# SCHOOLS WEEK

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



Lost generation? They could be the luckiest!

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## 'I'LL PUT SCHOOLS BANG IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS OFFICE'

The new children's commissioner reveals future plans, shrugging off criticism and why she's like the Queen

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# CEO 'super league' emerges as gaffe halts DfE pay crackdown

- Annual CEO league tables show the best-paid are pulling further ahead
- 25 leaders get £15k-plus rises, but there's caps and a six-figure cut too
- Government pay crackdown falters over data collection problems

TOM BELGER | @TOM_BELGER **EXCLUSIVE**

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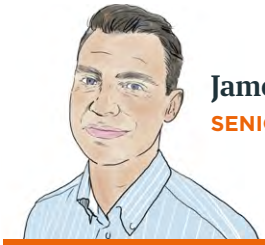

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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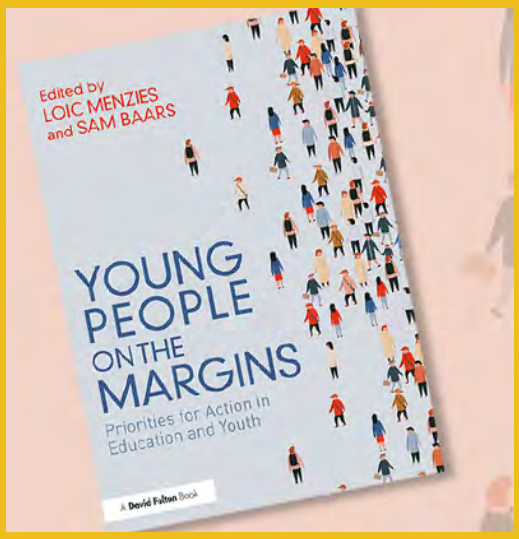


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# News

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# DfE told of exam downgrades days before results

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education knew the full scale of downgraded results before last year's exams fiasco, a *Schools Week* investigation has established.

Emails from officials also show the department knew of - and was pressing Ofqual - about the "outlier" grades issue a week before results day.

The findings expose Gavin Williamson's claims he was unaware of any problems until after students were issued grades and have prompted fresh calls for an independent review. The government U-turned on plans to award standardised grades after nearly 40 per cent of teacher grades were hauled down by an ill-fated algorithm.

Kate Green, Labour's shadow education secretary, said the education secretary's "chaotic" handling of results caused "huge stress" for students.

"They, their parents and teachers deserve honesty about what he knew, when he knew it, and why he did nothing to intervene."

*Schools Week* obtained emails between the DfE and Ofqual officials in the run-up to results day, following a six-month freedom of information request battle.

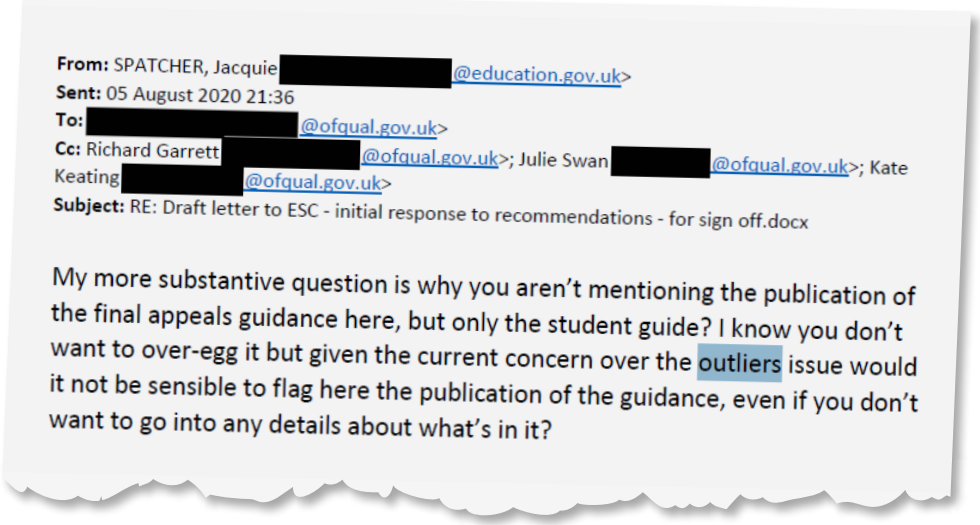
Last summer, Williamson told journalists: "Over the weekend [after results day] it became apparent to me, with evidence that Ofqual ... and external experts had provided, that there were real concerns about what ... [grades] a large number of students were getting ... and whether that was a proper and fair reflection of their efforts."

It has been reported Williamson was told of issues of "outlier" grades – high-performing students in historically poor-performing schools whose grades were hauled down - before results day.

The emails show Jackie Spatcher, the DfE's deputy director, was seeking assurance from Ofqual given the "current concern" over the "outliers issue" in an email sent on Wednesday, August 5.

It was followed with an email from the Joint Council for Qualifications to say that "outlier" candidates affected by the model were "firmly in the minds" of the exam boards.

The emails also reveal Spatcher was sent data on Tuesday, August 10 – three days before results – revealing the full scale of downgrades.



**From:** SPATCHER, Jacquie [redacted]@education.gov.uk>
**Sent:** 05 August 2020 21:36
**To:** [redacted]@ofqual.gov.uk>
**Cc:** Richard Garrett [redacted]@ofqual.gov.uk>; Julie Swan [redacted]@ofqual.gov.uk>; Kate Keating [redacted]@ofqual.gov.uk>
**Subject:** RE: Draft letter to ESC - initial response to recommendations - for sign off.docx

My more substantive question is why you aren't mentioning the publication of the final appeals guidance here, but only the student guide? I know you don't want to over-egg it but given the current concern over the outliers issue would it not be sensible to flag here the publication of the guidance, even if you don't want to go into any details about what's in it?

This showed that 50 per cent of students had "some" grades downgraded from centre-assessed grades (CAG), and 13 per cent had all grades downgraded.

It also revealed 15,026 students – 8.8 per cent – had three results marked down from their CAG.

Another spreadsheet sent to the DfE showed that the results of 25,175 students were bumped down by two or three grades. Fifty-two per cent of candidates in biology had their grades adjusted down.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the heads' union ASCL, said the findings "reinforce the call we made for a full independent review last summer".

"Valuable lessons could and should have been learned. It was a mistake not to hold a proper review then and it continues to be a mistake now."

*Schools Week* revealed last year that Williamson met with Ofqual to "talk about results" twice in the two days before the controversial A-level announcement.

However, he snubbed demands from the education select committee to provide details of what was said in the key meetings, despite promising transparency.

The emails also provide an insight into what the DfE and Ofqual were worried about in the run-up to results day.

Three days before August 13, the department asked Ofqual if it intended to publish data on the percentage of students who had "all/some/no CAGs change", as it believed "MATs may crunch and publish the data".

But Cath Jadhav, Ofqual's director of standards and comparability, wrote back: "We can do this but it's currently lower down our priority list than some other urgent stuff."

When asked about plans to publish a breakdown of attainment gaps at A-level, Jadhav said: "Yes, and a bit more, but it is reassuringly boring."

The DfE was also clearly concerned by media enquiries about how many schools had given their students all A*s and As.

Spatcher told Jadhav the special advisers had asked for the information. "I imagine they're thinking of using this in media briefings to reinforce the importance of standardisation."

Another "lines to take" document, prepared for the chief regulator Sally Collier the day before results day, stated that, if asked by media, she should apologise for the "stress and anxiety" students would be feeling.

Collier resigned in late August. She had opposed Williamson's plans to introduce a "triple lock" appeals policy for pupils to challenge results based on a mock grade.

Ofqual declined to comment. The DfE claimed that in line with the "separation of responsibilities" between it and Ofqual, they did not "have sight of the full details of A level results at individual or school/college level ahead of them being released".

They added after results day it became clear the algorithm had revealed unanticipated anomalies which "severely undermined confidence in the system".

A spokesperson added: "When the full scale of inconsistent and unfair outcomes became clear, we agreed with Ofqual that the fairest approach would be to award both A levels and GCSEs based on centre assessment grades."

Kate Green

# News

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# Consent for Covid testing trial questioned

JAMES CARR
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EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education has been alerted to potential ethics issues with its Covid testing trial in schools.

More than 170 schools and colleges are taking part in the scheme in which close contacts of positive Covid cases can stay in the classroom if they test negative after daily rapid tests. Currently close contacts have to self-isolate.

Documents explaining the trial, seen by *Schools Week*, say schools only require consent from close contacts, rather than the school community as a whole.

It means those who have not opted into the trial may unwillingly be at increased risk of contracting Covid, experts say. Rapid tests are under fire for low accuracy in picking up positive cases.

Experts are also concerned about a lack of data on the effectiveness of the new Orient Gene lateral flow tests used in the scheme. Participating schools, however, like the trial, with the number of pupils missing on-site education in one school drop by two-thirds.

## How does the trial work?

Schools are split into two groups. The first is a control group that follows the current national guidelines of ten days' self-isolation for close contacts. The second is an intervention group in which close contacts of positive cases can opt in to daily testing on-site by trained staff for seven days so that they can keep attending school.

If they get a negative result, they can stay in school. If they test positive, they are sent home to isolate.

Consenting pupils in both groups will also undergo two PCR tests during this period.

In FAQs sent to participating schools, seen by *Schools Week*, pupils are told they must "not use public transport" to return home if they test positive. But if it is their only option they must travel "on services that are not busy".

The trial aims to reach 200 schools in total by the time it wraps up at the end of the summer term – with 171 currently participating.

It is run by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), the Office for National Statistics and the University of Oxford.

It is funded by the DHSC, supported by the Department for Education, with its "ethics cleared" by Public Health England.

Westhoughton High School's Daily Contact Testing site

## Ethical questions surrounding consent

But the trial only requires consent from close contacts, rather than all those within participating schools.

Professor Jon Deeks, of the Institute of Applied Health Research at the University of Birmingham, said the trial meant other children would be put at "increased risk" if their classroom contained close contacts.

"It's important that all who could be infected are giving consent," he said.

Kevin Courtney, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said it supported the notion of clinical testing, but was aware of "proper concerns" surrounding consent and had asked for a response from the DfE.

Information sent to schools explains the trial had been given ethical approval "because there is genuine scientific uncertainty" about which method would be more effective in reducing the transmission of Covid-19.

"The risk to 'contacts of contacts' is low, and an independent ethics committee has ruled that only contacts need to give consent."

## New test performance unknown

The trial uses the Orient Gene lateral flow test, instead of the Innova test widely used in schools.

Deeks, a critic of the rapid tests, questioned this approach as "no description or evidence of the performance of the test is publicly available".

Information sent to parents explains the Orient Gene "has been reviewed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency for use in assisted testing" and validated against the Covid variants of concern.

A DHSC spokesperson said it had "undergone rigorous clinical evaluation" and was intended for use by healthcare professionals and trained operators.

The DfE said future supplies of lateral flow devices would include manufacturers besides Innova. Using a newly validated technology would help to ensure the trial remained valid.

## 'Far less disruptive to education'

In March, the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling stated that five days of sequential testing "matches the effectiveness" of ten days' quarantine.

While a list of FAQs sent to schools states: "Five to seven days of testing may avert a similar amount of transmission" to the ten-day quarantine if adherence stayed the same.

Westhoughton High School, in Bolton, has been part of the trial since March.

Between October half-term and Christmas, 1,000 of the school's 1,250 pupils had to self-isolate at least once due to positive Covid cases – with some year 11 pupils isolating on five separate occasions.

Since the trial began, five positive cases have been recorded at the school. In normal circumstances, about 240 pupils would have been forced to isolate, however this dropped to fewer than 80.

No close contacts had recorded positive.

Julie McCulloch, of the heads' union ASCL, said the trial was an important step in identifying whether disruption could be reduced.

The DfE scrapped plans for mass daily contact testing in January, following concerns about test accuracy.

A department spokesperson said the trial could maximise attendance, while minimising the risk of community transmission.

# News

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## Major MAT's DfE contract exposes potential governance pitfall

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EXCLUSIVE

The government insists it has a "robust governance process" for its edtech demonstrator scheme after the selection of a major academy trust to deliver its second phase prompted conflict of interest warnings.

*Schools Week* revealed this week that United Learning, England's largest academy chain, had been awarded an £850,000 contract to run the next year of the programme.

Launched in 2019, the programme uses "demonstrator" schools and colleges to help other schools reduce workload, support professional development and improve pupils' results using technology.

The scheme has been run for the past year by the London Grid for Learning, the Education Foundation and Sheffield Hallam University. The consortium bid to run it for another year, but lost out to United Learning.

According to a tender notice published in February, the new delivery partner will oversee the network, but will also be responsible for the grant and financial management of demonstrators.

Some of United Learning's schools are funded as demonstrators through the existing scheme, and will continue to be involved under its stewardship.

Ty Goddard, from the Education Foundation, called for clarity on the relationship as the scheme must be "seen to be transparent".

But the DfE said it had a "robust governance

process in place to ensure United Learning staff running the programme are completely separate from the United Learning demonstrator team". An independent audit will also take place, the department said.

The DfE originally appointed 20 demonstrator institutions last April, and named a further 18 in June. Another ten, including United Learning, were added at some point in the autumn.

Goddard claimed United Learning was added to the list of demonstrators "without consultation or involvement from the delivery partner organisations". He also claimed the trust had proposed to train "up to 60" of its own schools using its demonstrator funding.

"I challenged the department on countless occasions that this would threaten the integrity of the programme to use monies in such a way."

But the DfE said this week that the selection of demonstrator schools and trusts was "managed and overseen by the delivery partner and Ty Goddard was part of that consortium management team".

The move also creates a potential problem for the DfE – partnering up for a key project with a trust whose performance it is obliged to monitor.

It follows a trend in recent years of the DfE handing more responsibility – and money – to large multi-academy trusts to run flagship schemes.

For example, schools run by United Learning, Star Academies and the Harris Federation were among those named as "teaching school hubs" earlier this year.

*Schools Week* understands academy trusts are keen to bid to run the new £121 million Institute of Teaching.

Professor Toby Greany, from the University of Nottingham, told *Schools Week* there had been a "big shift" since 2010 towards commissioning "real-world education organisations" to lead system change. This had some benefits, he said, but was not without pitfalls.

Greany said multi-academy trusts handed contracts could face a "temptation inevitably to focus on the schools within the trust and to prioritise them, even though your remit is to work across the wider system".

Sir John Coles, United Learning's chief executive and a former DfE official, said his trust was "very committed to supporting the education system beyond our trust and so very pleased to have been appointed to undertake this important work for the department".

He also said the trust's "national scope and scale" and project management capacity meant it was "well-placed" to work with demonstrator schools and colleges "to help them to benefit as many schools, colleges, teachers and young people as possible".

Four of the 48 current demonstrators will not continue into the second phase.

## Former schools commissioner to take charge at AET

Former regional schools commissioner Rebecca Boomer-Clark has been appointed to lead the Academies Enterprise Trust, one of England's largest academy chains.

Boomer-Clark, currently national director of secondary education at Ark Schools, will take over at AET after the summer half-term break. Current CEO Julian Drinkall is leaving to head up the international Aga Khan Schools group.

AET chair David Hall said Boomer-Clark had an "extremely strong and impressive pedigree, having worked both in government and in senior roles in some of the best academy trusts in the country".

Her appointment follows a trend seen in recent years in which a number of RSCs have taken up high-profile academy leadership roles, prompting concerns about a "revolving door" between the commissioners and the sector they hold to account.

Boomer-Clark has been at Ark since 2017, when she stood down as an RSC after just over a year in the post. She had replaced Sir David Carter as the South West's commissioner after he became the national schools commissioner.

Boomer-Clark, who is also chair of the board of trustees of the Ambition Institute, said she was "extremely excited" to join AET, which she said had "come a very long way over the last four years".

Ark has announced that Venessa Willms, its current director of primary, will become its director of education. Ark's current regional director, Jerry Collins, has been appointed director of secondary education.

The 58-school AET has undergone a period of upheaval after being banned from expanding in 2013. The trust's finances have stabilised in recent years.

Pearson

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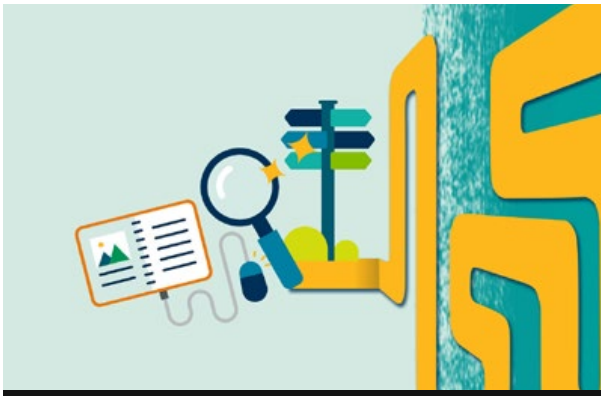

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# News

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# Sneaky funding change hits cabinets' schools

JAMES CARR
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EXCLUSIVE

Schools in areas represented by cabinet ministers stand to lose more than £15 million after the government's "ill-advised" decision to alter the method of calculating pupil premium funding.

An analysis by *Schools Week* of freedom of information (FOI) requests from 114 councils suggests schools stand to lose £94.3 million. Extrapolated across all councils, this amounts to a cut of £125 million.

England's largest academy trust – which faces a £775,000 dip – has flagged the issue with Department for Education officials.

Ministers decided to base premium funding on the number of free school meal (FSM) pupils schools had in October, rather than January as previously.

Our figures show an estimated additional 102,000 children became eligible for free school meals between last autumn and January this year.

Under the funding primary schools receive £1,345 extra per pupil, while secondaries get £955.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the heads' union ASCL, said the figures "hint at a major funding problem for schools caused by an ill-advised and badly-timed government decision".

We analysed FOI responses obtained by campaigner Andy Jolley and the Labour party.

They showed the areas served by 15 senior members of the Cabinet could lose about £15 million – with an extra 12,000 children eligible for support in these districts.

In Hillingdon, which includes Boris Johnson's constituency of Uxbridge and Ruislip, 500 more pupils became eligible, with schools losing up to £625,000.

Meanwhile, in Staffordshire, which covers education secretary Gavin Williamson's constituency of South Staffordshire, 1,010 children became eligible for pupil premium, with schools losing out on about £1.3 million.

No Cabinet members responded to a request for comment.

Northumberland saw the biggest percentage increase of eligible pupils, with numbers up by almost a third from 7,033 to 9,048 – creating a potential shortfall of £2.5 million.

Elsewhere, Kent saw the biggest loss in potential pupil premium cash at £4 million, with Birmingham trailing just behind at £3.8 million.

Meanwhile, in response to an FOI, United Learning said it raised the calculation change issue with DfE officials. It has an additional 621 pupils who qualified for pupil premium between October and January – meaning it faces losing an estimated £775,250.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, said: "Given the volatile financial situation of families due to Covid-19; it's been an exceptionally bad time to implement this change."

An FOI obtained by Jolley shows the DfE has assessed the financial impact of the date change. But it refused to release it, claiming it "could harm the department's reputation in regard to the accuracy and credibility of the statistical information it produces".

Vicky Ford, the children's minister, told the Stoke-on-Trent Live website the change "won't actually make a huge difference. What we've done is to give schools more certainty for the year ahead. If you based it on the January census, they have got very short notice."

The DfE did not respond to a request for comment.

■ **How much did your council lose? See the full list at schoolsweek.co.uk**

## Nerd note

Councils were asked to provide the number of pupils eligible for FSM in October 2020 and January 2021. Where councils did not break the pupil numbers down by primary and secondary, we used £1,250 based on a weighted average for the higher proportion of primary pupils.

# News



# Appeals against teacher grades stutter on

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Pupils and their families are still fighting teacher grades eight months after they were awarded last year, despite ministers promising a "swift" appeals process.

While pupils could not appeal last year if they disagreed with their school's professional judgment of the grade, they could make complaints about bias, discrimination and malpractice.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, promised a "robust" and "swift" appeals system.

But Ane Vernon, a partner at Payne Hicks Beach solicitors, said her firm had been instructed in connection with "several" appeals or malpractice claims. A "small handful" were still ongoing.

*Schools Week* has also spoken to a parent, who asked not to be named, who is taking a school to a SEND tribunal, claiming the process used to decide their child's grade was discriminatory.

Vernon said the reasons why cases are still ongoing included slow internal complaints procedures in schools or because evidence had to be collected through subject access requests.

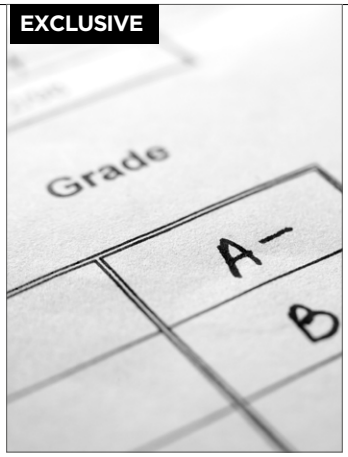
"Difficulties arise where the school takes a defensive stance or does not properly engage with the specific circumstances of the individual case," she said.

The number of appeals soared last year to 2,215, up from 745 in 2019, although Ofqual cautioned against direct comparison.

Ofqual statistics next week are expected to reveal how many appeals are outstanding. The appeals deadline was in September, while malpractice complaints have no deadline.

Nick Green, a father of four, is on the final stage of the complaints process after submitting a review with Ofqual last month. He is

EXCLUSIVE




claiming malpractice led to his son's result to be downgraded.

Green, an assistant principal at a South Yorkshire secondary school, has spent nearly eight months challenging his son's PE GCSE grade 6, despite being predicted a 7.

A statement to Green from Shelley College in Huddersfield says his son achieved a 9 in the mock exam for component one, and 7,7,6 in other tests.

But as the school had to "reduce" their "teacher predicted grades further" it considered how he had "admitted his struggle" with component two of the PE GCSE course, which it was not able to hold a mock exam on. Green's son said he does not remember this conversation.

Some schools marked down their own teacher grades, matching them to historical results at the school to avoid grade inflation.

Ofqual guidance also said judgments should be objective, based on the available evidence and not affected by a student's behaviour.

But a handwritten note by exam board Pearson, made after Green asked it to review the case, said about component two: "behaviour and [ineligible word] dipped. So why at bottom of rank order"

However, Pearson later claimed to Green the note was not an "accurate reflection of the conversation" and said the school clarified his son's behaviour "was not considered".

The board did not "have reasonable grounds" to investigate Green's concerns as suspected malpractice. Ofqual did not uphold the complaint, so Green has now submitted a further final complaint to the regulator.

Green claims there is "real failure in the system of accountability" from schools down to Ofqual and fears about what could happen for students this year.

"My son's confidence was knocked. He went to college and he came back and said I've got one of the lowest grades in the class.

"He's already looking at university. Sport is very competitive . . . universities now sometimes go back to GCSE grades when you get so many students getting top grades at A-level."

Pearson and Ofqual refused to comment on an individual case.

Shelley College had a "small number of appeals" and in all cases "an investigation was completed in line with Ofqual guidelines".

Dave Wadsworth, the principal, said: "In a small minority of these cases students then took their appeal to the exam board and we fully complied with this process. In all cases the exam board rejected the appeal."

Pearson said it was "very sympathetic to students disappointed with their results" and took allegations of malpractice "very seriously".

Geoff Barton, general secretary of school leaders' union ASCL, said schools were put in an "impossible position" last year.

# News

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# Ofqual work submission just 'facade of validity'

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Schools will have to provide samples of student work under the quality assurance process for teacher assessed grades this year.

It is the latest Ofqual update to the grading process – with just under eight weeks to go until the submission deadline on June 18.

In a blog published yesterday, Cath Jadhav, Ofqual's director of standards and comparability, said exam boards would request samples of work from all schools.

This would form part of the third stage of quality assurance, which involved sampling of schools' grades after submission.

But Stuart Lock, the chief executive of Advantage Schools, said there was "no point" in the submission, It would "give a facade of validity and cost millions of hours of adults' time which should be focused on the children".

"This is really disappointing from Ofqual. I presume it is so that they can be seen to be doing something."

Exam boards will request samples from at least five students in at least one subject at A-level and two subjects at GCSE, one of which is likely to be either English language or maths.

Boards will let schools know which subjects and students have been selected for sampling in the week of June 21.

Jadhav said schools will need to "promptly" submit the evidence – within 48 hours of the request – so it is important a school's evidence and records are "in good order ahead of that date".

Subject experts at the boards will then review evidence provided by a sample of schools.

Some will be chosen at random, but others will be targeted based on other factors, such as "significant changes in entry patterns" or where a centre is identified as needing additional support.

Meanwhile, in a two-week consultation published on Wednesday, Ofqual set out further detail on the proposed appeals process.

The regulator confirmed earlier this year that the process will involve pupils first asking schools to check for errors before escalating appeals to exam boards on their behalf.

Boards will then consider whether grades issued were a "reasonable exercise of academic judgment".

In its draft guidance, the exams regulator said that when it came to academic judgment, there would "often be a range of different decisions which could reasonably be made in the circumstances".

Results will therefore only be deemed to be incorrect "where the original decision represents an unreasonable application of academic judgment".

For example, a decision to award a grade B would not be unreasonable "where the decision maker for the appeal considers the evidence would support either a grade A or a grade B.

"Both would be reasonable and therefore neither would be unreasonable."

When considering whether a grade is an unreasonable exercise of academic judgment, the starting point for boards is "always" the grade itself, and "not any alternative TAG [teacher assessed grade] which the learner considers could or should have been determined".

The consultation closes on May 15.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

# Most heads to base grades on 'exam-style papers'

Over half of leaders plan to give greater weighting to "exam-style papers" than other forms of assessment when issuing grades this summer, a union survey has revealed.

The poll of 521 members of the ASCL school leaders' union also found that around one in 14 respondents plan to base grades on exam-style papers alone, despite exams regulator Ofqual recommending a "range of evidence" be used.

GCSEs and A-levels have been cancelled this year. Grades will instead be based on teacher assessments. Exam boards have provided optional assessment materials for schools to use alongside other evidence like coursework and mock exam results.

Leaders were asked to describe their general approach to awarding grades by ASCL, which mostly represents secondary headteachers. Fifth-three per cent of respondents said they would base grades on a "combination of exam-style papers and non-exam evidence, but with greater weighting given to exam-style papers".

Twenty-six per cent said grades would be based on a combination of evidence, with roughly equal weighting given to exam and non-exam-style approaches, while seven per cent said they would base grades only on papers set in exam-style conditions.

Reasons given for using only exam-style papers included disruption caused by lockdowns, the quality of evidence, the assurance given to whole cohorts and that it was pupils' own work, ASCL said.

Members were also asked to list all the types of assessment evidence they intend to use. The most popular was "chunked" or partial exam-style questions, cited by 89 per cent of respondents, and non-exam assessments, mentioned by 84 per cent.

Seventy-four per cent intend to use results of mock exams that have already been taken.

ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton said: "We should not be surprised about the variability in approaches, given that there are very few parameters about how this should be done and a wide range of differing experiences over the past year."

But he said it was "important that parents, politicians and the commentariat understand that there is no one-size-fits-all model out there, and nobody thinks that any of this is ideal".

It comes after Ofqual chief regulator Simon Lebus told the i newspaper there were "all sorts of things that could go wrong this summer, but we go into it much better prepared than we were last year".

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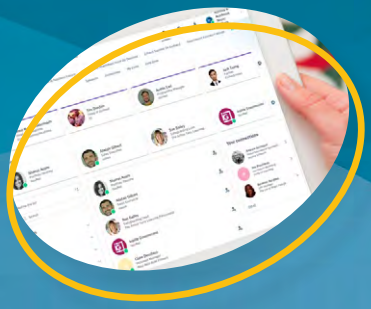

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# News

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# What you need to know about new 'world-leading' teaching institute

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
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Just £17 million of £121 million budgeted for the government's "world-leading" Institute of Teaching is guaranteed to set up and run the organisation.

The rest is dependent on recruitment and future spending reviews, *Schools Week* has learned.

It has also emerged that the Department for Education is already considering expanding the institute's recruitment targets for certain aspects of its work.

Here's everything you need to know about the new organisation.

**What will it do?**

Launching next year, the new institute (IoT) will deliver initial teacher training (ITT), the early career framework (ECF) for new teachers and national professional qualifications (NPQs) for more experienced staff, as well as sharing best practice.

The winning bidder or bidders will be expected to register with the Office for Students for degree-awarding powers. At least four regional campuses will be set up across England to become the country's "flagship teacher and leader development provider", led by a "world-leading faculty of expert teacher educators".

However, no capital funding is guaranteed, so bidders may have to make use of existing buildings.

The institute's teacher development will also be based on the "best available research evidence about 'what works'".

How much cash is on offer?

Earlier this week the DfE launched a tender to find an organisation or consortium to run the Institute over six years. This is longer than the four-year contract first mooted, and boasts a much larger budget than the £6 million included in the original announcement.

But the DfE confirmed this week that most of the £121 million is for the training, development and support of teachers through the various schemes on offer, which will be funded in the same way as other providers.

In fact, just £5 million is allocated for start-up costs, while about £2 million a year between 2022 and 2028 will pay for research.

**How big will it be?**

The government said earlier this year the institute would train 500 trainees from September 2023 and 1,000 a year thereafter. From next year it is also expected to cater for an annual 2,000 early career teachers and their mentors, and 1,000 national professional qualification (NPQ) participants.

However, *Schools Week* understands the DfE could require the Institute to cater annually for a further 1,000 early career teachers and mentors, and another 1,000 NPQ participants, depending on capacity and future budget announcements.

The DfE has also said it will be expected to deliver the national leaders of education development programme for up to 650 NLEs between 2022 and 2025.

Even with these expansions on the cards, the DfE has said it does not expect to spend £121 million and that the Institute's final funding will depend on take-up and future spending reviews.

**Will it always be taxpayer funded?**

The Institute is also still expected to be freed from its obligations to government when its initial contract ends, as first revealed by *Schools Week* in February. The DfE has said it the Institute should become self-sufficient after its six years are up.

Emma Hollis, from the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers, said this sustainability should be possible, providing future governments continued to fund the ECF and NPQs.

She added that the addition of centrally funded research over the first six years could prove "really interesting", providing it was shared with the wider sector.

However, the announcement of the new IoT has prompted concerns that it will divert resources from other providers. It could also make the teacher training sector more complicated, providers say, which is something the government has sought to address through its ITT market review.

James Noble-Rogers, the chief executive of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, said the DfE must be clearer about how the Institute would interact with the review, and "what net value" it would add to existing structures.

Tender documents state it is "crucial" for the Institute to collaborate with the existing teacher development sector.

## THE INSTITUTE OF TEACHING IN NUMBERS

**1,000** ITT TRAINEES A YEAR FROM 2024

**2,000** EARLY CAREER TEACHERS AND 2,000 MENTORS FROM 2022

**1,000** NPQ PARTICIPANTS FROM 2022

**650** NLE PARTICIPANTS

**£5m** IN SET-UP FUNDING

**£12m** FOR RESEARCH

Investigation

# The emerging 'super league' of best-paid CEOs

TOM BELGER
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EXCLUSIVE

**The country's best-paid academy chiefs are pulling even further ahead from the rest, with warnings of a "super league" emerging among leaders.**

But a Department for Education data collection gaffe means its supposed crackdown on chief executive pay has been halted for the past 18 months.

*Schools Week*'s annual CEO pay investigation can also reveal 25 leaders secured raiss of 15,000 or more, with 29 now earning at least £200,000. But some trusts introduced caps, and one slashed more than £100,000 from its leader's salary.

## The rich get richer

In 2017, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) began writing to academy trusts paying individuals more than £150,000, or multiple salaries between £100,000 and £150,000, to ask them to justify such high salaries from the public purse.

Our analysis is based on the accounts of the 277 trusts identified as receiving letters in the past four years. Twelve have since closed, joined other trusts or not published accounts, leaving 265.

Accounts for 2019-20 published over the past few months show 55 per cent of trust bosses (146) secured rises, more than three times the number whose pay was cut (40).

But the 20 best-paid chief executives were more likely to get an increase – with three-quarters getting rises last year.

Their average pay rise was also 4 per cent (£9,694), compared with 1 per cent among all 265 trusts that received a government warning over pay – suggesting the best-paid are pulling further ahead.

Meanwhile, 98 leaders took home more than £158,754, the prime minister's salary in 2019-20.

"We don't need a super-league of CEO pay," said Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union. "I've no problem with education professionals being well-paid. But the increasing gap between CEO and teacher pay is toxic."

## Meet the CEO super league

England's best paid trust chief executive, once again, is Sir Dan Moynihan of the Harris Federation. His pay moved up a £5,000 pay band to at least £455,000. The trust declined to comment.

The second-best paid leader, the Thomas Telford School's executive head Sir Kevin Satchwell, also moved up £10,000 in

**Best paid:**
**Dan Moynihan, Harris, £455-460,000**

**Biggest pay rise:**
**Wayne Barsby, LEAP MAT, £30-50,000**

**Biggest pay cut: Boston Witham**
**Former CEO Adrian Reed salary, £240,000**
**New CEO Emma Hadley, £115-135,000**

Continued on next page

# Investigation

pay bands to at least £291,000. A trust spokesperson said about half his salary was for leading the separate five-school Thomas Telford MAT as an "executive adviser".

Anita Johnson of the seven-school Loxford School Trust, also had a £10,000 minimum band hike to £230,000, making her the best-paid female school leader.

A trust spokesperson said her pay was "incomparable" with other CEOs as she received only £88,178 for her trust executive work. The rest of her salary is as head of Loxford, one of the country's biggest all-through schools.

The only two new entrants to the top 20 table from our previous analysis had rises. The White Horse Federation's Dr Nicholas Capstick's minimum pay band jumped £25,000 to at least £220,000, while the Gorse Academies Trust's Sir John Townsley reached at least the same amount after a £30,000 hike.

A Gorse spokesperson said the trust was expanding and secured "well above average" results for primary and secondary pupils despite a disproportionately disadvantaged intake.

Nine of the 20 high-paying trusts had added schools in the year. But school numbers in the other trusts remained flat, and three had just one school.

## DfE gaffe stalls pay 'crackdown'

The DfE says a data collection issue has stopped it sending any warning letters in the past 18 months. At least seven rounds of letters were published soon after being sent in the previous two years.

It was trying to resolve the issue "in a way that gives us, and academy trusts, confidence that any letters issued would be fair and proportionate".

It remained committed to challenging excessive pay "wherever it is clear it is not proportionate to the job role, or linked to improving pupil outcomes", but would not confirm if or when letters would be resumed.

Bousted added: "These rises show the government is absolutely toothless. The letters didn't work. And if they're not even doing that, what are they doing?"

## Six-figure salary cut and pay caps

The public clampdown does appear to have had some successes.

Fifteen per cent of trusts cut executive pay, and the number of £150,000 earners dropped to 106, down from 129 two years ago.

Cranford Community College announced a £150,000 cap, knocking £40,000 off executive head Kevin Prunty's pay band. It did not respond to a request for comment.

Boston Witham Academies confirmed the biggest cut, of at least £105,000. After Adrian Reed, who was paid £240,000 retired, his successor Emma Hadley started on between £115,000 and £135,000.

Meanwhile, the Hatton Academies Trust hired new chief executive Rob Hardcastle is on at least £90,000 – a £95,000 drop on his predecessor's minimum. William Thallon, the trust's chair, said Hardcastle's pay could rise with performance, but followed ESFA guidance that "reinforced" its directors' concerns about high pay.

Ark Schools said its chief executive Lucy Heller volunteered for a £11,158 pay cut given the "tough financial environment" for schools, leaving her on £198,961.

CEO pay at the Kingsdale Foundation has also been slashed since its accounts were filed from more than £220,000 last year to £200,000 or less as part of a restructure.

## Rise of the trust central team

*Schools Week* analysis shows a growing class of high earners amongst MAT central teams

### THE HIGHEST PAID ACADEMY BOSSES

| CHIEF EXECUTIVE | TRUST | MINIMUM PAY 2018-19 | MINIMUM PAY 2019-20 | DIFFERENCE | PUPILS | PAY/PUPIL | SCHOOLS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dan Moynihan | Harris Federation | £450,000 | £455,000 | £5,000 | 37000 | £12.30 | 48 |
| Kevin Satchwell | Thomas Telford School & MAT | £280,001 | £290,001 | £10,000 | 5849 | £49.58 | 1 |
| Julian Drinkall | Academies Enterprise Trust | £295,000 | £285,000 | -£10,000 | 32000 | £8.91 | 58 |
| Colin Hall | Holland Park | £270,000 | £280,000 | £10,000 | 1389 | £201.58 | 1 |
| Dayo Olukoshi | Brampton Manor Trust | £234,274 | £252,136 | £17,862 | 4544 | £55.49 | 2 |
| Jon Coles | United Learning Trust | £240,000 | £252,000 | £12,000 | 52000 | £4.85 | 72 |
| Hamid Patel | Star Academies | £236,371 | £250,382 | £14,011 | 15362 | £16.30 | 28 |
| Simon Beamish | Leigh Academies Trust | £225,000 | £235,000 | £10,000 | 18000 | £13.06 | 25 |
| Anita Johnson | Loxford School Trust | £220,000 | £230,000 | £10,000 | 7164 | £32.10 | 7 |
| John Murphy | Oasis Community Learning | £220,000 | £230,000 | £10,000 | 30,000 | £7.67 | 52 |
| Paul West | The Spencer Academies Trust | £215,000 | £230,000 | £15,000 | 15192 | £15.14 | 20 |
| John Tomasevic | Nova Educational Trust | £215,000 | £230,000 | £15,000 | 9862 | £23.32 | 15 |
| Steve Lancashire | Reach2 Academy Trust | £230,000 | £225,000 | -£5,000 | 17867 | £12.59 | 59 |
| Roger Leighton | Partnership Learning | £225,000 | £225,000 | £0 | 9483 | £23.73 | 12 |
| Andy Goulty | The Rodillian Multi Academy Trust | £225,000 | £225,000 | £0 | 3421 | £65.77 | 4 |
| Steve Kenning | Aspirations Academies Trust | £215,000 | £225,000 | £10,000 | 9074 | £24.80 | 15 |
| Ged Fitzpatrick | St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Academy Trust | £220,000 | £220,000 | £0 | 3913 | £56.22 | 8 |
| Steve Morrison | The Kingsdale Foundation | £210,000 | £220,000 | £10,000 | 2400 | £91.67 | 1 |
| Nicholas Capstick | The White Horse Federation | £195,000 | £220,000 | £25,000 | 12012 | £18.32 | 32 |
| John Townsley | The Gorse Academies Trust | £190,000 | £220,000 | £30,000 | 9102 | £24.17 | 11 |

# Investigation

and headteachers.

A third of the 265 trusts expanded the number of staff earning more than £100,000 last year, adding a net 91 staff to take the total to 862 – averaging 3.3 per trust.

Forty-seven trusts listed five or more staff on at least £100,000 in their latest accounts, and 16 trusts had ten or more.

The Harris Federation had 41 high earners across its central team and 48 schools, with four staff on £200,000 or more.

Holland Park, a standalone London trust that has been dubbed the "socialist Eton", reported a £280,000 minimum salary for chief executive Colin Hall, with three other staff on more than £120,000 each. It declined to comment.

*Schools Week* also analysed remuneration among large MATs' key senior managers, typically covering chief finance officers and education directors, but in a few cases including headteachers.

Senior figures earned £154,444 on average at trusts with more than 15 schools on the DfE's watchlist, although the figure includes pension and national insurance contributions.

The sums ranged from under £100,000 to more than £200,000 at Harris.

"A few years ago, you'd never see a trust with more than one person on over £100,000, but it's increasingly common," said David Butler, a partner at Bishop Fleming and executive author of the annual Kreston Academies Benchmark Report.

## Pay rises linked to recruitment struggles

Many trusts, education leaders and experts

defended high and rising salaries.

Butler said larger trusts needed greater financial skills and were competing with the private sector to recruit for roles such as chief finance officers. "If the organisation's got £50 million of income, it probably warrants a relatively sizeable salary."

The 2021 Kreston report found a general correlation between trust size and executive pay, albeit with "some anomalies", Butler added.

Pay hikes also appeared linked to growth. "If you have to justify a £150,000 salary to ESFA, it's easier if you've added 2,000 pupils. I've no issue with that, though at what point do diminishing returns kick in?"

## Some trusts highlighted growing

responsibilities. Aldridge Education said a £60,000 jump in the minimum earnings for its leader to at least £170,000 reflected leadership changes. The previous year's top earner was an interim chief executive who filled in until April 2019 with "only a portion" of the new CEO Jane Fletcher's responsibilities and objectives.

Others highlighted recruitment challenges. Estelle MacDonald of the 15-school Hull Collaborative Academy Trust saw her minimum salary jump from £155,000 to £190,000. A spokesperson said staff pay reflected market research and had delivered strong results, adding: "It's very difficult to recruit to Hull."

A spokesperson at the 28-school E-ACT,

## BEST PAID PER PUPIL

| CHIEF EXECUTIVE | TRUST | MINIMUM PAY 2018-19 | MINIMUM PAY 2019-20 | DIFFERENCE | PUPILS | PAY/PUPIL | SCHOOLS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mark Vickers | Olive Academies | £160,000 | £160,000 | £0 | 237 | £675.11 | 3 |
| Peter Evans | Learn@MAT | £135,000 | £135,000 | £0 | 323 | £417.96 | 4 |
| Seamus Oates | TBAP Trust | £170,001 | £170,001 | £0 | 490 | £346.94 | 8 |
| Elaine Colquhoun | Whitefield Academy Trust | £145,000 | £145,000 | £0 | 464 | £312.50 | 2 |

## LOWEST PAID PER PUPIL

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jon Coles | United Learning Trust | £240,000 | £252,000 | £12,000 | 52000 | £5 | 72 |
| Nick Hudson | Ormiston Academies Trust | £197,675 | £206,341 | £8,666 | 32251 | £6.40 | 40 |
| Lucy Heller | Ark Schools | £210,119 | £198,961 | -£11,158 | 28000 | £7.11 | 38 |
| John Murphy | Oasis Community Learning | £220,000 | £230,000 | £10,000 | 30,994 | £7.42 | 52 |
| Chris Tomlinson | The Co-operative Academies Trust | £145,000 | £150,000 | £5,000 | 16865 | £8.89 | 25 |

# Investigates

which gave its new chief executive Jane Millward a £25,000 rise on her predecessor's pay to almost £181,000, said the trust aimed to "attract and retain the most skilled and talented individuals". This had ensured senior salaries were "benchmarked and commensurate with the size and scale of the role."

## Trusts 'know how to spend funds with propriety'

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said attracting and retaining talent to lead complex organisations and ensure the best outcomes for children was a "top-level system priority". She criticised "arbitrary pay caps" and said trust boards knew they had to spend public funds with "regularity and propriety".

Alice Gregson, the chief operating officer of MAT support organisation Forum Strategy, said the average 1 per cent hike showed most boards recognised the need to be moderate.

High pay is not limited to academies. The 2019 school workforce census showed secondary heads in local authority schools (£92,728) only narrowly behind their academy peers (£93,969).

The Taxpayers' Alliance found the average council employed more than seven staff on at least £100,000.

Meanwhile, the average housing association paid its chief executive £181,086 in 2019-20, according to Inside Housing analysis – higher than the academy trusts warned over CEO pay, which averaged £148,774.

The *Health Service Journal* also found 65 NHS trusts sought government sign-off in 2019 for CEO pay of more than £150,000. The National Governors' Association has called for similar approval processes in education.

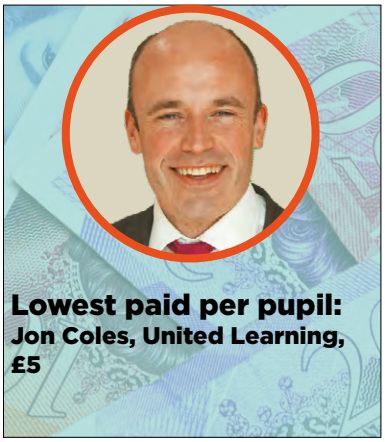
## Stark differences in pay based on trust size

Again, our analysis reveals stark differences between trusts on a per-pupil basis.

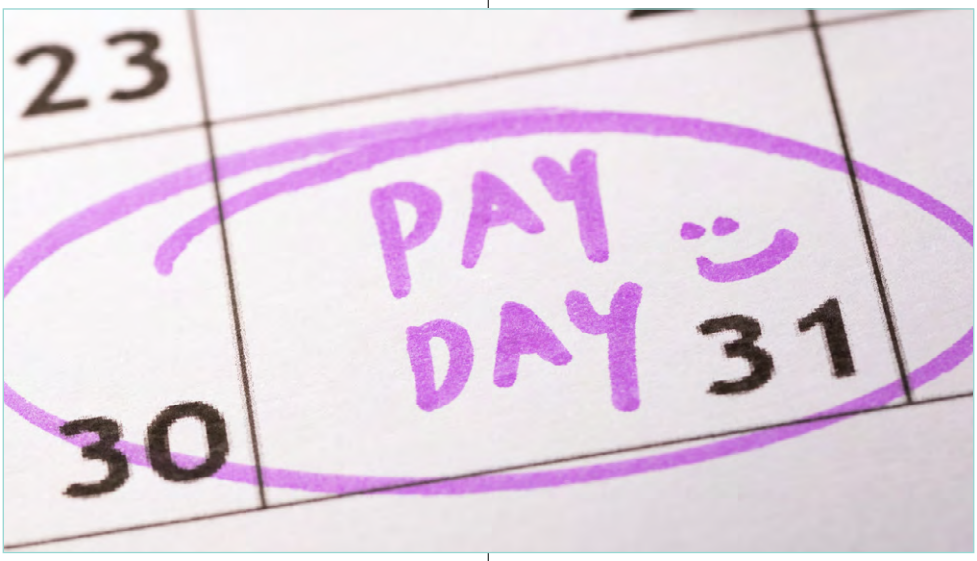
More than 30 leaders' salaries came in at more than £100 a pupil, while for eight larger trusts, including United Learning, Ark and Oasis, it came in under £10.

Sir Jon Coles, the chief executive of England's largest trust, United Learning, received a £12,000 rise last year, leaving him the sixth best paid on £252,000. But it still left him the lowest paid per pupil on the list at £4.85. The trust's sister charity pays his wage.

**Best paid per pupil: Mark Vickers, Olive Academies, £675.11**



**Lowest paid per pupil: Jon Coles, United Learning, £5**




A spokesperson said the rise was the first since 2012, and was fully offset by a corresponding cut in pension contributions.

Mark Vickers of Olive Academies was the highest per pupil at £675.11, but he said its alternative provision was "accepted to be a specialist high-needs area".

The trust has 237 pupils, but it supported another 2,000 mainstream pupils, which would average £71.52 a head. His pay also included an accommodation allowance and headship role. He said the board knew salaries had to be "justified" and value for money.

Several other trusts with high per-pupil pay offer alternative or special needs provision.

"No one begrudges someone being paid the rate for the job," said Meg Hillier, Labour chair of the Commons public accounts committee. "But we need to be wary of the golden escalator of pay which has seen some senior trustees and heads demanding more and more to keep up with the highest paid."

A DfE spokesperson said the "overwhelming majority" of trusts set reasonable pay. "We consistently challenge trusts where we deem executive pay to be too high and will continue to do so."

## Nerd box

*Schools Week* compiled data from trusts' 2019-20 accounts, websites and Gov.uk.

Some named leaders have since left their roles and salary, pupil and other data may have changed since trusts filed their accounts.

Data is based on actual salaries where given, or on minimum salary bands where not.

Salaries in the tables are for the CEO where named, or the trust's highest earner where not.

*Schools Week* looked at CEO where trusts employ one, or the most senior figure where not - with CEO used as a shorthand for the group as a whole.

Some leaders' pay included allowances, vouchers, pay for other roles and income in lieu of pension contributions. However pension contributions were not included.

# Speed read

# How Ofsted inspections are changing post-Covid

**Ofsted inspections are changing to meet the new demands brought about by Covid ahead of new 'lighter-touch' visits this summer. Here's what you need to know.**

## 1 COVID CANNOT BE 'SOLE FACTOR' FOR 'INADEQUATE' JUDGMENT

Ofsted has said that a school will be 'inadequate' under a particular judgment if one or more of the 'inadequate' criteria applies. However, this does not apply where the "inadequate criteria applies solely due to the impact of Covid".

## 2 CHECKS ON HOW CURRICULUM 'ADAPTED AND PRIORITISED'

Inspectors will seek to "understand how the school has adapted and prioritised the curriculum from September 2020".

Ofsted states this will include how the curriculum was implemented remotely and how curriculum planning has responded to learning gaps.

Sean Harford, national director of education, said schools are still expected to have an "ambitious curriculum that helps all pupils to study the full breadth of subjects. Where this is not fully realised, inspectors will want to see that leaders are working to bring this about."

## 3 LEADERS TO EXPLAIN HOW THEY SUPPORTED SCHOOL COMMUNITY...

Ofsted say inspectors will seek to understand how leaders supported the school community throughout the pandemic.

Areas of interest will include how remote education was put in place, how vulnerable pupils were kept safe and prioritised for face-to-face education and how staff and pupils' well-being have been promoted.

Other measures could include how Covid staff absences impacted on the running of the school.

## 4 ...AND HOW THEY ENSURED 'BEST POSSIBLE ATTENDANCE'

The guidance states inspectors will discuss how safeguarding arrangements "have changed over time due to the pandemic" as Covid has increased risks.

Attendance patterns will be discussed to understand how "the school ensured the best possible attendance for those pupils eligible to attend in person".

But attendance recorded between March 2020 and March this year will not impact Ofsted's judgment.

Inspectors will "consider the specific context and the steps school leaders have taken to ensure the best possible rates of attendance since the school opened to all pupil in March 2021".

When setting out what a school must achieve to be awarded a 'good' rating, in the behaviour or attitudes category, the guidance states: "Pupils have high attendance, within the context of the pandemic. They come to school on time and are punctual to lessons."

## 6 WATCHDOG WILL BE 'SYMPATHETIC' ON RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION PROGRESS

Teaching of relationships and health education in all schools, and sex education in secondary schools, became mandatory this academic year. But schools have been given flexibility on when during the year to begin teaching the curriculum because of Covid.

All schools will still be required to have taught some of the new curriculum, and to have consulted on and published a policy during this academic year.

However, inspectors will be "sympathetic" to schools that have not been able to fully implement the new curriculum, providing they have "had regard" to the Department for Education guidance, have a "good rationale" for prioritising what they have implemented and have "clear and effective plans to address any gaps before the end of the 2021-22 academic year".

If a school cannot provide evidence that it has done these things, then inspectors carrying out "lighter-touch" monitoring visits this term "may recommend that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection".

## 7 PUPIL ENGAGEMENT WARNING

Ofsted has also updated a section in the handbook concerning "if inspectors are prevented from speaking to pupils".

It now says that if inspectors cannot corroborate safeguarding evidence by talking to pupils during the inspection, safeguarding will be judged as "ineffective" and the relevant independent school standards judged as not met.

But inspectors will respect Covid "safety measures agreed with the school leadership when engaging with pupils, formally and informally".

# EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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## Will MATs become 'too big to fail'?

Asking schools to play a bigger role in the wider system should be encouraged. But the gradual move towards giving big MATs flagship government schemes could prove problematic.

United Learning is the largest trust in the country. The Department for Education is essentially the regulator of academies. For this relationship to work, there must be layers of independence.

So, how will this relationship change now that United Learning is essentially a government partner, running one of its flagship programmes?

If problems ever emerged at United Learning, the regulator tasked with overseeing this now has skin in the game. Any actions on, say, underperformance or financial irregularities, by the DfE would reflect pretty badly on its own judgment to award a key contract to the trust.

So can they ensure independence?

The DfE is increasingly looking to MATs to steward its flagship programmes. But in doing so, they need to make sure we don't make some too big to fail.

## 'Super League' CEOs – when will the pay rises end?

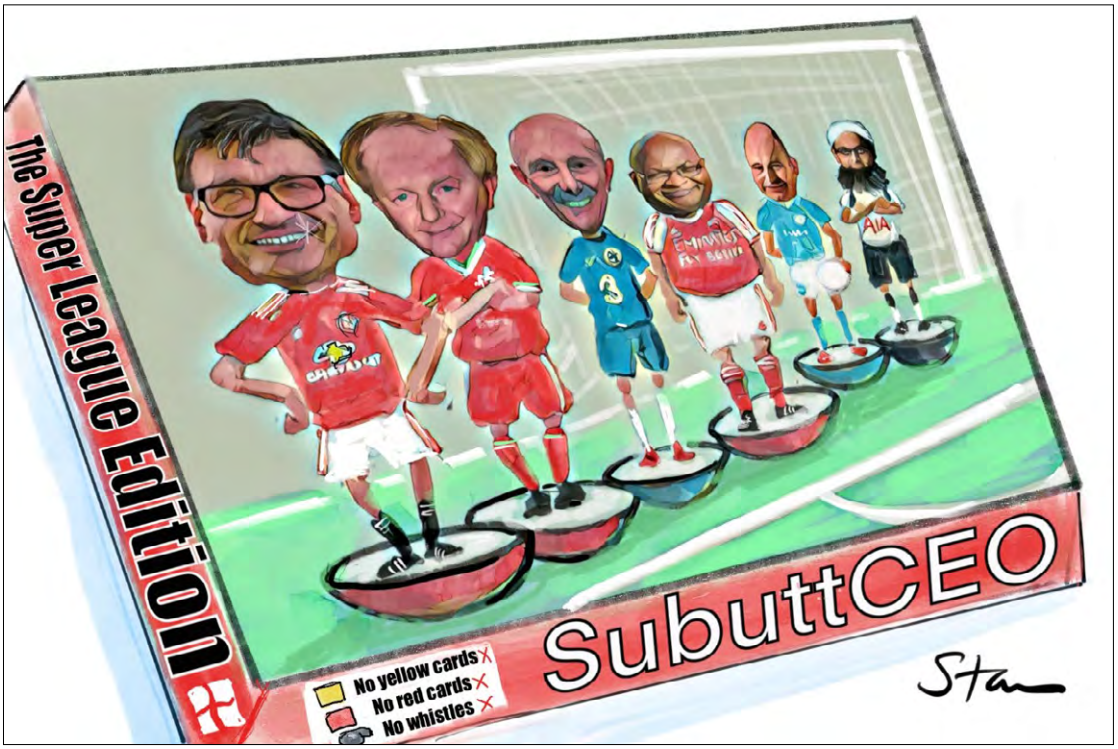
The ill-fated Super League of European football teams collapsed after backlash from the football community. It's unlikely that a similar climbdown will follow for the "super league" academy bosses.

Many in the sector have long been railing against the ever-growing pay of some bosses. Their voices led to letters from the Department for Education, politely asking trust boards to justify such pay. It's about the only lever the department has to control CEO pay.

But, as it turns out, they've even managed to muck that up. It makes our investigation findings that the best-paid CEOs – already on eye-watering salaries – are more likely to get pay rises, and bigger ones, than their peers even more worrying.

It will also not go down well with teachers, who have just been told to expect a pay freeze as Covid costs bite.

Most academy trusts are sensible on CEO pay. But it's right to be worried about the emerging super league.

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The Interview

# Dame Rachel de Souza, children's commissioner


# 'I want to put schools bang in the middle of this office'

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

**Almost seven years after *Schools Week* first profiled Rachel de Souza, we return to find out what she wants to do with the top role for protecting children in the country**

We're like a little republic within the Department for Education!" Rachel de Souza beams at me. The recently appointed children's commissioner for England is standing in front of her new desk on the sixth floor of Sanctuary Buildings, looking through the glass wall of her office at the small nation of researchers and analysts occupying a long room of desks.

She calls one in ("he's brilliant," she whispers) to explain her role: apparently she is "truly independent" of the government, sponsored by the DfE but not required to execute its policy. The office, which has been around for 17 years, should challenge and recommend what the DfE and other departments can do for children. In the role, de Souza counts as a 'corporate sole', which means she is herself a legal entity, a set-up that underlines her independence. "The Queen is one too," de Souza beams again. Wearing shoes with small bows and golden high heels, she is rather queen-like. But before looking into what her six-year reign will bring, let's begin with how it started.

It was an appointment many accused the former academy trust boss of inheriting on connections, rather than merit. After she applied for the job in August, she had multiple interviews including a student panel and a Zoom with Gavin Williamson, before she got the call late one December night. She's been in the post since March 1, but not before many tweets pointed to the patchy record of her academy chain, the Inspiration Trust, on inclusion. The education select committee only narrowly approved her appointment, doubting her "knowledge and experience" outside the schools sector.

They also questioned her commitment to the most vulnerable children, the specific remit of the children's commissioner. High fixed-term exclusion rates and a lacklustre response to children leaving for home education at the Inspiration Trust were raked over. About three years ago de Souza also signed a letter from her campaign group Parents and Teachers for Excellence "supporting in the strongest possible terms the right of heads to exclude pupils"

# The Interview



DAME RACHEL DE SOUZA

LAURA MCINERNEY

'Being at the front of the academies movement means that it's very hard to be seen neutrally'

IT'S A PERSONAL THING

Curriculum Vitae

legally. Yet now de Souza has said "the children's commissioner absolutely wants to see exclusions down to nothing". The change of tone – and her close work at Inspiration with founder and Tory donor Lord Agnew – have led to queries about her authenticity, and accusations of nepotism.

It can't have been the easiest start. "I have found since coming here that every door is open – no one is saying, 'I won't talk to that terrible children's commissioner'," de Souza smiles. What about the education select committee saying "Dame Rachel faces a steep learning curve in taking on this complex role"? Did she find it patronising? Would the same have been said about a male applicant? She rather graciously sidesteps the question. "What our discussion showed is how broad this role is," she nods, pointing out she is the fourth children's commissioner, following

**'I'd like to do a "Where is the best place to grow up as a child?" index'**

incumbents with medical, local authority and charity backgrounds respectively – the last being Anne Longfield, from the 4Children charity. "If you're confident in yourself as a leader, you let these things roll off you – but you also take on the message. I've been getting out to care homes, youth justice settings, NHS groups. There is a huge learning curve," she says, adding seriously: "What I really hope is the committee will be delighted."

How will she ensure this? First, de Souza has launched a survey of children called the Big Ask to seek out what their concerns and hopes are. It aims to be the largest consultation with children ever undertaken in England. With the evidence, she wants to set up "expert groups" to help her "create a joined-up strategy for children that will take us through the next ten years".

"What I'm finding is there isn't that joined

# The Interview

up-ness for children," she says, adding she wants her office to bring the "best, most brilliant ideas" about supporting pupils all together. The children's commissioner role currently has "two halves", she continues: providing evidence and policy. These halves are enabled by the role's "two superpowers", which are being able to ask for data from any public body, and to gain entry to any place where children are. From these functions, de Souza wants to create a third: "innovation". Her ten-year strategy for children will be about innovating a new, overarching approach.

After testing the survey questions at some of her old schools, de Souza already has an idea of five areas for the strategy: family, education, mental health, work and community. "Kids are talking to us about family strain, marriage, hopes for families of their own," she explains. "Then, they're concerned they've missed a lot of school, so are we offering the right curricula, the right pathways?" She adds: "Children also have lots of concerns about mental health since Covid, so we'll definitely be looking at a proper plan for that." She's rightly worried about a "feeling of intergenerational inequality" in terms of job opportunities, while the fifth focus is "something around civic pride, where I come from, the place I'm from". She wants to look at the "wider activities" children can access where they live.

Indeed, geographic place is central to the joined-up strategy – likely an insight from de Souza's time spent in a rural, coastal area. "Every year, we publish the best city to live. I'd almost like to do a 'Where is the best place to grow up as a child?'," she says, adding it would be like an index drawing in lots of data, possibly including rates of exclusion and home education, to build up a localised picture.

Given de Souza is only six weeks in, it's a commendably ambitious plan. To make ministers listen to it, she's clear she will take a different approach to Longfield, whose parting shot was to accuse the government of an "institutional bias" against children. De Souza delicately states: "Some in this role have found where the problems are, and then very strongly and publicly held ministers to account." Instead, she wants to work "collaboratively but independently. Praise what's working, and support ministers to find solutions where it isn't." It would be easy to say

Credit: Ellis O'Brien

Dame Rachel de Souza talks to *Schools Week* commissioning editor Jess Staufenberg

## 'If you're confident in yourself as a leader, you let these things roll off you'

the government is in for an easier ride. But de Souza has a knack for working the political system in order to exert greater influence. Perhaps this quality should be recognised as a strength, rather than a suspicion.

Rather, my concern is de Souza's lack of focus in our conversation about specific groups of vulnerable children, such as those with special educational needs and disabilities, in prison, or refugee children. She's picking up on themes, but less on groups. Indeed, this seems to be a deliberate part of her strategy. "Some people thought this role was for the most vulnerable children, but post-Covid, it's really for all children." There's something sensible in this, but de Souza has made the mistake of overlooking specific groups of children before, and came to regret it. In 2018/19, her trust's fixed-term exclusion rate was 17.2 per cent, compared with 1.4 per cent nationally. How did she miss that?

She tells me it was a "blip year" but adds: "I realised I'd been putting my efforts into outcomes [...] All the heads were acting, I believe, with integrity, but I think they knew my questions to them were all going to be on outcomes and curriculum." When she saw the exclusions data, de Souza said she thought, "No, we need an inclusion strategy".

So what's her strategy for SEND children now? "I'm developing my thinking here," she replies. "For me, it's the whole layer around special educational needs, mental health, those children in the pre-care threshold, that needs the best thinking." She adds, "We've got to put children first." The answer is vague.

In a way, the question is not whether de Souza should have the role: she has considerable experience working with children of all backgrounds, and a track record of achievement in tough stakeholder environments. The question is whether any other candidate for the job had much greater expertise with extremely vulnerable children.

Yet de Souza's ambitiousness can give her "little republic" and the education voice real clout within the corridors of power. "I want to put schools bang in the middle of this office," she tells me. It seems unlikely she'll stand for questions being ignored. "Wouldn't it be great if we had a children's minister who attended Cabinet?" she turns to me, eyes shining. "Wouldn't that be great?"

# Opinion

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LUKE SIBIETA

Research fellow,
Education Policy Institute

## The recovery will need funding – but just what sums are required?

**New analysis by the EPI shows the scale of ambition needed to ensure children's lives are set right after the pandemic, writes Luke Sibieta**

For many months, disruption has dominated young lives. Most have missed more than half a year of normal schooling and been starved of childhood experiences. The prime minister has responded with a pledge that no child will be "left behind as a result of the learning they have lost".

A long-term recovery package is set to be unveiled in a few weeks, but it's still uncertain whether the government is about to pull out all the stops and deliver a truly ambitious catch-up settlement. So if the PM is to stay true to his word, exactly just how much extra funding would be required?

To answer this, we first have to understand the extent of lost learning and the long-run consequences. EPI's latest analysis for the DfE shows that even by the first half of the autumn term, pupils were already about three months behind. This is incredibly alarming when you consider that it doesn't even include the prolonged pre-Christmas disturbance, or the chaotic switch to remote learning in early 2021. There is probably more to come.

And the impacts are likely to extend beyond the academic. There are accelerating mental health problems and a significant risk of disengagement for a small but significant minority.

If lost educational progress alone is not dealt with, our analysis shows that today's children could be £8,000 to £50,000 poorer as adults over their working lives. Summed up over eight million children, this makes for an eye-watering sum of £60 to £420 billion, which is likely to be an under-estimate of the potential long-run costs.

Such figures can seem overwhelming, but they are not intended as a prediction of inevitable doom and gloom for today's children. Instead, they should be regarded as a clarion call to today's policymakers.

There are concrete examples from Argentina and Germany where lost learning has translated into big long-run costs. But there are also examples of policymakers using crises as a catalyst for positive and sustained change to help pupils catch up and more, such as improvements to the New Orleans school system following Hurricane Katrina or the massive cooperative efforts between schools following the Christchurch earthquake in 2011.

After the Second World War – partly thanks to the reforming efforts of Rab Butler – the UK finally implemented a system of universal free secondary schooling and increased the school leaving age, which has been shown to have large positive effects.

> "It's not just about how much is spent, but what it's spent on

The common thread is that education recovery is not a passive thing. It requires sustained focus on ways to improve the quality of provision. So given what we know, how much should the government be spending on it?

Our assessment is that it will take a multi-year package worth about £10 to £15 billion in England – significantly more than the £1.7 billion committed to so far. This is based on the scale of the loss, what we normally spend on education, evidence on the effects of school spending and what international competitors are already doing.

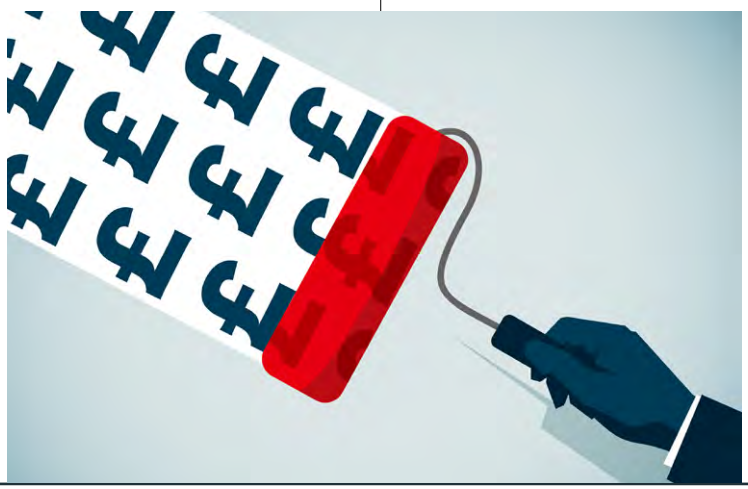
And it's not just about how much is spent, but what it's spent on. As we move towards the recovery announcement, EPI will be publishing a specific set of evidence-led and costed proposals with a strong focus on teacher quality and support, mental health and one-to-one interventions.

Of course, schools don't bear the full responsibility of addressing lost learning and educational inequalities. Extra support in the early years and post-16 must feature in any recovery plans.

We believe such a package will be sufficient to help pupils catch up, but a return to where we were before cannot be the ceiling for ambition. If the recovery package proves effective, it should be sustained to help deal with deeper problems, such as the yawning 18-month disadvantage gap that persisted well before the pandemic.

Getting this right – genuinely tackling lost learning through a properly funded and targeted recovery package – could serve as one of the greatest demonstrations of the long-term value of investing in education.

We must first meet the scale of this crisis. But let's also use it as a chance to reshape things for the better.



# Opinion

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MATTHEW KLEINER-MANN
CEO, Ivy Learning Trust

## 'Covid has changed education for the better – and we won't go back'

**It's time to stop talking about the lost generation and start getting excited about the next generation, says Matthew Kleiner-Mann**

The past year's ceaseless flow of negative headlines has caused us to coin the phrase 'doomscrolling'. That's bad enough for adults, but imagine being a child reading again and again about Covid's 'lost generation'.

Many have lost loved ones. All have lost some learning. And we can't undo that, but the pandemic has also given us a rare opportunity to re-evaluate and rebuild our systems stronger. To make practical changes. To improve day-to-day school life. To be braver, more effective leaders too.

And it's not just about what we can do for children, but what they can do for themselves. The experience has taught them valuable technology and life skills which will make them more resilient, more motivated and more employable in the future.

Some of the most effective changes our schools have made over the past year have been small adjustments with a big impact on learning. Using technology to enrich learning in school and at home is the obvious one, but there are plenty others.

Staggering play times has led to a significant reduction in playground incidents. Children get back to good learning quicker after breaks as a result. Coming into school in PE kit on PE days has had a similar effect.

We've had to re-evaluate our systems for monitoring children's progress too. More regular progress meetings with teaching staff have given us much greater agility in identifying and fixing barriers to learning.

And levels of parental engagement have soared. Participation in surveys has increased fivefold in some of our schools. Parents now have a much deeper understanding of how their children learn and how to encourage them, along with a deeper respect for school staff.

Internally, new ways of communicating with each other have sped up the spread of good practice. We use video conferencing to share effective innovations through masterclasses that are accessible to all. Our good practice groups meet more regularly, resulting in stronger and more productive networks. Even trustee and governing body attendance has improved.

Covid has changed the way we lead, and we are seeing much greater collaboration locally and regionally. We all recognised early on that we needed each other to navigate these unprecedented times, and that sense has only grown, even as we begin to see light at the end of the tunnel.

> "Children's adaptability to the new normal has been astounding'

Within our trust too, we have collaborated more than ever, saving time and stress when dealing with unfamiliar challenges.

And that support has made us braver. "Let's go with Google Classroom." "Let's deliver live lessons." "Let's send all our school computers home." "Let's change our staffing patterns." "Let's meet unions early on to talk about our plans."

We couldn't have imagined ourselves capable of half of it. And yet, here we are. Decisive leadership focused on single critical issues has united us, and that approach will be crucial to catch-up plans.

So much for our ability to support children and deliver an outstanding education system. But what of the children themselves?

Well, they've had to deal with remote learning on unfamiliar platforms, often with little or no adult support. For many, daily routines have been different and more challenging to follow.

Yet their adaptability to the new normal has been astounding. If anything, we should be focused, not on what they've lost, but on how much more independent, self-motivated and resilient they are than we thought. We should be praising them, acknowledging their skills and helping them to recognise how these will help them in the future.

Sure, some will need extra support, both academic and emotional. Well, that's what teachers do! It won't hurt to strengthen them in their efforts. And mental health practitioners may now be commonplace on school sites, but wouldn't we have always welcomed them?

This generation of children are at the forefront of change. Thought of properly, they are not some lost generation, but the lucky ones.

We just need to be brave enough to tell them so.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MOLLIE BENJAMIN
Senior solicitor, Child Brain Injury Team, Bolt Burdon Kemp

## Children with SEND are being let down and schools can help

**Getting the right placement is fraught and unduly challenging and school support is vital to families' uphill battle, writes Mollie Benjamin**

As a solicitor who acts for children who have suffered brain injuries, I am all too familiar with the difficulties faced by families in navigating the special educational needs (SEN) system and securing appropriate school placements.

In truth, children who have additional educational needs are being let down by this system. A lack of funding coupled with the complicated application process and costly appeal system is often a barrier to children receiving the educational input, equipment and therapies they need to access the curriculum and thrive throughout their education.

This failing SEN system also results in schools and teachers being denied the training, support and funds they need to provide necessary input for children with complex needs.

The Children and Families Act 2014 was hailed as the biggest reform to child welfare legislation in decades. It introduced Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) for children and young people aged up to 25 who are assessed to have special educational needs.

The aim of the EHCP is to identify a child or young person's educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support required to meet those needs in one legally binding document.

The law sets out what should be included in the EHCP within the 12 sections including health, social care and special educational provisions required by a child or young person that are related to their SEN or disability. The task of how to implement them is decided by the Local Authority, with little indication of guidelines or recommended practices for assessments and subsequent development of EHCPs.

But ever-growing restraints on funding are driving Local Authorities to provide inadequate support for children with SEND, even if they are entitled to it within their EHCP. A recent BBC News article highlighted the challenges faced by parents of two children, both of whom have autism, in securing a suitable school place. One family spent £18,500 challenging the local authority's decision in the special educational needs and disabilities tribunal. The local authority had refused to carry out an assessment for an EHCP.

> "The process is onerous, expensive, time consuming and overly adversarial

Refusals to assess, and inadequate provisions in EHCPs following assessment often mean that families have no choice but to challenge the local authority in the tribunal. The appeal process is intended to be 'user friendly' but this is a far cry from what families face in reality.

Although legal representation is not required, families often face a local authority represented by an experienced legal team; without it, it is an uneven playing field. Few families are in a position to instruct solicitors privately. Legal aid is only available in a small number of cases, and even then it is limited in scope. The process is onerous, expensive, time consuming and overly adversarial.

In 2019-2020, 7,917 appeals were lodged at the tribunal and in 95 per cent of those, families were successful over the local authority. It is estimated that the total cost of defending appeals at the tribunal since the introduction of the Act is almost £200 million.

And there are no 'winners'. Each successful appeal represents a child who was entitled to more support, went without, and had to fight to receive it. Or a child who didn't get the placement they needed, with repercussions for them and others.

In 2019, only 60.4 per cent of new EHCPs were issued within the prescribed 20-week time limit. There is rarely any action taken to ensure that local authorities adhere to procedures within time.

The system is failing young people and needs to change. But in the meantime, schools play a vital role in assisting children to secure appropriate provisions for support in their EHCPs.

This dysfunctional process inevitably causes tensions can all too easily mean relationships become fraught, but open lines of communication with families are essential.

Working together, teachers and parents are best placed to identify needs early. The evidence they gather can prove vital to ensure children access the support they need to thrive and reach their potential.

Which is what the system should be supporting, rather than undermining.

# Opinion

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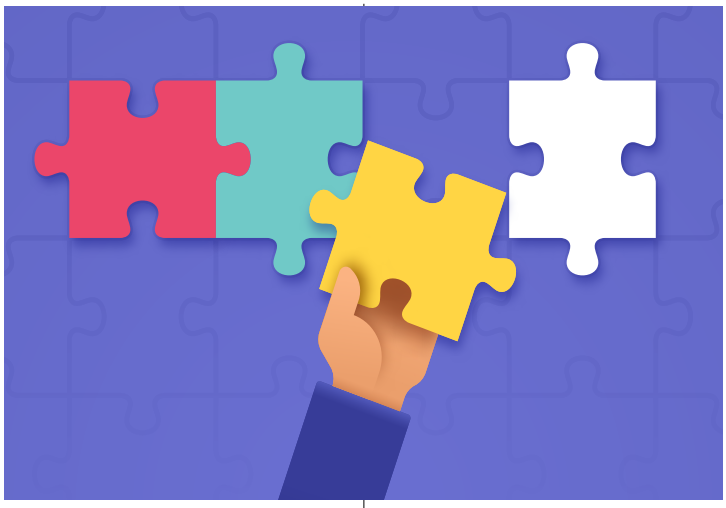
DR CHRIS HAMPSHIRE
Chair and trustee, Frank Field Education Trust and trustee, Weaver Trust

## Is future multi-academy trust consolidation inevitable?



**Unless the DfE provides an incentive, only a small number of MAT mergers are likely to take place. Dr Chris Hampshire explains why**

In a recent spat in these pages, National Governance Association CEO Emma Knights signposted ethical concerns with a direction of travel that seems to be towards ever larger MATs. United Learning CEO Jon Coles riposted that we should really be asking why MATs are so still small. In reality, a MAT-led system as imagined in this argument would rely on a number of mergers, and that means that it is still only a very remote prospect.

For a start, while each MAT has direct control of its expenditure costs it really has little certainty about its projected income. Such projections depend on careful and detailed assessment of the different cost and revenue scenarios including the DfE funding formula and pupil numbers. It is worth noting that school spending per pupil in England will be about the same level in 2022-23 as it was in 2009-10 with no real growth in spending per pupil over the past 13 years. This represents a significant squeeze on a MAT's revenue.

And in spite of even the most careful scenario analysis, a number of unexpected costs can arise. The 7.2 per cent increase in employer pension contributions from September 2019 is a case in point. The government will compensate MATs for these increased costs and has committed to £1.5 billion in spending to continue this compensation through to 2022-23. However, each MAT will need to assess the impact of the government not continuing to fund these increased employer contributions after that date.

> "There has been no real growth in per pupil spending over the past 13 years

Furthermore, each MAT will incur additional annual costs should education spending fail to keep pace with any annual increase in salaries. The 2019 spending review proposed an increase in education funding of MATs of £7.1 billion between 2019-20 and 2022-23 covering pupils aged five to 16. Each MAT determines what, if any, annual pay award is given to employees, but any increase beyond government funding creates additional cost pressures on their short- and long-term finances.

Single school trusts are very limited in their ability to use economies of scale to deliver cost-savings compared with MATs, who can centralise functions such as procurement, IT and HR. This centralisation allows each school within the MAT to benefit from shared expertise and collective purchasing power. But once a critical mass of schools and pupils within a MAT is reached, only very marginal cost savings are achieved thereafter. The DfE appears to hope shared expertise and services will be sufficient to incentivise MAT mergers and growth, but the jury is out. Leaders will certainly be wary of the risk of over-reaching.

Financial and operational considerations aside, improving pupil outcomes should be the ultimate success criteria for any MAT. On that front, according to the DfE itself, there is no clear relationship between the size of a MAT and its performance on the Progress 8 measure. Smaller MATs apparently have more variable Progress 8 scores compared with larger MATs. But the difference is marginal and, as Jon Coles points out, there is no data on very large MATs.

And in the end, it is the members of each MAT who have the final decision on whether it is in the best interests of their organisation to grow or merge. MAT mergers or take-overs should be based upon detailed analysis – including current and future government policy, financial aspects, ability to improve pupil outcomes, etc. Any financially viable MAT over a three- to five-year term has very little incentive to engage.

Nevertheless, some MAT mergers and consolidation will occur. Changing internal and external market forces will occasionally outweigh other considerations, including financial viability. But the long and short of it is that only a small number of MAT mergers are likely to proceed in the short term.

That is, unless the DfE moves to incentivise them, by, for example, changing the rules to include mandatory re-brokering of schools in a 'requires improvement' category.

# Reviews

BOOK REVIEW

★★★★★

## Young People On the Margins: Priorities for Action in Education and Youth

**Author:** Loic Menzies and Sam Baars
**Publisher:** Routledge
**Reviewer:** Melissa Benn, writer and education activist

*Young People On the Margins* is a valuable and lucid account of the multiple ways in which generations of vulnerable young people have been failed by our education system and by society itself, and what we might do about it.

The book considers six discrete groups: children who come into contact with social services, the homeless, pupils with special needs or disabilities, those from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller (GRT) background, children with mental health problems, and young people who come from economically disadvantaged areas that do not fit the prevalent models of inner-city deprivation.

Each chapter follows broadly the same template: human stories mixed with carefully constructed evidence on disadvantage and marginalisation, ending with detailed proposals for reform. Taken together, the book represents a decade of work by the Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY), led by the ebullient Loic Menzies, who here contributes a sensitive opening and closing chapter.

Some of the material, such as the difficulties faced by children with special needs, feels more familiar than others. But no matter how familiar, it is always poignant.

Ellie Mulcahy and Abi Angus open their contribution on pupils from a GRT background by describing a recent roundtable with experts and practitioners to discuss the problems. The seminar quickly becomes "one of the most difficult conversations I have been involved in... such was the rawness of attendees' emotions" at the prejudice faced by GRT pupils.

Even more shocking is Will Millard's chapter on children who come into contact with social services. He tells of a young woman with an eating disorder, raped on her first day at a teenage psychiatric centre. Sent to another foster home soon after her 15th birthday, she was then raped and beaten by her foster father and two of his friends.

Many of the experiences of marginalisation described here are more subtle: the result of harried teachers with big classes unaware of different cultural customs in some communities, or without the time to learn about pupils' lives outside school.

It is inevitable that young carers or those without anywhere to live, for example, will have very different needs to their more settled, supported peers. In many cases, sensitive earlier intervention could halt unnecessary exclusions, and prevent young people drifting further to the margins. As one contributor points out, it is also important for teachers and other professionals not to have a 'deficit discourse' around any of the young people, their families or communities.

While contributors take a suitably stern approach to dubious practices such as 'off rolling', all implicitly recognise that the vast majority of schools are doing the best they can in straitened times.

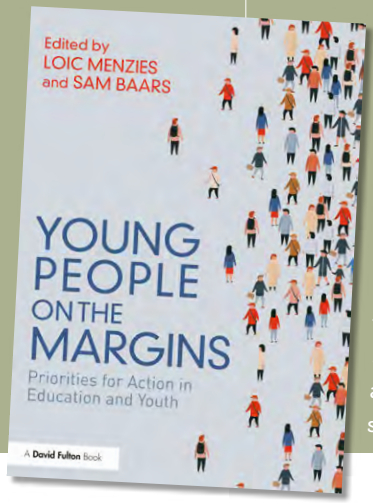
The book deliberately steers clear of bigger political points, even though the implications of its findings are clear. Child poverty is the thread that links most of the stories in this book, and it is obvious that austerity measures have pushed more into poverty while stripping funding from schools and youth services.

As Alix Robertson points out in her chapter on mental health, the rise in exam pressure is an added stress for many young people. Meanwhile, an increasingly atomised education system makes it much more difficult to share and implement valuable lessons about 'what works'.

In many ways, the book's proposals are reminiscent of the Every Child Matters agenda of the closing years of the last Labour government: the urgent need for a crack team of 'para professionals' (social workers, counsellors, youth services) working within every school, and more attention paid to specific and pastoral needs in order to help every child flourish.

But *Young People on the Margins* also works as a handbook for school leaders who are keen to address problems in the here and now. Each chapter ends with a useful list of measures, many of which are within the immediate reach of schools.

Whether it's about early intervention, limiting unnecessary school exclusions or paying more attention to the home lives of marginalised students, this book should be a valuable addition to every staffroom.



# Reviews

**Our blog reviewer of the week is Robin Conway, director of research and innovation at John Mason School**

**@JMSREFLECT**

## TOP BLOGS of the week

**Making the Move from Written Marking Towards Verbal Feedback. Some Practical Tips.**
**@sarahlarsen74**

I am probably not alone in still doing far too much written marking despite having seen the power of non-written feedback and experienced the positive impact on workload. Thus Sarah Larsen's opening claim to have not marked a set of books for over three years instantly grabbed my attention.

Larsen explains how after participating in the Verbal Feedback Project with a colleague, they moved towards using a combination of whole-class feedback and live marking. The blog is highly practical, summarising her methods and sharing a very useful planning tool for whole-class feedback.

Larsen also makes a powerful case for the validity of these methods of feedback noting that what they have in common is that "they cause students to THINK HARD about any feedback given, and, crucially, the improvements that they subsequently need to make". That is the essence of effective feedback.

**Teaching a Subject as a Non-Specialist**
**@MissHudsonHist**

It is not uncommon for teachers, particularly of foundation subjects, to have to teach outside their subject areas. Hopefully, few have faced the challenges and lack of support Miss Hudson experienced in her NQT year.

However, what has come out of it is this nice piece which offers some useful, practical advice for those supporting non-specialists. There are always going to be additional challenges if we're teaching outside our specialism but, as Hudson concludes, "Sharing, support and leadership are crucial in enabling non-specialist teachers to teach well".

If subject leads follow these suggestions then non-specialist teachers should be better supported. And if you're going to be teaching outside your specialism, this makes a good list of specific support to ask for to enable you to thrive.

**The Video Lesson**
**@MrTSci409**

After all the technological challenges of online learning, live lessons and remote meetings, Mr Taylor takes us back to something much more old-school. Conjuring a familiar image for many of us of the video player being rolled into the classroom, Taylor applies the principles of cognitive science to getting the most out of learning from a video.

The prior reading of questions to help students focus on the key content and avoid cognitive overload seems a particularly important technique. Taylor makes a strong case that video lessons are not 'lazy lessons' and that "whilst videos shouldn't be considered a replacement for expert teachers, they certainly do have some benefits which can enhance our classroom practice".

**Systems not Goals**
**@MrsBallAP**

It is quite possible that the next educational initiative to go the way of learning styles and brain gym will be the near-obsession with target grades. Mrs Ball is certainly of the opinion that the time is ripe for change.

There have been good blogs on this before and Ball references two of these (by Ben Newmark and John Tomsett). However, her blog brings an original line of thought to the debate. Drawing on her reading of James Clear, she argues that the use of target grades forces a focus on goals. Instead, she argues, a focus on "building school systems with the highest expectations, a relentless drive and commitment to improvement and a focus on the highest quality curriculum" would be much more beneficial. A convincing and well-put case.

**The 'Language Leap' At Transition**
**@HuntingEnglish**

I have a conscious bias towards lesser-known bloggers for these reviews, but Alex Quigley is one of the 'big names' whose work I find so useful I will happily make an exception. Here, he responds to Johnson's claims about an 'illiteracy surge' by returning attention to the 'language leap' between primary and secondary education.

The issues are clearly explained and the solutions both practical and research-engaged. Crucially, he argues that an emphasis on "training secondary school teachers in teaching reading, writing, academic talk and more, with the specific attention to their subject" is a good first step. While he rightly points out that these issues haven't been created by lockdown, perhaps it will be the impetus we need to redouble our efforts in this vital area.



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# Research

Harry Fletcher-Wood reviews the evidence on a school-related theme. Contact him on Twitter @HFletcherWood if you have a topic you would like him to cover

# Is the evidence we rely on all it's cracked up to be?

**Harry Fletcher-Wood, associate dean, Ambition Institute**

The potential of feedback, growth mindset and deliberate practice to boost learning has become familiar through repetition in books, blog posts and training sessions. We don't always have time to unearth the roots of these claims, but three recent studies have, each shedding new light on the strengths and limits of these approaches.

The EEF Toolkit ranks feedback as the single most powerful teaching technique. In a thoughtful review, Stefan Ekecrantz traces the origins of this claim. The crucial source is a 1996 meta-analysis of feedback interventions by Kluger and DeNisi. Ekecrantz examines it closely, and raises a couple of concerns about applying its conclusions in schools.

First, Kluger and DeNisi focused on the way feedback affects behaviour – not how it affects learning. Later authors extended Kluger and DeNisi's conclusions to argue that feedback has powerful effects on learning – but this isn't fully justified by the original research.

Second, Kluger and DeNisi included a range of studies – including those testing the effect of feedback on workers' use of ear protection, hockey players' body checks, and people's extra-sensory perception (apparently feedback helps). Only nineteen of the 131 studies included were in schools and most focused on changing classroom behaviour – not learning.

Just one study looked at students aged 15-18: it examined the effect of feedback on high-achieving students. It didn't help. Clearly, feedback can influence people's behaviour – but the effect on learning may be weaker than we believed.

Growth mindset theorists have argued that students with a growth mindset are better at pursuing learning and overcoming challenges. In this study, Alexander Burgoyne, David Hambrick and Brooke Macnamara tested six claims made by growth mindset researchers about the differing beliefs and behaviours of people with growth and fixed mindsets.

Assessing students' beliefs and efforts, they found that three claims produced insignificant results; two produced statistically significant but insubstantial results; and one produced a significant result in the 'wrong' (unexpected) direction: people with a 'fixed' mindset responded better to feedback than people with a growth mindset.

Clearly, how students see themselves influences what they do. But – as the researchers conclude – this does not mean that growth mindset is a robust application of this idea: "Our results suggest that the foundations of mindset theory are not firm and, in turn, call into question many assumptions made about the importance of mindset."

Anders Ericsson consistently argued that deliberate practice is all it takes to develop expertise. In a paper that launched ten thousand others, he found that elite violinists had spent more time in deliberate practice than weaker violinists. (This paper was misinterpreted by Malcolm Gladwell as implying that it takes ten thousand hours to become an expert.)

Twenty-five years later, Brooke Macnamara and her colleagues 'replicated' the experiment. They copied the original study's approach with a few improvements, like ensuring the interviewer didn't know whether they were interviewing an 'elite' or a 'good' violinist, which might influence the results.

Surprisingly, they found that 'good' violinists had practised more than 'elite' ones; both groups had accumulated ten thousand hours' deliberate practice. Deliberate practice still made a substantial difference to how well they played (around a quarter of the difference). But its influence was less clear cut, and less substantial than claimed.

Testing existing claims, and improving upon them, is central to science. Yet at the time of writing, Macnamara's replication study has been cited 16 times. The original, 11,825 times. Granted, the original has a 25-year head start, but Macnamara's paper is more recent, better-conducted and almost certainly more accurate.

This is why I think it's worth discussing these critiques. Each of the original arguments has merit: feedback, deliberate practice, and how students see themselves all affect their learning. But these limited claims can morph into bolder slogans. "Feedback should be our top priority!" "Deliberate practice is all it takes." "Growth mindset is everything!"

To use evidence well, we must acknowledge the merits – and the limits – of good ideas.

# WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

## MONDAY

With little fanfare, the Department for Education announced this week it had appointed a contractor to run a "social media listening tool".

There's very little detail included in the £53,000 contract tender notice, but the department confirmed it would use the tool to "understand how education policies are being discussed on social media to provide real-time audience insight".

After a year in which school staff unions have complained repeatedly about not being consulted on key decisions, this attempt to listen to randoms on social media does seem slightly cynical...but maybe the department is also planning to start "listening" to sector workers too?

***

Gavin Williamson is rarely rolled out these days, even to discuss education with the media, so it was strange to hear him talking for the government on the hot potato of political lobbying the other day.

During an interview with Radio 4, the education secretary insisted no civil servants moonlighted in the private sector while working in his department. It follows a backlash over lobbying by former PM David Cameron.

"There were some people that had worked on charitable bodies, but, other than that, nothing else," he told the *Today* programme.

Surprisingly, Gav failed to mention how the DfE saw no problem with allowing Lords Agnew and Nash to hold roles in multi-academy trusts while also being the academies minister said trusts were accountable to.

## TUESDAY

The current obsession of senior Conservative politicians with the Union Flag, and more specifically, their desire to see it flown everywhere, meant it was only a matter of time before attention turned to schools.

Following the publication of a poll that showed almost 40 per cent of the British public believes all schools should fly the flag, MP Andrew Rosindell weighed into the debate, insisting that "all schools should fly the Union Jack outside their school ... and a different pupil each morning should be given the honour of raising the flag at the start of the school day".

But we're not sure Rosindell has really thought through the logistics. What happens when a school runs out of pupils who haven't had a go? Will mass expulsions be in order? Or swaps with other schools? Or cloning? All seems a bit much just so that a small group of politicians with a weird flag fetish can get their way...

## WEDNESDAY

There was, by all accounts, no love lost between Nick Gibb and Robert Halfon when the latter left the Department for Education. And we are in no doubt the everlasting schools minister was far from pleased when his former skills minister colleague seized control of the education committee.

The pair have clashed often over policy since working together for a brief period between 2016 and 2017, but never so publicly as this week, when a war of words broke out on the Conservative Home website.

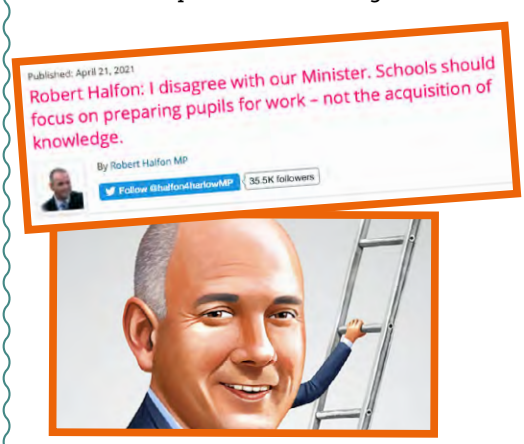
Gibb wrote for the site in late March, arguing that now is not the time to give up on the education reforms that he has been pursuing for the past 150 years at the DfE.

It wasn't the main thrust of the argument that angered Halfon, but a throwaway line buried in the piece in which Gibb said: "We must strongly resist the calls from those who talk about ripping up our curriculum to make it more 'relevant' or to make it solely about preparing pupils for work."

"Respectfully, I couldn't disagree more," replied Halfon in his own Conservative Home article responding to Gibb's Conservative Home article, which was in itself a sort of response to another Conservative Home article.

"While education wears many hats, its primary purpose must surely be employment."

It was at this point that education Twitter collapsed into fits of rage.






## THURSDAY

We expect GCSE and A-level students were reassured to read this week that Ofqual chief Simon Lebus is expecting things to run smoothly this year.

The interim chief regulator told the i newspaper that "there are all sorts of things that could go wrong this summer, but we go into it much better prepared than we were last year".

Yikes!

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# FEDERATION ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER

L9-L13
(Leadership Pay Scale)
Permanent from September 2021

new wave federation

This is an exciting leadership position within a dynamic and highly experienced team. The New Wave Federation consists of three high performing and innovative schools in Hackney, London. We aim to provide the best possible primary education in a stimulating and creative environment. The Federation holds both a National English Hub and Ed Tech Demonstrator School. The New Wave Federation has been awarded Apple Distinguished School status, recognising our commitment to technology in education.

New Wave Federation prides itself in its drive to provide innovative education for all of its pupils. We are looking for a highly visible, proactive leader to join us as Assistant Headteacher. We seek to appoint an experienced and skilled leader who will bring a wealth of knowledge and energy to the well established team.

Our reputation for high standards is well known. We aim to provide exceptional learning experiences for all of our children, regardless of their background. As Assistant Headteacher, the successful candidate will lead curriculum subjects with the aim of providing excellence for all.

Although based in one school, our staff work across the federation dependent on need.

Application packs are available from the Federation Business Manager, Ms Alia Choudhry at **achoudhry@newwavefederation.co.uk**

**Closing Date for applications: 12.00pm, Friday 30th April 2021 Interviews: w/c Monday 10th May 2021**

**Grazebrook Primary School Lordship Road, London N16 0QP 0208 802 4051**

**Shacklewell Primary School, Shacklewell Row, London,E8 2EA 0207 254 1415**

**Woodberry Down Primary School, Woodberry Grove, London, N4 1SY 020 8800 5758**

## Layton Primary School

**www.layton.blackpool.sch.uk**

# Deputy Headteacher

**The Headteacher and Governors of this Outstanding school are looking to appoint a new Deputy Headteacher from September 2021.**

Layton Primary School is looking to recruit an individual who is ready to move into deputy headship within a busy, outstanding three-form-entry primary school. This is a wonderful opportunity for the right candidate to lead, learn, challenge, teach, plan and empower others alongside the Senior Leadership team.

The successful appointee will need to be able to demonstrate a proven track record of high quality teaching in order to secure high standards, alongside the ability and experience of learning and managing other staff towards improved outcomes. A clear notion of how to improve yourself and others is a key element of the role, together with improving the existing multi-faceted talents within school. Curriculum development will be a key area of your role, working with all stakeholders to secure improvement to our intended and implemented curriculum.

Our school values opinions, promotes individuals' strengths, and creates opportunities for personal growth. This post represents a superb career opportunity in a modern school with excellent new facilities and technology.

To gain further information please visit our advertisement at www.layton.blackpool.sch.uk/current-vacancies

Informal conversations with the Headteacher are welcomed, in addition to a visit to school, by prior arrangement. We have scheduled two opportunities to visit school for a socially distanced tour, on either **Thursday 15th April at 2pm or Thursday 22nd April at 2pm**.

Please email **recruitment@layton.blackpool.sch.uk** to book onto one of these visits or request a telephone conversation with Mr Clucas, Headteacher.

*Layton Primary School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children/vulnerable adults. This post is subject to satisfactory two year reference history, Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check (previously CRB check), medical clearance, evidence of any essential qualifications and proof of legal working in accordance with the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996.*

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anthem

# Principal
## Oxford Spires Academy

## Hours: Full time

Anthem Schools Trust is seeking an exceptional individual to lead Oxford Spires Academy following the appointment of the current Principal to a second headship within another multi-academy trust. Oxford Spires Academy is part of Anthem Schools Trust, an education charity serving over 8,000 children and young people in 16 schools across the East Midlands, London and the Thames Valley.

We are looking to appoint a Principal with a proven track record at either Principal or Deputy Principal level. As a senior leader in our organisation, the post-holder would be expected to embrace Anthem's values of integrity, collaboration and excellence and work closely with other schools across the Trust, whilst enjoying the autonomy to further develop the Academy's distinctive ethos.

**To discover more about this exciting opportunity, please click here.**

**Find out more about Oxford Spires Academy at www.oxfordspiresacademy.org**

**Summerfields Primary School**
Newport
Isle of Wight

# Headteacher

we think... we learn... we grow...

The school's Governing Board are seeking to appoint a dynamic, strong, visionary Headteacher with a clear strategic view to school development to take post from 31st August 2021. The position would suit an aspiring Deputy Headteacher or a current Headteacher looking for a new challenge.

Situated in the Island's county town, and commutable from the mainland, the school of 182 pupils has been consistently rated 'Good' by Ofsted.

The prospective Headteacher will be expected to model effective leadership and drive a culture of continuous improvement.

To book a tour (virtual or physical) – please email the School Office **office@summerfields.iow.sch.uk**

To request an application pack - please contact **eps-recruitment@hants.gov.uk.**

**Proposed salary band: L11 to L18 (£54,091 - £64,143)**
**Closing date for applications: 7th May 2021**

**JOB TITLE:** HEAD OF SCHOOL
**LOCATION:** SHENSTONE SCHOOL
**SALARY / SALARY RANGE:** L19-L24
**CLOSING DATE:** 30/04/2021
**INTERVIEW DATE:** WEEK COMMENCING 17/05/2021
**START DATE:** 01/09/2021

SHENSTONE SCHOOL | TKAT Inspiring learners, changing lives.

As the Head of School you will work alongside the Executive Head Teacher, Senior Leadership Team, Governing Board, TKAT Trust and staff to develop the shared vision and strategic plan, which serves to inspire and motivate pupils and all other members of the school community. You will lead on teaching and learning and help to ensure that we consistently offer an environment which enables each child to achieve their full potential through the provision of quality teaching and learning at our specialist school setting.

Shenstone School is a special school for pupils who have severe and/or complex learning difficulties within the London Borough of Bexley. Shenstone School is located on two sites, Sidcup (for younger pupils) and Crayford (for older pupils). We work hard to ensure that Shenstone is a safe, happy, welcoming and truly outstanding place for our pupils to thrive. Our school benefits from impressive facilities across the two sites, enabling us to offer a wide range of opportunities and activities for learning both inside and outside the classroom.

For more information about the role please email **admin@shenstone-tkat.org/phone** the office on **0208 302 1743** and request a virtual meeting or COVID risk assessed face to face meeting with the Executive Head Teacher.

**Professional qualifications required –**

- Is a qualified teacher with QTS
- Experience of senior leadership in a school (NPQSL/ NPQH)
- Evidence of relevant CPD
- **Experience in a special school setting is essential**

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# HEADTEACHER

## ASHTON PARK SCHOOL

GATEHOUSE GREEN LEARNING TRUST

ASHTON PARK SCHOOL

**Required for September 2021**

**Salary Scale: L32 to L38, £90,379 - £104,687**

**Contract: Permanent**

An exciting opportunity for an established strategic leader who has the skills, knowledge, experience and commitment to continue the transformation journey at Ashton Park School. You can make a tangible difference to young people in South Bristol, in an environment where learning is at the heart of all we do. Implementing quality first teaching is central to our students' success.

Ashton Park is an inclusive, oversubscribed school, committed to providing all our students with an exciting and challenging education where learning, achievement and enjoyment are key. We are proud to host a specialist Resource Base for students with Speech, Language and Communication Needs who are fully integrated into the life of the school. We have 1200 students on roll - 1079 students in Years 7-11 and a further 129 in sixth form. Our school is set on the outskirts of Bristol, in the beautiful grounds of Ashton Park within walking distance of the city centre.

Are you:

- Highly ambitious for every child, whatever their background and abilities
- Able to remove barriers to learning so every child can excel
- Able to inspire, motivate and empower others to deliver the highest quality education

If this sounds like an opportunity for you, please visit our website or the Trust website for further information and details of how to apply.

**Visits to the school: 22nd or 23rd April 2021**

**Closing date for applications:**
**Midday on Thursday 29th April 2021**

We are an Equal Opportunities employer in line with the 2010 Equalities Act. We are committed to advancing equal opportunities for all and eliminating discrimination on any basis, so that equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) underpin all we do. An enhanced DBS check is required for the successful applicant.

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