund if they have a short-term teacher absence rate at or over 20 per cent, or a long-term teacher absence rate at or above 10 per cent.

But there will be "greater flexibility" for support staff in special and AP schools. These will be eligible to claim the cash if they have a short-term absence rate of 15 per cent or above, or a longer-term absence rate of at least 10 per cent.

It follows headteachers' warnings that supply costs are soaring as more and more staff are sent home to self-isolate, with some schools



reaching a closure "tipping point".

The fund is to cover teacher absences and can be used to pay supply teachers or for additional hours for teachers working part-time who want to increase their hours.

Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, said keeping schools open was a "national priority".

Teacher Tapp data shows the proportion of teachers not in school has more than doubled across England since half-term.

Devastated teachers running axed diversity schemes lament 'backward step'

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

Devastated teachers who run equality and diversity schemes say the government's withdrawal of funding is "a backwards step".

But the Department for Education says it will continue to develop programmes that support teachers from diverse backgrounds.

Since 2014, the DfE's equality and diversity fund has supported schools to help teachers of protected characteristics progress into leadership.

Under the Equality Act 2010, these protected characteristics are; age, disability, gender, reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Eight regional hub lead schools allocate funding to school-led projects throughout their areas – with the DfE investing £2 million between 2018 and 2020.

The pandemic delayed funding for the next round of projects until December, but last week regional hubs were told funding would be scrapped completely.

Isobel George, of Backwell School in Bristol, said the south-west regional hub that she lead had overseen 21 projects since 2018, with more than 350 teachers taking part.

The projects varied in focus, with the BAME, maternity and women in leadership schemes proving particularly successful.

"We had people saying it was the first time in their career they were told they had the potential to be a headteacher," George said.

Participants undertook continuing professional development (CPD) to boost leadership skills, shadowed senior leaders and were visited by guest speakers.

They also received support in writing job applications, with mock senior leadership interviews and feedback.

"There's a huge amount of passion and



Arv Kaushal

'It was the first time they'd been told they had the potential to be a head'

commitment out there for the diversity and equality agenda, but you need funding and support to make it sustainable."

Analysis of the 2017-18 programmes found 30 per cent of teachers who took part gained a promotion by the end of the programme.

But George said the figure was likely to be much higher in subsequent years as teachers from under-represented backgrounds used their new skills to progress into leadership.

The funding cut also follows the recommendation of the Timpson Review into school exclusions that the DfE extend the scheme.

Janet Sheriff, the hub lead for Lancashire and West Yorkshire, said she was "shocked and devastated" about the cut and believed the move was "a backwards step in the education profession".

The programmes helped to support participants' "confidence and self-belief". The funding had allowed staff to access these projects in a time of tightening school budgets.

"I'm really concerned that the gains we have been making, particularly in terms of raising the profile of importance of diversity in leadership, will be lost and will be lost quickly."

In 2018, the DfE released a statement of intent on the diversity of the teaching workforce in which it highlighted women and ethnic minority teachers were under-represented at senior levels, pledging it wanted to see "a teaching profession that prides itself on promoting a diverse workforce".

According to the government's 2018 school teacher workforce census, 92.9 per cent of headteachers and 85.1 per cent of classroom teachers in England were white British. Women made up 75 per cent of the teacher workforce, but only 67 per cent of heads were women.

Arv Kaushal, a teacher at Challney High School for Girls in Luton and the programme lead for the BAME into Leadership programme in north-west London and south central England, said: "We understand there are budgetary constraints and everybody's having to tighten up... it gives a very clear message about where the priorities lie.

"Our thoughts have always been this shouldn't be a luxury item – why is it considered a luxury that some of those people are never going to reach those places of leadership?"

A DfE spokesperson said: "We keep our programmes under continuous review to ensure they best address the needs of schools and teachers, and are continuing to develop programmes that will support teachers from diverse backgrounds."

ITT review slammed as a threat to sector stability

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Teacher trainers have branded the reboot of a government review that will look at slimming down the number of providers as potentially “the most destabilising thing that has happened to the sector for years”.

Schools Week revealed on Monday that the review, originally pledged in the teacher recruitment and retention strategy almost two years ago, is back on the table, with details and a new expert group expected to be announced soon.

The review is meant to tackle duplication and the “overly complex” nature of the sector, which is made up of more than 1,000 different organisations.

But James Noble-Rogers, chief executive of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, warned the review “could be the most destabilising thing that has happened to the sector for years... Anything that threatens the stability and autonomy of a sector that is already under significant pressure could lead to many, possibly most, ITE providers (along with their partner schools) voluntarily withdrawing. That would be a disaster that we can ill afford.”

The DfE’s new ITT core content framework, released last November, set out a minimum entitlement for trainee teachers and placed a duty



on providers and their partner schools to meet this entitlement.

It is understood the government could use this duty to clamp down on providers that don’t meet the requirements.

Schools Week understands the government is concerned that “too much of ITT is low quality and not rigorously tied to the evidence”.

“The government has shown through the early career framework and the national professional qualifications how seriously they take evidence-based training. ITT is next,” a source said.

But Emma Hollis, executive director of the National Association of School Based Teacher Trainers, took “immediate issue” with the concern about quality.

“By every objective measure, the ITT sector is performing

exceptionally well. Ofsted inspections have 99 per cent of providers rated good or better. If the DfE does not trust Ofsted’s judgment in ITE, we would argue that this fundamentally undermines the validity of their own inspectorate across all remits.”

The review is expected to make use of some of the £22 million allocated in the spending review to raise teacher quality.

It was announced last Wednesday that this new pot of cash would be also used to help schools give experienced teachers time away from the classroom to mentor new starters.

It is not yet known what the review’s terms of reference will be, or who will lead it.

However, Professor Sam Twiselton, who led the DfE’s review of ITT content last year, confirmed she had been approached to be involved.

“The department are considering how to get expert input into the review and have approached me to ask if I will be involved,” she told Schools Week, adding the review was still at the “early planning stage”.

But Hollis questioned the timing of the review, which she said had the “potential to undermine recruitment to the profession at an extremely sensitive moment in time”.

“The ITT core content framework has only just been rolled out, as have the expectations under the new ITE inspection framework. Providers need time to embed and consolidate this before any further changes are thrust upon them. We await next steps in discussion with the DfE.”

DfE did not respond to a request for comment.



Emma Hollis

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Edu research charity shuts as funds dry up

A research charity is to close after finding it “impossible” to secure further funding during the pandemic.

In a post on its website, the Institute for Effective Education states its staff are being made redundant and current activities are either being taken on by other organisations, or discontinued. It was due to close today (Friday).

The charity, which lists former education secretary Estelle Morris as a trustee, was set up to “produce and translate research into education into effective action to benefit all young people”.

The latest phase of its work – the Research Schools Network – was a four-year project planned to end in September this year, according to IEE director Jon Haslam.

But he added: “It was a challenge to find further funding even before the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic has made the task impossible, and we have therefore taken the decision to close. We are proud of the part we have played over the last 12 years in the support and encouragement of evidence-based education.”

The Research Schools Network will now be

fully run by the EEF, which confirmed the IEE’s closure would have no impact on the scheme. EEF has been the sole funder of the project since January and will do so until at least August 2023.

A final report by IEE on its work, including its activities with the Research Schools Network, is expected to be published next spring.

Haslam added: “We would like to thank everyone who has worked with us. We leave the stage confident there are organisations and individuals who will continue to take the movement forward.”

News

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Recruitment targets finally hit (but still subject woes)

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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The government has met its secondary school teacher recruitment target for the first time in eight years, following a pandemic-induced surge in applications.

The number starting initial teacher training courses in England rose by 23 per cent to 41,471 this year, new government figures show.

It means the teacher supply model (TSM) target, which sets out the number of teachers needed to enter the system each year, has been reached at secondary level for the first time since 2012-13.

However, recruitment in some long-standing shortage subjects – including physics and maths – remain below target.

Jack Worth, the school workforce lead at the National Foundation for Educational Research, also warned that the boost would only last “as long as there is turbulence and uncertainty in the wider labour market unless we follow through on making teaching an attractive profession over the long term, on both pay and working conditions”.

The rise in applications has been driven by the Covid-19 pandemic, with more



people out of work and others more likely to be attracted by the job security offered by teaching.

As usual, most new ITT entrants (35,467) were graduates starting postgraduate courses, while 6,005 were entrants to undergraduate courses. Both groups increased by 23 per cent.

The recruitment target in secondary supply was exceeded at 106 per cent, while at primary 130 per cent of the original target was achieved. The TSM target was also exceeded for EBacc subjects (105 per cent).

At individual subject level, targets were smashed by even larger degrees, for instance 256 per cent in classics and 189 per cent in biology.

Other subjects include history (175 per cent), PE (135 per cent), art and design (132 per cent), drama (131 per cent) and geography

(130 per cent).

Applications in all of the shortage subjects, bar physics, rose at least 10 percentage points. Physics is at 45 per cent of what it needs to be, modern foreign languages at 72 per cent, design and technology at 75 per cent and maths at 84 per cent.

The figures come after the government announced it was either reducing or ending various incentives to boost recruitment for the next academic year, following this year's increase in supply.

The proportion of new entrants taking up a university place has increased this year, up 3 per cent to 47 per cent.

At the same time, the proportion of entrants on a school direct salaried route fell from 9 to 6 per cent, while Teach First's market share also dropped from 6 to 5 per cent. The proportion of entrants in school-centred ITT and on a school direct fee route stayed the same.

Kevin Courtney, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said that recruitment was “nothing without retention. The government needs to have a long-term plan for retaining teachers, so that they will still be working in schools in five years' time.”

The Department for Education has been approached for comment.

TOTAL NEW ENTRANTS TO ITT

41,471

(up from 23% from 2019-20)

% OF EBACC TEACHER TARGET MET

105%

(up from 87% in 2019-20)

% OF TEACHER SUPPLY TARGET MET

SECONDARY:

106%

(up from 87% in 2019-20)

PRIMARY:

130%

(up from 94% in 2019-20)

SHORTAGE SUBJECTS STILL FALL SHORT OF TARGET

2020-21 (2019-20)

Physics: 45% (43%)

MFL: 72% (62%)

D&T: 75% (41%)

Chemistry: 80% (70%)

Maths: 84% (64%)

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EDITORIAL

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Exam proposals are sensible, but are they enough to fend off another fiasco?

Although later than promised (no surprise), we finally have clarity on what accountability and exams will look like this year.

First, the good bits. It's right exams go ahead. As it stands, there aren't better options out there that don't create their own problems.

There are some sensible solutions: advance notice of topics and allowing formula sheets will help exams seem less daunting. But we'll have to wait until the new year for future details.

The proposal to allow the same grade inflation as pupils were given this summer, on the face of it, also seems fair. It just might be that pupils this year have actually missed just as much, if not more, teaching than the cohort of 2020.

But there are some big implications: does this mean grade inflation is now "baked in"? If so, what does this mean for the validity of qualifications in the future? It's clearly something Ofqual will be mulling over.

And giving pupils a higher grade won't solve their learning gaps - it just means they might struggle more in whatever they choose to do next.

The contingency plans also seem sound. But, will

they be able to hold up if restrictions are eased and we lurch back into another spell of spiralling infection rates?

The government will be hoping the roll-out of vaccines, alongside rapid testing plans, will ensure this isn't the case.

Perhaps the biggest problem is ministers kicking the can down the road on providing fairness for pupils in the hardest-hit regions who have spent weeks out of school.

It's a sensible plan to set up an expert group to evaluate the best proposals - but couldn't this have been done months ago?

More importantly, is this even a problem that can be adequately solved? The proposal of regional grading has rightly been canned, and proposals to add an asterisk to grade certificates or lower university entry may be too little.

Either way, it was good to see some honesty from Ofqual interim chief regulator Dame Glenys Stacey who all but said there are not good answers.

A bitter truth now is better for schools than being strung along with the false promise of a solution on the horizon.

SCHOOLS WEEK

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Story on page 7

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Ampleforth College ordered to stop admitting new pupils over safeguarding failures

... **Richard Duree**

I have one daughter who went through both St Martin's Ampleforth Preparatory School and Ampleforth College and I have two sons still at the College. The pastoral care is literally the best available at any school bar none. The school is in the top 10 per cent for value added to the pupils' education and in the top ten influential schools in the country. The allegations against the school are all historical, often decades old and usually associated with the Abbey, which is now wholly separate from the school.

The school passed the Independent Schools Inspectorate inspection last year against the most stringent criteria imaginable. Ofsted then dropped an emergency inspection on the school in September for reasons unknown. The Ofsted inspection resulted in a formal complaint from the school against the regulator. While that complaint was under investigation the regulator by its own rules should not have published its report, which is riddled with factual errors and demonstrates a complete lack of understanding about the school. The report and the situation are nothing short of a disgrace.

It is suspicious that within an hour of the report being published late Friday afternoon the media was already publishing stories about it. I'll let you draw your own conclusions.

Meanwhile I can assure you that the school is unequivocally supported by the vast majority of the pupils and their parents and it will win its appeal against Ofsted.

If I had my name on the report I'd be more than a little concerned that it says more about me than the school.

Explained: the new Covid contingency framework

Mark Drury

So all those hours I spent planning an alternative Tier 2 timetable for the whole school were wasted...

Christmas chaos as schools allowed to extend holidays

Elaine Latter

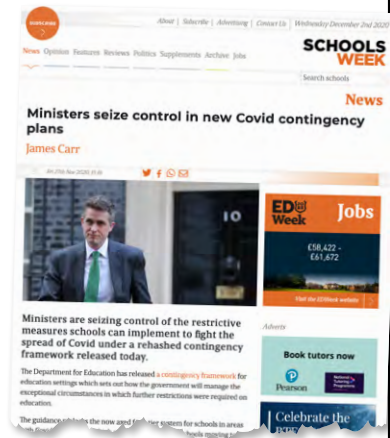
Should have been allowed to shut on the 9th [of December] to allow a full 14-day quarantine before Christmas to allow elderly

REPLY OF THE WEEK

John Stephens, @john_stephens67

Ministers seize control in new Covid contingency plans

Yes, heaven forbid that the people closest to the issue with the greatest expert knowledge might make a decision without the explicit agreement of the DfE... who no doubt have a couple of spreadsheets that tell them everything.



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

grandparents to safely see their grandchildren! But that's common sense it was never going to happen.

Neil Payne, @neilpayne

The market model was never truly going to work in trusts of schools. It is surprising that any academy trust would feel they could do their own thing with something such as term dates during a national emergency. This is a real mark of the arrogance of the current system.

The government's treatment of teachers is shameless

Rachael Cave, Facebook

It's a nightmare and for parents and kids, we've all had enough now. Stay safe, and do our best is all we can do. 🙄 The PM should go and have a look in the schools now - think he would have shock!!

The government's culture war is chilling for curriculum rigour

Dom Hughes, @DomHDomH

Ironically, and counter to pompous Tory fears, teaching a warts-and-all accurate history curriculum that holds a mirror up to Britain's past (and therefore present), would make me prouder to be British.

Manifesto promise of £30k start salaries by 2022 ditched

Sarah Tweddell, @MrsTweddell

It's not starting salaries that need to change... it's keeping experienced staff, who aren't felt valued or who are too 'expensive' for schools. Someone put an MP who has actually got some common sense in charge of education, please!

BTEC AWARDS 2021

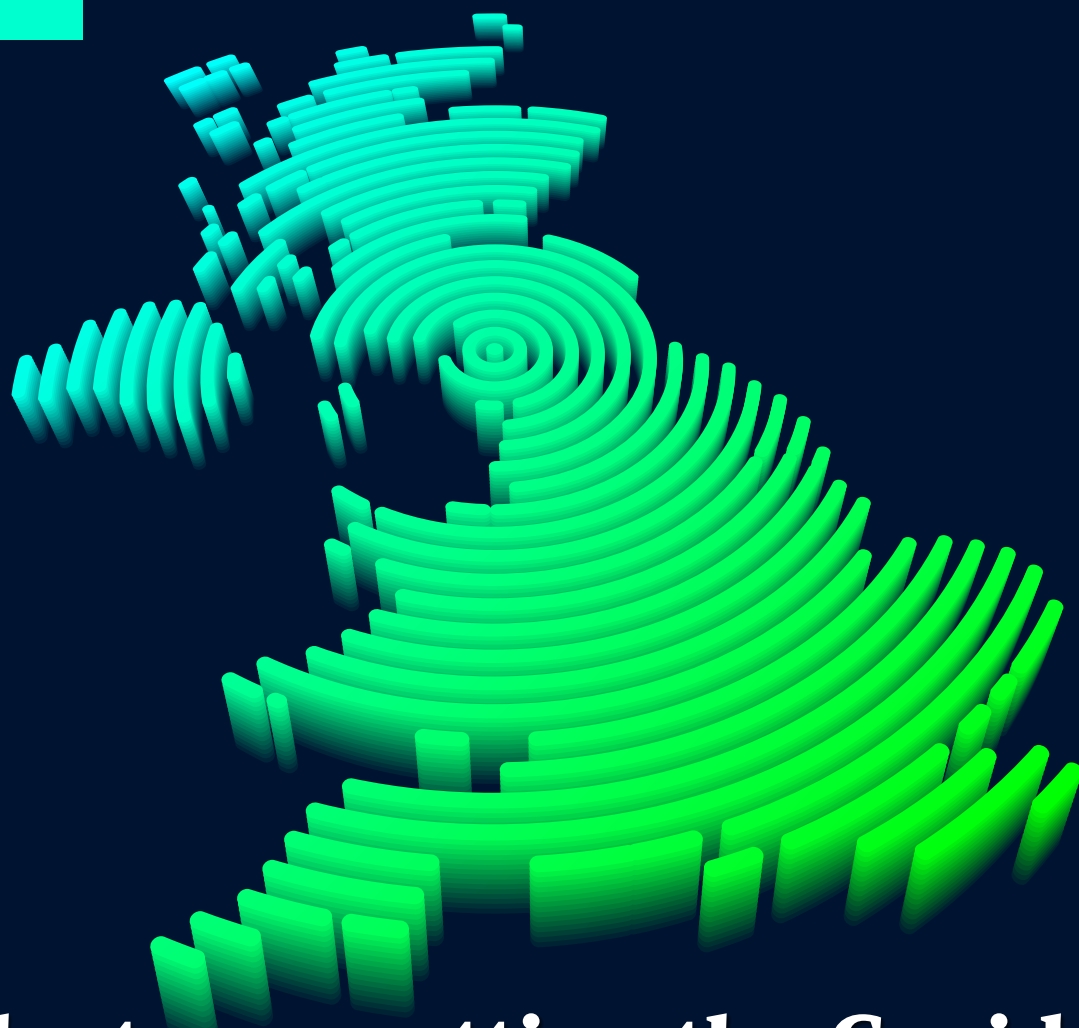
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Feature

JL DUTAUT | @DUTAUT



REACT: The team putting the Covid response on a proactive footing

Central to the DfE's pandemic strategy, very little is known about the Regional Education and Children's Teams. JL Dutaut finds an evolving initiative with promise for the future.

In an emergency, there is always pressure to react, react, react," warns Ofsted's national director of social care, Yvette Stanley.

Somewhat ironically, Stanley is a key member of the national REACT team (Regional Education and Children's Team), a central plank of the DfE's strategy for responding to the pandemic.

But you'd be forgiven for not knowing much about them. Despite the apparent key role, the REACT teams don't have their own page on the DfE website. A Google search

doesn't bring up much information, either.

So, *Schools Week* set out to find out exactly what are they, what do they do and who is involved.

What do we know?

The earliest reference to REACT in the public domain is a letter dated April 14 – just three weeks into the first lockdown – addressed to education committee chair, Robert Halfon, from schools minister Nick Gibb. In a brief part of a lengthy letter setting out the DfE's

actions to protect the most vulnerable children in response to the pandemic, Gibb explains that REACT's remit is "to co-ordinate our engagement with local authorities across education and children's services".

Fast forward to late September, and REACT teams were briefly in the news. Children's minister Vicky Ford offered an assurance that they would be gathering information "in real time" to identify and deal with any spike in exclusions as schools reopened.

Other than that, little more has been said.

Feature: REACT

But REACT's absence from the headlines isn't necessarily a fault.

The DfE was quick and, unusually, very willing to hook *Schools Week* up with the key players when we asked (including an hour in a virtual room with not only the national schools commissioner Dominic Herrington, but three of his regional commissioners). Ofsted was also equally open about its part. So, the work doesn't seem secretive, or at least not deliberately so.

Gibb's April letter described REACT's constitution as follows: "The REACT teams are led by the Regional Schools Commissioners and include Ofsted's Regional Directors and policy teams from across DfE covering children's social care, early years, special educational needs and disabilities, further education and regional delivery."

Gibb even went as far as determining how they would operate – holding bi-weekly meetings – and to what end: "to pool intelligence and collectively assess risks across LA areas, identify common themes or live issues to feed back to policy teams, and provide additional support and guidance to LAs."

In the main that has remained true, but Ofsted's involvement in the regional teams ended in summer after they started to inspect local authorities again (to avoid any conflicts). The watchdog's national directorate remains involved with the national team, but since Ofsted's regional directors were the only other permanent fixtures of the REACT framework that were at least arm's length from government, in effect what REACT amounts to now is a redefinition of school commissioners' roles and a redeployment of

"The work doesn't seem secretive, or at least not deliberately so"

theirs and DfE resources.

The key difference, Herrington says, is how the teams "bring together colleagues from different bits of the department so that when we are talking to an area, we have a joined-up view".

There are nine regional REACT teams that map directly on to the eight areas RSCs normally operate in. The only difference is that the breadth and diversity of Lancashire and West Yorkshire means Vicky Beer's region is split into two REACT teams. On each of these teams sit the RSC, as chair, members of their teams as appropriate, and regional DfE colleagues from children's social care and SEND, early years, further education and the academies and maintained schools directorate.

A troubleshooter for the most vulnerable children

Despite their name, these teams are designed to do more than react. As Stanley says, "Having colleagues with breadth and depth of experience has enabled us to refine our thinking and anticipate things a bit more."

Seen in this light, the policy shows commendable foresight from a DfE that has often, from the start of the pandemic,

appeared rather beleaguered and on the back foot.

According to all those I've spoken to, bringing that breadth of expertise to bear has been fundamental. Consider REACT's regional role as that of a troubleshooter for the most vulnerable children.

For Beer, a perfect example was the transport situation for vulnerable and key worker children during the initial lockdown. "You wouldn't believe the conversations we were involved in with Liverpool and the Department for Transport on bus routes and making sure schools were able to get the people to and fro." In fact, unlike exams, laptops or free meal vouchers, no transport fiasco made the national headlines this year.

I ask Herrington about the exclusions monitoring cited by Ford, excited to know what they've found out. But he delivers a classic civil servant's answer: "We have just done that but I don't want to prejudge the analysis." So some sort of analysis may be forthcoming, but whether it comes from REACT or whether they remain in the background is anyone's guess.

Another REACT key strength highlighted by all is the regional policy response it has enabled. And beyond that, REACT has also facilitated support from one region to another without the mediation of national-level intervention. Beer adds: "What we're able to do now is work with our colleagues to reflect some of that learning [from the first wave]. We do it individually, across and within departments and between those different teams. But we've also been able to facilitate local authorities to do that too and that's a real benefit of this approach."

And the flexibility seems to have even

Yvette Stanley



Dominic Herrington



Kate Dethridge



Feature: REACT

applied to REACT itself. Cook said: "REACT evolved – at first, we were responding to the impact of the pandemic but increasingly our work became proactive".

Teams adapted to losing Ofsted inspectors and, as Beer states, were "able to tilt our way of working. We definitely pivoted, working very closely with local authorities".

'We've reset some of those relationships'

Everyone seems to agree on one more point, put most succinctly by Ofsted regional director for the East Midlands, Katrina Gueli: "On a very basic level, it got everyone around the table and reduced the need for multiple conversations".

In a school system so often characterised as fractured, it seems particularly noteworthy that REACT has built bridges that everyone involved believes should become permanent. Beer is emphatic when she tells me that "one of the real legacies from this is that it has reset some of those relationships. Genuinely, we are seeing collaboration across local authorities. There are no barriers. We all want exactly the same outcome here."

Dame Kate Dethridge, RSC for north-west London and south-central England, agrees: "One of the strongest things that has come through for me is around the power of collaboration".

And Hannah Woodhouse, RSC for the south-west, where until now the pandemic's effects have remained comparatively low, has used the time and resources to build that collaboration even further to support vulnerable schools. Just this month, an initiative developed through her REACT team has launched nationally that aims to pair struggling schools with others who have the capacity to support them. "There isn't a paperwork process or a matching process, or

Hannah Woodhouse



"It got everyone around the table and reduced the need for multiple conversations"

'you have to go with this NLE or that CEO'. It's just whoever's best placed locally to support you in experience terms and geography terms. They can be maintained or academies, it doesn't matter."

REACT may have created the space for a legacy of collaboration that will outlast Covid. It may not be the legacy DfE envisaged at the outset, but it would certainly have broad support.

But what about potential conflicts?

RSCs seem to have carved out a crucial role for themselves in the policy development and delivery during Covid. But their initial roles have not gone away altogether. So do these new duties create their own conflict of interest?

On the day of my meeting with the commissioners, *Schools Week* reported

Vicky Beer



that Beer had told Focus Trust to rescind its decision to close its 15 schools a week early before Christmas to allow families to isolate and enable them to socialise safely at Christmas. The warning was delivered in a meaty letter that threatened future action should the trust not comply with her demands.

I put the matter to Beer, but it was Herrington who dismissed it: "Those issues are always fed up. We were in quite a lot of dialogue about that, and we're in conversations with policy colleagues about it as well."

This may be REACT's key weakness. There is a blurriness about the policy. If Ofsted's contribution is compromised by its resumption of activities, why isn't the commissioner's office? Where does the RSC stop and the REACT member begin? Where's the line between feeding up intelligence and feeding down policy?

REACT may have proven beyond doubt that a regional layer of bureaucracy between local authorities and national policy makers is necessary to effectively manage our school system. But for the collaboration it has facilitated, supported and unleashed to truly be a legacy of the times, the role of RSCs may need further redefining.

In the meantime, schools struggling alone to meet the pandemic's challenges now know where to turn.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

A raft of new data from multiple agencies points to a rising tide of families in need, with no other place to turn but their schools, writes Whitney Crenna-Jennings

When Covid-19 shuttered schools and workplaces earlier this year, our thoughts quickly jumped to the children likely to be most affected: those from disadvantaged homes, already 1.5 years behind their peers in school by year 11, those requiring help from local services, and those heavily reliant on the stability provided by schools and teachers.

Just how prepared would we be to support the children whose lives would be deeply disrupted throughout this period?

Before this year's events, one of the sectors most relied upon by the vulnerable – children's social care – was under significant pressure. Local authority spending power had fallen considerably since 2010, particularly in disadvantaged areas, leading early family support services to be cut.

This system is a lifeline for some of the country's most vulnerable children – those who experience highly traumatic or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): neglect, abuse, domestic violence and parental mental illness. A large body of evidence shows the significant impact of ACEs on lifelong health and wellbeing.

Of course, it doesn't have to be this way. The right interventions can break the link between childhood trauma and difficulties in adulthood. But at the moment, there is often no guarantee that the right support services are there for children.

New government data covering the period just before the pandemic on "children in need" – those identified as reliant on local services for their health or development – follows concerning



WHITNEY CRENNNA-JENNINGS

Senior researcher (mental health, wellbeing and inclusion), Education Policy Institute

All signs point to even greater pressure on schools post-Covid

trends seen in the past few years. It shows that the proportion of children over age 16 often with complex needs, making them vulnerable to criminal exploitation, continues to rise, while domestic violence and parental mental ill-health remain the most common causes for social services' involvement.

per cent.

All this was before the pandemic even struck. But new NHS data covering summer 2020 shows that further to this, rates of probable mental illness in children have risen to one in six, from one in nine in 2017. This is linked to financial stress: children with disorders were

“There is a clear imperative to invest in these services now

The signs are far from promising elsewhere. Since 2019, the number of episodes of social service involvement related to gangs has increased by one-third, while drug misuse by children, trafficking and child mental health episodes have all increased by over 20

almost three times as likely to live in a household that had fallen behind on payments.

Other indicators are also flashing red. The NSPCC has reported a record increase in calls to their domestic abuse helpline – an



average of one every hour. Meanwhile the National Crime Agency has reported a ten per cent increase in cases of online grooming stemming from the lockdown.

Taken together, these most recent statistics on the state of vulnerable children in England paint an alarming picture.

Many of these concerns were also reflected in Ofsted's Annual Report this week, which warned that the state of vulnerable pupils during the pandemic was now a "matter of national concern".

The pandemic looks to have amplified many of the forces in society that can drive children into a state of high vulnerability, not least the level of existing inequalities. Many families already lived in highly challenging social and economic circumstances – situations in which child mistreatment is more common. The pandemic has extended and deepened this disadvantage.

We have yet to see how the system will cope with the influx of children needing support in the months to come, but there is growing evidence that many children have been unable to access the help they need during the pandemic.

The government still has the opportunity to ensure social care providers and the local agencies they work with have what is necessary to support families in need. There is a clear imperative to invest in these services now. Failure to do so creates the risk of long-term individual suffering and spiraling societal costs.

In the meantime, with local services either under strain or unable to reach children, there is now a real concern that schools – already overburdened following the disruption to education this year – will simply be left to deal with the after-effects.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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ANNA
MC SHANE

Deputy director of the education
practice at Public First

Now the government must show it can stick to its guns

This week's announcement gives welcome certainty but the true test is whether the department can work out how to deliver on it, writes Anna McShane

The firm reiteration today by the Department for Education that "exams are the best and fairest way for young people to show their potential" is a step change for a department that has been firefighting and backtracking throughout this crisis.

For the most part it has given teachers and pupils up and down the country what they were crying out for – certainty. Certainty that GCSEs will go ahead, certainty about what will be assessed, and – to an extent – certainty on how they will be graded.

I don't envy any of the individuals involved in coming up with this new process. Even more so than last summer, the perils to individuals and the system as a whole of getting it wrong are clear.

In ensuring GCSEs take place, the department has learnt the right lesson from last summer's horror stories of students unable to progress because of an algorithm based on their school's history. Ensuring it is students who

ultimately have the stake in their own future is the right choice.

It is also right to recognise that across all schools students have suffered disruption. Being able to take in sheets of formulas and know topics in advance will give students more confidence that they will not be faced with a paper that covers things they have never

seen or learnt about before, and that they will have a real chance to show what they can do.

The decision to award grades broadly as generously as last year also makes sense, and perhaps also finally shows the department's growing understanding its own vulnerabilities. It would be ridiculous to pretend awarding grades based on 2019 outcomes could be fair. Equally, it buys them and Ofqual some time to see how the rest of the pandemic plays out, to understand the disruption across all year groups and potentially to radically rethink the assessment landscape. Rushing through a new grading system now would certainly not play to their strengths.



But if I were a teacher hearing today's news, I know my response would be entirely dependent on my context and how the virus had played out in my school. For some this term, the impact has been relatively minimal – a few students here and there isolating and

will get back to normal. But the answer can't be to adjust grading regionally, and the department has rightly ruled that out, adhering to its new dogma that the individualism of the student outweighs the history of the school or region. In truth, regional grading would do nothing to account for huge differences between schools within regions or indeed individuals within schools.

The expert advisory group the DfE have set up to look at this will have a mammoth task unpicking not just the regional discrepancies but the really gritty differences in the amount of learning that has been lost in schools. Meanwhile, they will also have to guard against underestimating the huge technical challenge of awarding grades based on 2020 outcomes, and ensure once again that their solutions don't unfairly disadvantage schools and students who have been worst affected.

But whatever the challenges, let's be clear – Gavin Williamson has offered us certainty like this before. If this education secretary wants to retain any ounce of trust from the sector, today's assurances must be kept.

“I don't envy the individuals involved in coming up with this new process

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Regulations are about to be introduced that represent a substantial change to schools' employment practices, write Jenny Arrowsmith and Joanne Moseley

The Restriction of Public Sector Exit Payment Regulations 2020 are now in force. These impose a £95,000 cap on the amount public sector bodies can pay to an employee when their employment comes to an end.

The organisations that have to comply with the cap are set out in a schedule that separates England, Wales and Scotland. The list is laid out in alphabetical order and covers virtually all publicly funded schools. In England and Wales this includes academies (including non-maintained special schools), community and special schools, pupil referral units, maintained nursery schools, voluntary controlled schools and foundation schools (including foundation special schools).

The regulations set out a number of payments that count towards the £95,000 exit payment cap. These include redundancy payments, severance payments, payment in lieu of notice (but see below for further information on PILONs), settlement agreements and, controversially, "pension strain" payments (i.e. additional employer pension contributions to enable an individual to take early retirement on an unreduced pension). The total of all exit payments cannot exceed £95,000.

The inclusion of pension strain contributions potentially causes a huge problem for employers because it's not unusual for these to be in

JENNY
ARROWSMITH

Senior associates,
employment team,
Irwin Mitchell



JOANNE
MOSELEY



New cap on exit payments could lead to legal disputes

excess of £100,000 (even for middle-ranking staff) before you even add in any of the other payments they may receive on termination. Many pension schemes haven't yet been amended to cap payments at a level that allows them to comply with the

pension (including additional pension purchased with their own money) aren't included in the cap.

Payments for death in service, payments for accidents or injuries and payments pursuant to a court order are also excluded. In addition,

“The inclusion of pension strain is potentially a huge problem

£95,000 limit. For example, the Local Government Pension scheme rules (which apply to many schools) haven't been changed to accommodate the cap and won't be this side of Christmas. That leaves employers (and the pension scheme providers) in a real dilemma because the regulations prohibit the relevant authority from making the payment, but they do not alter the employee's entitlement to those payments. This is likely to lead to legal disputes.

The cap only applies where there is an extra cost to the public sector employer. Payments, or elements within payments, that result from an employee's accrued right to a

any part of a payment in lieu of notice which represents up to a quarter of an employee's salary is exempt from the cap.

Employers don't have to notify anyone before making a public sector exit payment. However, any employee who has received, or is due to receive, an exit payment, has to write to "all relevant authorities" that employ them, setting out details of the amount of their exit payment, how it is made up, the date they left their employment and who is responsible for payment. These rules mean that someone who has left one job but still has another in the public sector cannot receive more money than they



are entitled to if they leave any other public sector job within 28 days of receiving the exit payment.

The guidance states that employers must keep a record of exit payments made to an employee or office holder and may keep records where they have exercised the cap.

Schools that breach these rules may be penalised. New guidance expressly states that "the relevant authority is responsible for ensuring any exit payment it makes does not exceed the public sector exit payment cap. Any payment that exceeds the cap and is not compliant with the regulations or directions is considered a payment beyond the organisation's legal competence, which may result in sanctions on the organisation".

All in all, these new regulations represent a substantial change to schools' employment practices with potentially damaging consequences. To avoid legal complications, affected schools should get up to speed with them immediately. Further information is available in guidance and a new Treasury Direction.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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African and Caribbean history and culture are woven across all subjects at one Birmingham primary. Nigel Oram and Philip Hynan explain why

In October 1963, Oxford history professor, Hugh Trevor-Roper delivered several lectures – broadcast on BBC radio – that concluded with these words: “Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But, at present there is none; there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness.”

Thankfully, such ideas are (for the most part) obsolete. Our national curriculum, however, still contains vestiges of that rhetoric when it comes to the study of African history and its people in the diaspora. And there is no excuse for it. It was only eight years after these lectures, nearly 50 years ago, that Bernard Coard published *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British School System*.

Addressed directly to black parents, Coard’s pamphlet explored the reasons for the abysmal failure of their children in our schools. Among these, it listed the racist policies and practices of education authorities, the racism of the curriculum; the low self-esteem the vast majority of black children experienced; and low teacher expectations of black pupils.

Two decades later the murder of Stephen Lawrence led to the Macpherson Inquiry. It concluded that the murder investigation had been “marred by institutional racism” that extended beyond the police. It read: “It is incumbent upon every institution to examine their policies and the outcome of their policies and practices to guard

NIGEL
ORAM

Headteacher and deputy headteacher of Harper Bell SDA primary school, Birmingham



PHILIP
HYNAN

Our diverse curriculum is a source of pride for all our students

against disadvantaging any section of our communities.” Among its 70 recommendations several related to education, including amendment

reflective and knowledge-rich curriculum.

It will continue to evolve, but it is built on three clearly defined

“The failure to heed warnings is as shocking as it is obvious

of the national curriculum and holding local authorities and governors accountable for creating and implementing strategies in their schools to prevent and address racism.

Yet today in Birmingham, the impact of the failure to heed warnings is as shocking as it is obvious. At the end of the early years foundation stage, Birmingham’s black Caribbean children rank third in attaining a good level of development. By the end of key stage two, the same pupils rank 20th for attaining age-related expectation in reading, writing and maths. By the age of 16, they are 21st out of 22 for attainment 8 average, Ebacc average and a strong pass in English and maths.

That’s why we’ve taken our school on a journey to develop a truly

ethical pillars: our Christian values, our high aspirations for pupils, and our commitment to represent the cultural heritage of our families, the majority of whom are of African or African-Caribbean heritage.

Everything in it is intentional. The influence of African and Caribbean history and culture is woven across all subjects. We took a systematic approach to studying the continent’s history before the arrival of Europeans, and our pupil knowledge journals now include the often-hidden civilisations of Great Zimbabwe,

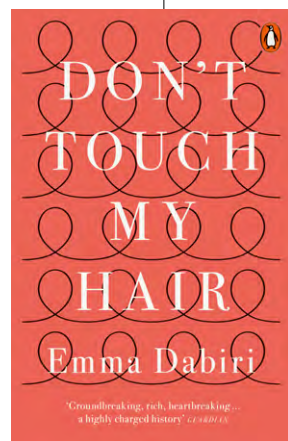
Carthage, Kush, ancient Mali and others.

In stark contrast to the recent *Reflecting Realities* report – which stated that just five per cent of children’s books have BAME protagonists, despite 33.5 per cent of primary school-aged children being BAME themselves – we ensure our children see themselves in the books they read.

And these books, like *Don’t Touch My Hair* by Sharee Miller, ensure the curriculum reaches beyond core and foundation subjects to issues routinely faced by black school children. A quick Google Image search of “unprofessional hairstyles” is sufficient to exemplify the problem. Across the country black and mixed-black pupils are being excluded because their hair is too short, too long, too big or too full. Here, we promote healthy hair relationships.

And given the chance to beam with pride about their own illustrious heritage, our pupils continue to proudly define themselves as British. There is no either/or. So while changes to the national curriculum’s content may not have been forthcoming, other changes mean schools have all the scope they need for creative adaptation.

But to truly make Trevor-Roper a relic of the past requires all schools take up that responsibility – not just those where the majority of students are from BAME backgrounds. It is the future. And there is African history to teach.



Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



Motivated Teaching

Author: Peps Mccrea

Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

Reviewer: Sarah Barker, teacher of English, Orchard School, Bristol

In 1953, Roald Dahl published *Lamb to the Slaughter*. It tells the tale of Mary Maloney, who kills her disloyal husband with a frozen leg of lamb, shoves it in the oven and calls the police. Believing the crime to have been committed by an intruder, the police search the premises for hours looking for a “blunt instrument”. Jack Noonan, the lead detective, declares, “It’s the old story. Get the weapon, and you’ve got the man.” He and his officers then tuck into roast lamb, generously provided by Mary Maloney, who giggles in the other room.

Aside from Dahl’s exercise in perfect irony, we can all identify with Noonan; we know exactly what we need to do to solve a problem, but getting hold of it is quite another matter. For teachers and school leaders alike, motivation is a similarly elusive weapon. In our discussions around raising achievement, we invariably include affective factors; along with motivation, we throw around words like confidence, self-esteem and resilience. Yet there is a disconnect between our understanding of these factors and ways in which we broach them with our students. We recognise motivation’s centrality to our core purpose but we don’t all truly understand how to go about it.

Peps Mccrea’s *Motivated Teaching* makes this slippery concept into one we can tackle. It is pithy — the whole book is contained in under 125 pages — but this succinct approach is welcome. The book is so well researched that we can read it with a sense of security that Mccrea has done the hard work for us

and converted the findings into real and tangible approaches for our schools and classrooms.

The format of *Motivated Teaching* follows Mccrea’s previous works; after an examination of the urgency of this issue, he identifies five “core drivers” and the book is organised around these: success, routines, norms, belonging and buy-in. Each chapter includes succinct summaries of research findings and summaries of key ideas.

The key idea check-points are crafted in such a way that we are guided through the reading process and the crucial take-aways are handed to us. This isn’t always necessary (Mccrea’s language is so clear and direct that I understood the key ideas without these regular summaries) but the simplicity is phenomenally powerful. Huge ideas and years of research are summarised into neat, compelling maxims.

Crucially, the core drivers and the key ideas are the cornerstones of Mccrea’s motivation for learning framework. It is in this framework that he presents structures I believe could be fundamental to the transformation of students’ outcomes, life chances and wellbeing.

One of the most appealing elements of *Motivated Teaching* is the fact that it is centred on real and possible approaches. Too often, educational

guides offer strategies that would fall apart within seconds of being exposed to a real classroom environment. By contrast, this book is empowering because it calls on us to apply our own subject knowledge and adapt our pedagogy to bring about improved motivation in our students. The guidance is broad enough for us to own, and yet specific enough that we can take it away and make it work.

At times, it can feel as though we’re being given something obvious — for example, Mccrea’s suggestions include an explanation of “precise pitching”, which means that we should “provide learning experiences that are challenging yet achievable for as many pupils as possible”. I’m yet to meet a teacher who wouldn’t include this as a fundamental consideration to the planning process.

It is in reading the whole book, though, that we come to understand that it is the combination of *all* the elements that will bring about positive change in the motivation of our students. I also

have to admit that while I may claim to be applying some of these principles to my practice, the reality is perhaps messier and less consistent than I’d like. Mccrea’s book has refocused and sharpened my understanding of what this could look like, and that is a very warming prospect.

A HIGH IMPACT TEACHING BOOK

MOTIVATED TEACHING

Peps Mccrea

Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is **Melissa Jane**, class teacher, Castle School, Cambridge

@MelJaneSEN

Teaching outdoors and incomplete pictures

@edifiedlistener

We're nearing the end of the most unusual term of my teaching career and here, Austria-based PE teacher Sherri Spelic addresses some of the emotional challenges of the past few months in an evocative and empathetic piece. She describes her process of adapting to one relatively small change, and how she was quick to blame herself when the change didn't work straight away. "[We've] dramatically shifted our approaches to any number of routines and habits – and still, when things go south [...] how many of us are quick to blame ourselves?" It's a soothing read as we approach an end of term that will be as different as the rest of it has been.

When will disabled Black lives matter?

@zahrabei

I think a lot about preparing young people to go out into the world as adults, hoping it will treat them with compassion and fairness. Unfortunately, this is often not the case for disabled people, who still face widespread discrimination. We also know that Black

TOP BLOGS of the week

people and people of colour continue to face systemic racism, as highlighted this summer by Black Lives Matter protests around the world. For Black disabled people, the discrimination multiplies, barriers building upon one another. Zahra Bei's blog post outlines the case of Osime Brown, a young autistic Black man who is under threat of deportation to Jamaica. As Bei explains, Osime was permanently excluded aged 17, and only then given access to diagnosis and support for his autism, which came too late to prevent his exposure to criminal exploitation. As Bei shows, Osime's experience is not unique and "highlights the discrimination inherent in education, health, social care, criminal justice and immigration systems. Multiple injustices are deeply entrenched."

Medical needs in education

@2tubies

Health is on every teacher's mind at the moment, but even before the pandemic, medical needs were an everyday reality for some young people. Helen, who has two sons with medical conditions, writes about the huge variation in practice she has encountered during their education. The

best schools offer "great communication and relationships with parents, principled leadership and an equal value placed on all pupils". The worst left one of her sons "excluded from activities [and] not valued at all."

Helen makes an observation shared by many disabled people since the start of this pandemic: the frustration at the sudden appearance of accessibility measures disabled people have requested for years. As Helen says, "It has been bittersweet to watch the pace of blended learning develop now that it is a requirement for all children." As a former disabled student, I can only agree.

Exploring the journey to further and higher education for refugees and asylum seekers

@Refugee_Support

In 2016, I volunteered in refugee camps in northern France. The people I met, who had fled all kinds of violence and trauma, had many reasons for taking such risks to reach British shores: family, cultural connections, employment prospects. A common reason was education: many told me they felt our education system would welcome them based on their potential, not their passport. This research blog suggests this isn't yet the case.

While the research, drawing on testimony from 500 young refugees and asylum seekers, focuses on barriers faced when trying to access further and higher education, schools play a key role in delivering its recommendations and a key source of best practice in helping young refugees overcome barriers that are financial, legal and practical, such as navigating complex application systems. As one young person said, "My whole journey was about finding the information that wasn't given to me." Just giving refugees permission to enter the country is not enough - we must also give them the knowledge they need to access and to thrive in the education institutions we pride ourselves on. What better places to lead the way on this than our schools?

Research

Ambition Institute's Harry Fletcher-Wood will review a research development each half term. Contact them @Ambition_Inst or @HFletcherWood if you have a topic you'd like him to explore

Is confusion in the classroom really such a bad thing?

Harry Fletcher-Wood, associate dean at Ambition Institute

We rarely set out to confuse our students – but perhaps we should. Recent research suggests that carefully inducing a little confusion can encourage students to think harder about conflicting ideas, helping them learn.

For example, one experiment asked students to study scientific concepts with two virtual characters: a teacher and a peer. Sometimes, these characters disagreed: one introduced incorrect information about the concept, and the learner was invited to give their opinion. These disagreements caused confusion: immediately afterwards, students scored worse on knowledge tests for concepts about which the characters had disagreed. But subsequent tests showed that their confusion had helped: they recalled more, and were able to apply it better.

Confusion seems to be another form of desirable difficulty (something I've discussed previously); it forces students to attend to the details and to process them more carefully. As the authors put it: "Confusion resolution requires the individual to stop, think, engage in careful deliberation, problem solve and revise their existing mental models." Such desirable difficulties, they add, "inspire greater depth of processing during training, more durable memory representations and more successful retrieval".

Another study suggests that if we want to induce confusion, we should focus on student misconceptions. Researchers tested whether it was better to give a clear explanation of a scientific concept, to debate misconceptions (as in the study above) or to describe why those misconceptions were problematic. They found that students learned more when misconceptions were debated, or discussed explicitly, than when they received a straightforward explanation



(which did not discuss misconceptions).

This seems counter-intuitive: debates and more complicated explanations took longer, and added cognitive load by including additional details, words and diagrams. But the costs were worth it: "The addition of incorrect information... was essential for students." One of the researchers built on this work by creating a series of videos that explore misconceptions about science, using them to improve scientific understanding. For example, here's his video about where trees get their mass.

An obvious concern is that inducing confusion may hinder students' learning, raising misconceptions they hadn't thought of. But a third study offers some reassurance. Students listened to a short lecture, then answered a multiple-choice question about it. If most students got it right, the teacher moved on; if most got it wrong, they explained again. But if students were split, they were asked to discuss their answer with peers. The risk is that a student who is vocal, persuasive and wrong could mislead their peers. The researchers asked follow-up questions to check.

What they found is that, provided a good proportion of students have the right answer initially (around half), spending time considering wrong answers does not increase confusion: "After discussion, the number of students who give the correct answer [to that question] increases

substantially" and "the vast majority of students who revise their answers during discussion change from an incorrect answer to the correct answer". Moreover, these discussions meant students learned more, both immediately and subsequently, and listening to them offered the teacher a valuable sense of "what goes on in their minds".

As the authors of the first study noted, "common wisdom holds that confusion should be avoided during learning and rapidly resolved if and when it arises". And yet "confusion can be beneficial to learning if appropriately regulated because it can cause individuals to process the material more deeply in order to resolve their confusion". So while confusion is not a goal, it can be a tool to encourage deeper processing.

This doesn't mean creating *lasting* confusion: students should leave the lesson clear about the right answer. Nor would we expect students to resolve their confusion unsupported. The point is rather that we don't need to avoid confusion entirely: in moderation, it may help students to make sense of ideas, and better recall them.

We might plan to induce a little confusion by introducing possible misconceptions and asking students to evaluate them. And we might use confusion we haven't planned for, boosting students' understanding by keeping them confused, and keeping them thinking.



WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

WEDNESDAY

Heads were incensed earlier this year when Gavin Williamson claimed some schools were out to game the system on centre assessment grades at A-level this year.

"You will have had some schools who would have literally put in every child as either an A or an A* or a B," the education secretary said, once again apparently forgetting he was speaking out loud.

Transparency campaigner Andy Jolley decided to put Gav's claim to the test by asking Ofqual under the freedom of information act to say how many schools had entered CAGs of only Bs or above.

The answer? Just 119, out of 2,858 centres. And of those, 93 had five or fewer entries.

But it gets better. Ofqual also provided FOI King Jolley with a breakdown of the type of schools that provided only top grades.

Only nine of the schools were comprehensive, while 18 were the government's beloved "city academies", and 35 were independent schools.

So once again we find a significant gap between what the education secretary says and the reality of the situation. But who the hell is surprised anymore?

Given the regular ticking off the DfE and various other bodies get for regularly appearing to forget that school support staff exist, you'd think there would have been a memo to all arms of government

to remind them that, in fact, it's not just teachers and leaders upon whom we rely for the education of our children. While it's important support staff get the recognition they deserve, it's absolutely paramount that they are treated equally to teachers on matters as important as vaccinations.

So, we can only imagine the ire that must have been felt when updated advice on priority groups for Covid-19 vaccinations neglected to mention them entirely.

The document from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, published this week, states that "vaccination of those at increased risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 due to their occupation could also be a priority in the next phase".

It continues: "This could include first responders, the military, those involved in the justice system, teachers, transport workers, and public servants essential to the pandemic response."

Now the JCVI would probably argue that school support staff would be included in the "public servants" catch-all, but the absence of a direct mention will no doubt be causing some (probably unnecessary) concern among workers.

THURSDAY

Following the government's big announcement on exams and accountability this week, Williamson spent the morning media rounds apparently trying to make anything other than his big announcement

the story.

And it worked. Gav got a slew of headlines after claiming that Britain was first to approve a coronavirus vaccine for us because our medical regulator is "much better" than the French, Belgians and Americans and "because we're a much better country than every single one of them".

This nationalistic twaddle reminds us of a time when then defence secretary Williamson told Russia to "go away and shut up".

Clearly our Gav's got the act of diplomacy down to a T.

For his next trick, Williamson netted a few more articles after saying that Eton College, the famous private school attended by the prime minister and countless other politicians, should allow girls to attend.

Not only were Williamson's initial comments covered extensively, but reporters even got a second bite of the apple when just four hours later he was slapped down by Boris Johnson's spokesperson, who insisted admissions were a matter for the college and not the government.

If Gav's main job that day was to keep continuing questions over exams and accountability off the front pages, then it does look like – for once – he actually succeeded. Good job *Schools Week* doesn't engage in such fripperies (on the news page at least).





Department
for Education



School Teachers' Review Body Member - Chair

The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) is an independent body which makes recommendations to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education on the pay and conditions of school teachers in England.

The STRB assesses evidence from Government and organisations representing schools and the teaching profession, and visits schools and local authorities to develop its understanding of issues facing teachers. In addition to providing recommendations on annual pay awards for teachers and school leaders, the STRB has been asked to report on a variety of matters in recent years, including moving toward a pay structure with higher starting and early career salaries and relatively flatter pay progression and providing additional guidance to schools through advisory pay points.

Further information on the STRB is available at: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/school-teachers-review-body

The STRB is now seeking to fill a vacancy, and is looking to recruit a chair that demonstrates the following criteria:

- Expertise of providing strong leadership at a senior level, including chairing groups with diverse skills and experience to deliver consensus.
- A detailed knowledge and understanding of pay, remuneration, performance management, labour market and reward issues and a strong understanding of the policy, financial and operational constraints that impact on remuneration decisions, especially in the public sector.
- Expertise in analysing and interpreting detailed information such as statistical and economic data and information on legal, policy and HR matters and to draw appropriate conclusions.
- Able to communicate effectively and command the respect of others quickly, to challenge and engage courteously particularly those of opposing views, facilitating agreement across a wide range of perspectives and attitudes.

Appointment

This position will provide an influential and intellectually stimulating challenge for the right individual, who will contribute to the recruitment, retention and motivation of an effective teacher workforce. As a member of the STRB you will bring your own expertise, alongside a high degree of analytical ability, strong communication skills and, ideally, an appreciation of public sector reward issues.

The time commitment for this position is approximately 30 days per year, for which an attendance allowance of £350 per day is payable, no additional fee is paid for any time spent in preparation or travelling. This is a ministerial appointment and will initially be for up to three years.

The closing date for applications is: 15 January 2021, 12pm

Please visit the public appointments website for full details of this vacancy and information on how to apply, available at: <https://bit.ly/STRBChair>

You may also be interested in:

The STRB are seeking to fill an additional vacancy for a board member. If you are interested in also applying for this role, then further details can be found here: <https://bit.ly/STRBBoardMember>



Department
for Education



School Teachers' Review Body Member – Economist

The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) is an independent body which makes recommendations to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education on the pay and conditions of school teachers in England.

The STRB assesses evidence from Government and organisations representing schools and the teaching profession, and visits schools and local authorities to develop its understanding of issues facing teachers. In addition to providing recommendations on annual pay awards for teachers and school leaders, the STRB has been asked to report on a variety of matters in recent years, including moving toward a pay structure with higher starting and early career salaries and relatively flatter pay progression and providing additional guidance to schools through advisory pay points.

Further information on the STRB is available at: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/school-teachers-review-body

The STRB is now seeking to fill a vacancy, and is looking to recruit an economist that demonstrates the following criteria:

- A strong track record of professional experience requiring specialist expertise in economics at a senior level
- The ability to analyse and interpret a large amount of complex and sensitive information, clearly communicate economic analysis to a non-specialist audience and demonstrate a working knowledge of the impact of any potential decisions on the teacher workforce.
- An understanding of pay, remuneration and reward issues and an appreciation of the policy, financial and operational constraints that impact on remuneration decisions.
- An ability to communicate effectively in collective decision making, assessing/debating conflicting opinions across a wide range of perspectives and attitudes to form a coherent set of recommendations.

It is desirable if candidates also have:

- A detailed knowledge and understanding of labour market economics, and/or the economics of education.

Appointment

This position will provide an influential and intellectually stimulating challenge for the right individual, who will contribute to the recruitment, retention and motivation of an effective teacher workforce. As a member of the STRB you will bring your own expertise, alongside a high degree of analytical ability, strong communication skills and, ideally, an appreciation of public sector reward issues.

The time commitment for this position is approximately 25 days per year, for which an attendance allowance of £300 per day is payable, no additional fee is paid for any time spent in preparation or travelling. This is a ministerial appointment and will initially be for up to three years.

The closing date for applications is: 15 January 2021, 12pm

Please visit the public appointments website for full details of this vacancy and information on how to apply, available at:
<https://bit.ly/STRBEconomist>

You may also be interested in:

The STRB are seeking to fill additional vacancies for a chair and board member. If you are interested in also applying for either of these roles, then further details can be found here:

Chair vacancy – <https://bit.ly/STRBChair>

Board member – <https://bit.ly/STRBBoardMember>



Department
for Education



School Teachers' Review Body - Board Member

The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) is an independent body which makes recommendations to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education on the pay and conditions of school teachers in England.

The STRB assesses evidence from Government and organisations representing schools and the teaching profession, and visits schools and local authorities to develop its understanding of issues facing teachers. In addition to providing recommendations on annual pay awards for teachers and school leaders, the STRB has been asked to report on a variety of matters in recent years, including moving toward a pay structure with higher starting and early career salaries and relatively flatter pay progression and providing additional guidance to schools through advisory pay points.

Further information on the STRB is available at: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/school-teachers-review-body

The STRB is now seeking to fill a vacancy, and is looking to recruit a board member that demonstrates the following criteria:

- A strong track record of providing effective leadership at a senior level.
- A good knowledge and understanding of pay, remuneration, performance management, labour market and reward issues and a strong understanding of the policy, financial and operational constraints that impact on remuneration decisions.
- The ability to analyse and interpret a large amount of complex and sensitive information, providing insight and a working knowledge over the impact of any potential decisions on the workforce.
- An ability to communicate effectively in collective decision making, assessing/debating conflicting opinions across a wide range of perspectives and attitudes to form a coherent set of recommendations.

Appointment

This position will provide an influential and intellectually stimulating challenge for the right individual, who will contribute to the recruitment, retention and motivation of an effective teacher workforce. As a member of the STRB you will bring your own expertise, alongside a high degree of analytical ability, strong communication skills and, ideally, an appreciation of public sector reward issues.

The time commitment for this position is approximately 25 days per year, for which an attendance allowance of £300 per day is payable, no additional fee is paid for any time spent in preparation or travelling. This is a ministerial appointment and will initially be for up to three years.

The closing date for applications is: 15 January 2021, 12pm

Please visit the public appointments website for full details of this vacancy and information on how to apply, available at <https://bit.ly/STRBBoardMember>

You may also be interested in:

The STRB are seeking to fill additional vacancy of chair. If you are interested in also applying for this role, then further details can be found here <https://bit.ly/STRBChair>



Headteacher Bradon Forest School

L25 to L31 (£76,141 to £88,187)



The Athelstan Trust wishes to appoint an excellent teacher and school leader to the post of Headteacher at Bradon Forest School from September 2021.

Our Multi-Academy Trust, formed in 2015, consists of four (soon to be five) secondary schools (Malmesbury School, Bradon Forest School, Sir William Romney's School and The Dean Academy) in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire.

Bradon Forest is a successful, popular 11-16 school with approximately 1,000 students in the rural village of Purton, surrounded by stunning countryside and easy access to the M4. There is shared sixth form provision with Malmesbury School. An inspection in 2016 judged the school Good in all areas. The Trust's schools share a deep commitment to delivering an excellent comprehensive education.

At Bradon Forest, we continue to develop our attractive site following the construction of our new state of the art sports hall in 2016 and new food and textiles block in 2018. Our mix of modern and traditional learning environments gives a unique, individual feel that is welcomed by students and parents. We provide a friendly, caring, creative and purposeful environment. Students are encouraged to take every opportunity both academically and in extra-curricular activities. We strive to develop confident young adults who show respect and resilience and have high aspirations.

This post offers a talented and ambitious school leader an opportunity to work in a supportive Trust committed to working together to raise standards and high-quality Professional Development for staff.

Closing Date: 12 noon Tuesday 5th January 2021—Interviews 14th and 15th January 2021.

Please send a letter of application (maximum two sides of A4) outlining your skills and experience. An application pack is available on the school's website. Please send your application form and letter to Jo Cummings admin@theathelstantrust.org

Bradon Forest School, The Peak, Purton, Swindon, Wiltshire SN5 4AT
<https://www.bradonforest.org.uk>



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GOVERNANCE MANAGER & CLERK TO THE BOARD

We have an exciting opportunity for a Governance Manager & Clerk to the Board to join the Mowbray Education Trust Central team. Reporting to the Chair of the Board you will be responsible for the smooth and efficient running of meetings of the Board of Directors and any committees, and to monitor compliance with various legislative and regulatory requirements affecting Mowbray Education Trust Limited (MET).

The role will include clerking meetings, including the preparation of agendas, taking of minutes and distribution of information. You will also manage two clerks who provide clerking to the individual schools.

This role is permanent working 14.80 hours per week (equivalent to 2 days per week), for 52.179 weeks per year (all year round).

Board meetings are generally held at John Ferneley College in Melton Mowbray, however travel to other venues may be required.

Application deadline - midnight on Thursday 31st December 2020

For more information and to apply, please visit <https://www.mowbrayeducation.org/join-us>

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