

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

'Am I a hero or a villain?'
Former DfE director on making decisions in a pandemic



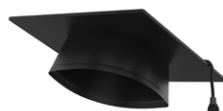
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Autonomy, yes.
But a phone ban is
Williamson's call



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Are universities
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Academies minister questions 'moral purpose' of single school headteachers

- In first interview, Berridge challenges leaders 'sitting in splendid isolation'
- No plans for 'get out' MAT clause, or forced conversion in academy push
- Berridge to meet sex abuse school heads, 900 kids in Ofsted investigation

EXCLUSIVE

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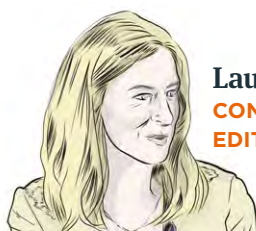
SCHOOLS WEEK

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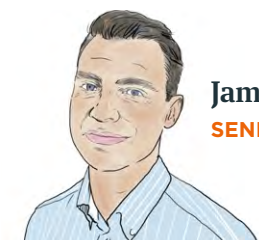
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Make mental health everyone's responsibility



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The benefits (and risks) of 'try before you buy'

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An alternative to A levels? I believe we have one

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Ofsted on 'humanising' the inspectorate

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The Academy Push

Standalone schools targeted in nudge to revive MAT drive

TOM BELGER

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EXCLUSIVE

A minister has urged high-performing standalone academies not to sit in their “splendid ‘outstanding’ isolation,” as the government launches a fresh drive for every school to join a multi-academy trust.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson outlined a raft of policies to revive the academies programme by nudging schools into converting and growing MATs.

Plans include formalising ‘try before you buy’ MAT membership, supporting growth of religious trusts and looking at forcing conversion of long-term ‘requires improvement’ schools (see page 5 round-up).

A Schools Week investigation has established the push to academise comes amid a slump in conversion rates – which started before the pandemic.

Academy openings hit a decade-low amid Covid disruption last year. But officials and experts say there is latent demand to join MATs as a result of the pandemic.

Williamson said the government’s “vision is for every school to be part of a family of schools in a strong multi-academy trust”.

Williamson claimed single schools were “no longer viable” in his speech, vowing to shift England’s “pick and mix” education system towards a “single model” based around MATs.

Academies minister Baroness Berridge told Schools Week it was ministers’ role to issue a “clarion call” to the sector.

“For the person sitting in their splendid ‘outstanding’ isolation, think carefully about what is your moral purpose of not sharing your excellent single academy trust with a wider group of schools.”

National schools commissioner Dominic Herrington revealed this week that 87 per cent of academies are in MATs, up from 80 per cent three years ago.

But flagging conversion rates reveal just how far off course Covid has knocked the academisation agenda.

Conversion rates last year were the lowest since 2010, with just 240 converter academies, 103 sponsored, 57 free schools and one university technology college opening.

The 401 openings mark a 48 per cent drop



Gavin Williamson

on 2019. The analysis includes some schools transferred between trusts which received new DfE reference numbers.

Completed conversions gradually picked up throughout last year, but dipped further in the latest lockdown.

The stark decline comes in spite of the DfE rejecting calls for a national halt to conversions during the pandemic.

The Local Government Association backed a pause last May, warning overstretched councils’ time spent handling conversions was undermining their efforts to deal with the pandemic.

The National Education Union agreed, warning proper consultation was impossible and wrong when schools had “life and death issues to deal with”.

Peacehaven Heights and Telscombe Cliffs, two primary schools in East Sussex, defended consulting virtually on controversial conversion plans earlier this year.

But they U-turned this month amid parent anger and staff strike plans. A council spokesperson said consultation was on hold until all Covid restrictions had lifted to ensure “meaningful consultation”.

Leora Cruddas, CST chief executive, said it was “not at all surprising” Covid had hit conversions, calling it a “capacity issue”.

Sarah Ginns, research manager at Forum Strategy, said trusts had focused on supporting existing schools rather than growth.

Geoff Barton, general secretary

of the Association of School and College Leaders, noted no schools would have received academy orders as Ofsted inspections were suspended.

But official figures show academisation already flagging before Covid struck: 776 schools opened in 2019, a four-year low. Five of the past 10 years had seen more than 1,000 launches.

Cruddas blamed a “lack of clear direction from the then-government” for the slowdown.

Anne West, an education professor at the LSE, also noted a decline could simply be down to the fact so many secondaries had already converted.

But Berridge, Williamson and Herrington all echoed a new CST report in saying the pandemic had boosted school collaboration and highlighted the benefits of MATs. Williamson said central team support had helped schools “concentrate on frontline teaching”.

Herrington said there was a “good platform” for MAT growth, as there was more discussion of their benefits and less on past “high-profile problems” in the academy sector.

“There may be an increase in schools choosing to join trusts as a direct result of the collaborative work many developed during the pandemic,” Ginns added.

But while backing more collaboration between schools, Barton warned against the “narrow idea this has to be done through MAT expansion”.

A DfE spokesperson said: “The Covid outbreak understandably drew the focus of school leaders and governing boards during the last year, but despite the challenges we have over 350 schools in the converter pipeline as of March this year.”



Baroness Berridge

The Academy Push

7 key policies behind the all-academy vision

Gavin Williamson has announced a raft of new policies to nudge the sector towards the government's "vision" for all schools to be academies. Here's what you need to know

1 CONSULTATION ON LONG-TERM RI SCHOOLS JOINING TRUSTS

Williamson stated his ambition to bring schools with a "history of long-term underperformance, which have had three consecutive 'requires improvement' or worse judgments by Ofsted, into strong multi-academy trusts".

He committed to consulting "fully" with the sector on any such changes.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, urged "caution ... about the unintended consequences of new forms of compulsion, such as further stigmatising schools in this category".

2 PLANS TO 'MAKE IT EASIER' TO JOIN MATS

Williamson also said the government wants to "turn that 50 per cent of pupils studying in academies into 100 per cent".

During the summer term the DfE will be "undertaking research and speaking to school leaders" as it seeks "to make the process of joining a multi-academy trust as easy as possible".

3 £24M FUND TO GROW 'STRONG TRUSTS'

The annual trust capacity fund will be increased by £7 million to £24 million for the 2021-22 financial year to "grow existing strong academy trusts and provide more capacity for trusts to take on and support conversions". Guidance on who the fund is for and how to apply will be published in May.

4 SCHOOLS CAN 'TRY BEFORE YOU BUY'

The education secretary encouraged schools to join a multi-academy trust temporarily before deciding to make the leap.

He said the initiative "makes it easier for maintained and standalone schools to explore the benefits of joining a strong trust. Schools can try before they buy and see for themselves first hand what being part of a strong trust involves."

This type of partnership – known as a service-level agreement – isn't new but the government has now published a model agreement and some guidance around it.

Williamson said he saw no reason why every local authority-maintained school

in the country "shouldn't consider taking up this opportunity as soon as possible".

He added: "We want them to make that choice with confidence, this is an important key step for some of those schools that have that nervousness to get over."

5 £1.25M FOR 'TURNAROUND' CATHOLIC TRUST

Williamson said the DfE will work with the Catholic Education Service and dioceses across the country to "establish a new turnaround trust to specifically support Catholic schools in need of intensive support".

The Northwest Catholic Dioceses MAT, funded by £1.25 million from the government, will act as a "temporary home" for inadequate Catholic schools in the region while dioceses work to build MAT capacity.

It is similar to the Falcon Education Trust, set up by the government to take over failing schools.

6 PILOT PROGRAMME FOR NEW FAITH TRUSTS

As there is a "smaller proportion" of Church of England and Catholic academy trusts, the DfE is set to launch a pilot programme in partnership with the CoE and Roman Catholic Church to set up new academy trusts.

The Diocesan Trust Formation Pilot will support nine diocesan academy trusts across England in areas of need. Seven new trusts have been identified, with a further two in the pipeline. The DfE will provide £800,000 in funding.

7 'GREATER CLARITY' ON ACADEMIES HANDBOOK

Williamson said a "clear regulatory framework that can support strong trusts" is needed to bring the "greatest benefits to the greatest numbers".

He explained that such a framework was also needed "to address issues in the small number of cases where they arise".

He added: "Providing clear guidance for trusts will support our vision for strong families of schools, led by strong and effective governance, and this year the academies financial handbook will be updated to bring greater clarity to our guidance."

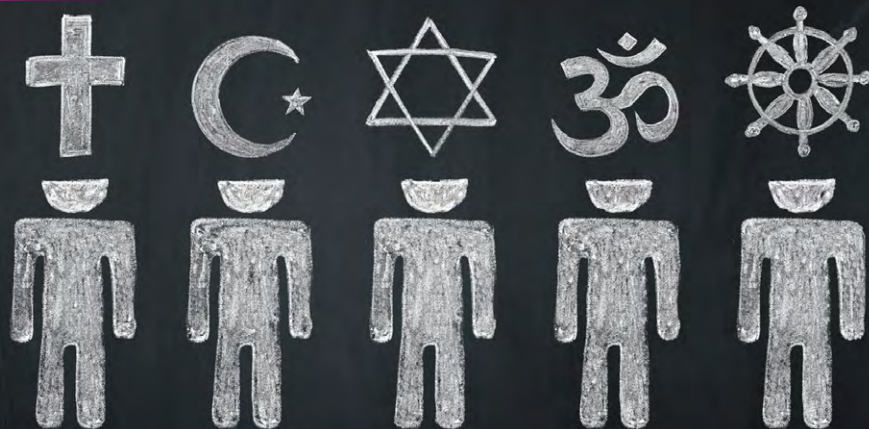
This will include reference to "key legislation", but no "new burdens".



Gavin Williamson

The Academy Push

EXCLUSIVE



Berridge happy for en-masse conversions in faith school plans

SAMANTHA BOOTH
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Baroness Berridge said she would not rule out the rapid growth of religious trusts, after announcing over £2 million to help more faith schools become academies.

The Department for Education will work with the Catholic Education Service and dioceses across the country to establish a £1.25 million "turnaround" trust based in the North West.

An £800,000 "diocesan trust formation pilot" will also set up new academy trusts in partnership with the Church of England and Catholic Church.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson said CofE and Catholic trusts have a smaller proportion of academies compared with non-church schools.

Under a government agreement, the Catholic Church must retain control of governance of Catholic schools. For CofE schools, the "expectation" is for another diocesan or "strong church school-led" trust to run them.

The rules have led to schools converting en masse. Plymouth CAST, whose directors are appointed by the Catholic Bishop of Plymouth, took over 34 schools that all converted in April 2014.

But, just two years later, it received a warning notice after Ofsted found a "significant decline" in some schools since joining the trust. It was later also given a financial warning.

Asked by *Schools Week* whether she would be happy for 30 primary schools in one area to join a trust overnight, Berridge said: "I wouldn't rule it out in the right context."

The academies minister said the

government now has "rigorous processes" for new multi-academy trusts, as the system has "matured" since 2010.

"I would want to be making sure that the expertise that is there ... we would need to make sure that there's great communication, great tech and that there is a very clear plan for that, but I wouldn't rule it out in the right context."

For the pilot, seven new trusts have been identified, with two more in the pipeline. The nine diocesan trusts will be across areas of need in England.

The DfE said the new MATs will have both Catholic and CoE academies and will be church-led. But the trusts themselves do not have a "religious designation".

Nigel Genders, the CoE's chief education officer, said the pilot will allow the "creation of more academy trusts which are suitable for church schools to join".

Meanwhile the "turnaround trust", to be called Northwest Catholic Dioceses MAT, will support Catholic schools in need of "intensive support". It will act as a "temporary home" for inadequate schools while dioceses work to build MAT capacity.

It is similar to the Falcon trust set up by the government to take over failing schools.

The DfE is in final discussions with the churches and dioceses on the MAT and further details will be published in due course.

A spokesperson for the Catholic Education Service, which is working with the DfE to set up the trust, said Catholic academies and MATs play an "important part" in the education landscape.

They added that it was "essential" they were allowed to "flourish in a manner that respects their Catholic ethos".

National behaviour survey part of new discipline drive

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

Schools will take part in a new national behaviour survey, with plans afoot to update guidance on banning mobile phones and exclusions.

Gavin Williamson outlined the proposals as part of a drive for "strong behaviour and discipline policy". The minister also called for "proper and sensible debate" over exclusions when he addressed school leaders at the virtual annual conference of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) on Wednesday.

The Department for Education will shortly commission a new survey, providing a "regular snapshot of the state of behaviour in schools". Williamson said it will show whether behaviour is getting better or worse over time.

It will also "signpost" what schools need and show what interventions are making a difference.

It will not provide school-level data or be used as a school performance measure, Williamson added. The DfE will work closely with unions and the CST in building the survey.

Asked by CST chief executive Leora Cruddas about the reliability of the survey and why Ofsted data on behaviour was not enough, Williamson said: "At present we don't have a proper or accurate measure on this, it's an important first step."

The education secretary reiterated his past support for heads who banned mobile phones, and plans to consult on how to best help them do so. Reforms will come alongside other changes to discipline, behaviour and expulsion guidance later this year.

He said the first schools had now been matched up and training begun as part of the DfE's £10m behaviour hubs project. Applications are underway for the next cohort from September.

MATs and schools with strong records will provide expertise and advice to 500 schools which struggle with poor discipline over the next three years.

Williamson used the term "expulsions" to refer to permanent exclusion. When asked why, he said: "Having the terminology of school exclusion can sometimes actually create a distorting image."

"We need to make a differentiation between those children who are being suspended from school for a short period, as against those who are permanently excluded."

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Academies minister Q&A

Q: What are your top three priorities?

A: The first one is achieving every child in a good school. I talk about a triple whammy: disadvantaged kids who have missed a lot of school, and who are going back to a weak school, and that it affects, and I really am passionate about the staff experience as well. From what I hear it has not necessarily been the most positive experience if you are a member of staff in a school that has been struggling.

The second one is around safeguarding. As I came into the role I was told that I was going to give evidence to the independent inquiry into child sex abuse. So I had to understand very quickly, in depth, our system. I had already actually commissioned an internal review into all of these pieces of the system, because I wanted to be assured that any complaint that came in could be like a coin in a slot, and there were no cracks between any of the statutory or other agencies.

Third, I'm surprised I have become very passionate about the value of money and school resource management and helping schools to buy better – a bit like a money saving expert for them. Being able to get value for money for them is a skill – or an art, actually.

Lord Agnew was very outspoken in his views about this: do you think that schools are wasting money?

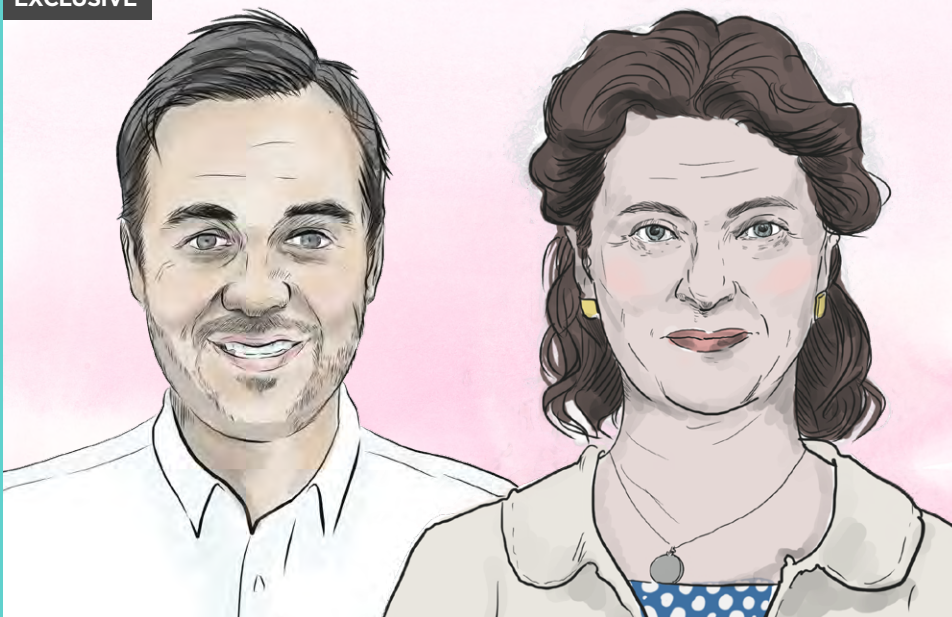
No, not deliberately. If you look at your personal finances – why is it that we have this guilt culture that maybe there's a better deal out there? We have broken that down about individual spending in a way English people talk about getting a better deal, and we just need that in schools. The way we're connecting school business professionals, we are there trying to skill up and equip them and connect them to frameworks to get a better deal. This is about help, there's no shame in asking for a school resource management adviser.

We've only really had savings data from the resource advisers trial?

When will we get to see more?

Obviously with Covid-19, it was not the time to have a relaunch but we have

EXCLUSIVE



Editor asks: Baroness Berridge

Conservative peer Baroness Berridge was appointed academies minister in February last year, a month before Covid-19 forced nationwide school closures. She speaks to *Schools Week* editor John Dickens in her first interview.

been working on that and I am moving away from that big figure of "we have saved x billion" to have much more detailed targets of what has been saved. But yes, we should just be open about this because none of this money comes back to us in the department. It just gets recycled by the school to be spent on other priorities – and that's what we need to make sure they can do.

On to safeguarding. What did your internal review find?

It's a work in progress. A key thing to look at is, have we got the right data? If not, what data should we have and what purpose do you have certain data for? Unfortunately, things take longer than I would like.

Have you read the Everyone's Invited testimonies? What was your reaction?

I met Soma [Sara, the website founder] around about a week ago. I was saddened, actually, that young people

found that was the way to make these claims known. And it has challenged me about how do we ensure the victim's voice or information about culture, because it's not all offences... we do a consultation each year on keeping children safe in education, but is there a way to ensure that our consultation is rather like the consultation on exams, where about half the responses came from students? That's the challenge.

MPs and various organisations have raised these issues with the DfE for years. Why was nothing done at the time?

It's not true to say that we haven't done anything. We responded to initial concerns back in around 2016-17 about peer-to-peer abuse. Of course, you've had the explosion of the use of social media through this as well.

We do need the Ofsted review to look at the framework of inspection. They are going to talk to over 900 children and young people during this process as well.

Q&A

There is scope to consider all options when the review comes out. The first safeguarding document went out in 2006 – this is relatively new. It does take a long time to embed things in and change culture. We're still on a journey.

What do you want to see from schools in response to Everyone's Invited?

Many schools will have taken action. I am looking at bringing together a group of the main schools because I want to meet both sides of this equation. But most schools take the safeguarding responsibilities really seriously. They are the second highest referrers to children's social care, so they are spotting stuff. We also have over 70,000 people on the DBS [Disclosure and Barring Service] and barred list for children's workforce.

I'm aware that – in more schools than I would like to think – that the designated safeguarding lead sometimes has to look at a kid and say, 'You're not going home tonight. I'm calling the police. I'm calling social care. You're not safe.' That's not to say we can't improve things, and obviously the shift in the culture has been raised, but most schools are doing this really well and take these responsibilities really seriously.

On academies, Gavin Williamson said this week that it is "no longer viable for schools to be single entities". What does this mean for single academies?

If you are a "good" or "outstanding" school – now is the time you need to be giving that expertise across a wider group of schools. I know there are school leaders now who are thinking, 'actually, I don't want it to me on my own'.

For the person who's sitting in their splendid "outstanding" isolation: think about the moral purpose here. We all have a responsibility to help these kids catch up. And we've got to work together. We're not going to outlaw that, but think carefully about what is your moral purpose in not sharing your excellent single academy trust with a wider group of schools.

I think it is a sort of a seminal moment: you should be thinking about all of the children, even in your locality, how can you have that participation in the

system. I do want to call them out and say, "please, now is the moment to spread your excellent practice across the system – for the benefit of all these kids".

You've announced policies to nudge towards full academisation – will you make it mandatory?

It's not currently on the agenda.

If we have all academies – will you allow a strong academy to leave a poor-performing academy trust?

The school itself is not a legal entity so

function of the department, I assure you, has gone from strength to strength. Over 250 staff are on the commercial function. We will be managing the contract to ensure it delivers the performances of that contract. We have to be transparent – it has to deliver.

But it's important that MATs are doing this in the school system. I want to see MATs as the home of school improvement. Keeping all of this investment in the system can only be of benefit to the entire school system.

"Keeping vulnerable children in school was something we should be very proud of"

we are not looking at any kind of divorce arrangements. But there are, through the regional school commissioners (RSC), ways of giving that intelligence that we need to help improve the quality of that trust if it's not delivering the support services that it's supposed to. I'd hoped that they would talk to the RSC about how to improve the quality and get more involved in their own trust to help improve that quality across the schools.

What's happening with free schools – has the programme lost momentum?

No, it hasn't lost momentum, but we've had a pandemic. We didn't get free school money in the one-year spending review. That was the biggest signal to me of the state of the public finances.

I just don't know [the size of the next free school wave]. We're going to approach a spending review process, [and] I never would have predicted that we wouldn't have got any money.

United Learning got the EdTech Demonstrators contract. How does the ESFA handle the tensions between being the regulator for the trust, but also partnering with it on a flagship scheme?

The academies handbook makes really clear what their responsibilities are for public money to deliver schools. The commercial

Do you think it was right for the department to sue a council and threaten schools in order to keep them open?

We did everything we could to keep schools open as long as possible because schools are the biggest protective factor for vulnerable kids. I think, as someone living in London, the feeling of the tectonic plate that shifted across Christmas and the Kent variant was just extraordinary.

Keeping vulnerable children in school was something we did well in that second lockdown. It's something we should be very proud of – I don't think many countries did that.

We've been banging on for years about unpublished academy scandal investigations such as Lilac Sky and Bright Tribe. What's going on – will they be published?

I assure you, if there is intervention that we can do – if there is criminal or civil liability... I have been briefed on all of those cases, and most of them we can't publish because you prejudice proceedings. But I assure you that, as a lawyer, I want effective intervention, and those cases are in my inbox.



Lord Agnew

CST conference round-up



Results may be withheld if no agreement on teacher grades

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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GCSE and A-level results may be withheld or delayed during the quality assurance process if a school and board cannot agree on grades, Ofqual's interim chair has warned.

At the third stage of quality assurance this year, exam boards will conduct both random and targeted checks on the evidence used to determine teacher-assessed grades.

Guidance from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) published last month said that a board will decide whether to accept the grades submitted or undertake further review, which "may lead to the withholding of results".

Ian Bauckham, Ofqual's interim chair, explained that if wider sampling at a school does support an "emerging concern" then the board may ask the school to "make adjustments to its grades in the interests of fairness to all candidates".

Speaking at the Confederation of School Trusts annual conference, he added: "In the last analysis, boards reserve the right to withhold or delay the publication of results if it is not possible



to agree an acceptable way forward in such cases."

Schools Week has approached Ofqual to ask what "withholding" means and what the resolution of this situation would be.

Under the "virtual centre visits" section of the JCQ guidance, it says that if an exam board has "significant concerns about a specific element of evidence, the centre may be asked to remove the evidence and reconsider the grade".

It adds that in "rare cases" where it is not

possible to resolve issues arising from a visit, "results may be withheld pending further investigation".

During his speech, Bauckham also said that although there is more time to deal with appeals this year, as results days have been pulled forward, it is likely that appeals will take longer to process than normal.

Boards were "modelling" for various scenarios, he added, as this year the evidence will "look different from one centre to the next".

Bauckham, also chief executive at Tenax Schools Trust, again defended Ofqual asking all schools to send in some evidence of student work in the week of June 21. He said the submissions will be "non-labour intensive" and "administratively straightforward" for exam officers to manage.

He added: "For the majority of centres, where there is no reason for further scrutiny, this will be all that they need to do."

Ofqual's interim chief regulator Simon Lebus had said the submissions will "avoid the need for exam boards to contact centres after the end of term when teachers should be taking a much-needed rest during the summer holidays".

MATs use cover of Covid to centralise

Multi-academy trusts have moved to centralise HR, finance, health and safety and other policies in the wake of the pandemic, a new study suggests.

While only 15 trusts of mixed sizes in the Midlands took part in the research, it points to a potentially significant development for the sector if replicated more widely.

The study, carried out by the Confederation of School Trusts and the University of Nottingham, included questionnaires and interviews with trust CEOs and school heads.

The report said CEOs and their teams had "buffered" academy heads by "centralising responsibilities for the

development and implementation of policies relating to, for example, health and safety, HR and finance," as well as providing greater personal support.

"This had brought a degree of stability to the leadership of individual academies, which were then able to focus on the welfare of pupils and their families more easily, and the wellbeing and capacities of teachers to provide and enhance their teaching," the report said.

One interviewee said the pandemic allowed their trust to work as a "much tighter, centralised, policy-driven unit", adding: "It gave us permission to do what we hoped."

Sector to develop its own governance code

A governance code similar to one already in place for charities is to be drawn up for the sector.

The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) will join with the Chartered Governance Institute to produce the Academy Trust Governance Code.

The new code will increase "trustee awareness of the importance of good governance in the successful delivery of their charitable purposes and help them understand what good governance looks like", the CST said.

It hopes to support regulatory requirements, but not to be used as a regulatory tool. The team developing the code will be sector-led, but the Department for Education and the Charity Commission will have observer status over the group.

A Charity Governance Code is already in place. CST chief executive Leora Cruddas said it was a "mark of our maturity that we are moving beyond regulatory compliance and determining what expert governance looks like in our sector".

Schools & Academies show round-up



Online forums could help teachers after Ofsted inspections

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

Ofsted may host online teacher forums to provide more support for schools after inspections, the watchdog's national director of education has said.

Sean Harford (pictured) told The Schools and Academies Show yesterday that such a plan could also help to "humanise" the inspectorate.

The director had been asked by Frazer Westmorland, headteacher at Mundella Primary School in Kent, what could be done to make inspections feel "more cyclical" rather than discussions "dropping off a cliff" after completion.

Harford explained that, due to Ofsted and the sector's interest in curriculum and "upskilling teachers", it "can and will play a part" in organising events which allow collaboration.

He added that the watchdog may "give support" through "this sort [the SAA online show] of medium".

Harford said he could envisage Ofsted setting up a system where 1,000 teachers in a designated subject across the country log on to the same event to discuss findings within their



field and "what looks like a good curriculum".

"I think the pandemic and the way we've had to work has taught us this is entirely doable and it's probably a really efficient use of people's time," he said.

Such a system could help to "humanise the inspectorate" and allow teachers to engage in discussion without thinking they are being judged.

While Harford admitted that "there will always be an element of teachers and schools being anxious to work with the inspectorate ... there are ways we can work where people can learn from us in the same way we have learned from them in the last year".

Just 10 schools 'not effective'

Ofsted conducted remote monitoring inspections of schools graded "inadequate" or "requires improvement" during the spring term.

Schools Week analysis of the first batch of 41 letters revealed that all schools were judged to be "taking effective action" to educate pupils during the pandemic.

Harford said the visits were "quite successful", adding that inspectors found just 10 schools in total "were not taking effective action".

The visits once again highlighted to Ofsted the different contexts in which schools were working and "how different areas were having to respond in different ways".

He added: "Of course in the longer term that will lead potentially to differential learning rates, which we will need to be cognisant of as we go into the summer term."

Harford said that Ofsted has also been asked to visit "good" and "outstanding" schools that "had not responded as well" as some of the schools graded "inadequate".

Ofsted will not return to a full programme of graded inspections until the next academic year, although monitoring inspections will begin again on May 4.

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR_93

Jobs website expanded to include support staff

The Department for Education is set to expand its free-to-use teaching vacancies website to include support staff.

Academies minister Baroness Berridge announced the extension while speaking at the School and Academies Show yesterday.

The state-run vacancy service was rolled out across England in 2019 as part of the government's strategy to aid teacher recruitment and retention.

Berridge said the goal was to "save schools money and time when recruiting teachers instead of having to rely on paid job boards".

She added: "Following feedback from schools and trusts, the service is now being expanded to include other school roles such as teaching assistants and support staff."

Last year *Schools Week* revealed analysis which suggested that the job board was failing to advertise more than half of available positions. Berridge said this week that 45,000 jobs had

been advertised, with four in five schools signed up.

The academies minister also touched on the importance of technology in education in the wake of Covid-19, announcing a £25 million "connect the classroom" pilot project.

She said the scheme would provide digital networks to over 500 schools which are "struggling to make use of basic essential technology and cloud-based services".

She added: "This project will unlock the exciting opportunities that technology can offer in ways that otherwise would have been impossible in these schools."

The reliance on online services also necessitated the need to ensure services could be used "safely and securely", Berridge added.

The National Cyber Security Centre alerted schools last month following an "increased number" of ransomware attacks. The fallout lasted weeks and saw trusts suspend Covid

testing, lose financial records and students' coursework.

Berridge said that the DfE would be undertaking a risk protection arrangement "cyber risk pilot" with over 500 schools.

She said schools taking up the offer would be "supported to achieve certification that helps to protect them against 80 per cent of the most common cyber attacks".

Each certified network will also receive £250,000 of commercial cyber cover for one year to "improve resilience".

Elsewhere, Berridge highlighted the work of school resource management advisers (SRMAs) which, she claimed, helped trusts to "implement millions of pounds" of saving opportunities over more than 800 visits.

Schools Week revealed last month that the DfE had set aside £7 million to train 200 SRMAs each year until 2024.

Investigation

Death threats and protests: the schools facing 'trial by social media'

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

Increasingly aggressive language, including death threats, has led some in the sector to challenge online platforms to act to protect teaching staff from abuse and harassment, reports Tom Belger

School leaders' safety is being "jeopardised" as online campaigns become "trial by social media", with police now probing death threats to a head embroiled in a fresh alleged racism row.

Harris Academy Tottenham issued the warning over staff safety amid a petition for its executive principal to quit, alleging discrimination against black students and staff and sparking protests.

It comes only a few weeks after similar protests at Pimlico Academy, in London, and death threats to staff at Batley Grammar, in Yorkshire, over the Muhammad cartoon row.

The incidents have sparked alarm in the sector over online platforms' role in fuelling tensions, and how data and employment law, as well as limited PR expertise, limit schools' ability to defend themselves.

But experts said they also underlined the need for schools to improve internal channels for students and others to raise grievances without resorting to social media, particularly on issues of race.

Police investigate death threats after online campaign

More than 5,000 people have signed the petition to Harris Academy Tottenham, launched last week by former PE teacher Joshua Adusei.

Adusei accused the school of "institutional racism," alleging discipline policies have been tightened and disproportionately affected students from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds. "A lot of us feel the school treats kids like prisoners," he said.

The petition also demands a reversal of restructuring plans. A school letter

to parents seen by Schools Week pledged to "avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible," blaming falling pupil numbers in Haringey.

It unleashed a wave of critical comments by students and others online, and even a playground protest after Adusei was suspended following the publication of the petition. He has since been dismissed after a longstanding alleged misconduct probe.

One comment posted online compared a silent line-up policy to "Putin's Russia" and another claimed the school was "run by white people...who don't understand the children".

A Harris Federation spokesperson called it a "misleading, vindictive and vexatious campaign", saying its diverse leadership team "categorically denies" racism and all the allegations made. A previous audit of behaviour policies found no discrimination.

The school has reported to police four death threats received by its executive principal, as well as a threat to stab teachers made via Change.org.

A Met spokesperson said reassurance patrols had been arranged in the area. Officers had made enquiries over "malicious communications" aimed at staff.

All comments have since been removed from the petition, but the row has fuelled fresh debate over staff safety, racism and the role of online platforms in school life.

Seven petitions in two months

The incident is at least the seventh Change.org petition since March calling for staff to be

change.org

Petition details Updates



Harris Academy Tottenham: Resignation of the acting principal /head of academy

5,867 have signed. Let's get to 7,500!



Joshua James Adusei started this petition to Harris academy and 5 others

sacked or reinstated at schools in England.

Three petitions were created attacking or defending the Batley Grammar teacher at the centre of a blasphemy row last month. He is reported to have gone into hiding after being named on social media and receiving death threats.

Stephen Morales, chief executive of the Institute of School Business Leadership, warned against "trial by social media. It's dangerous and we're seeing more of it."

The Harris flare-up also echoes similar unrest at west London's Pimlico Academy. Principal Daniel Smith faced a petition to quit and footage of student protests went viral on social media last month. National Education Union members plan a ballot for industrial action next week.

Two Change.org petitions were launched attacking its strict discipline rules, alleged dress code discrimination against black and Muslim students, and the school's flying of the Union flag.

A Future Academies spokesperson said it

Investigation

made “no apology for taking a disciplined approach,” and had significantly improved the school’s results and secured an ‘outstanding’ rating. But it has also created a race and equality committee, and is re-writing its PSHE curriculum.

‘The law does not allow us to defend our colleagues as they deserve’

Online platforms now face questions over their role in such incidents.

A Harris Federation spokesperson claimed platforms hosting such content did “almost nothing” despite them being used to make death threats.

The spokesperson said it could not challenge public allegations on an “equal footing,” as data privacy and employment law stopped it fully questioning Adusei’s claims or motives.

“The law does not allow us to defend our colleagues as they deserve,” they added. “But the cost is leaders having their wellbeing and safety jeopardised. The profession cannot allow good senior leaders to have to tolerate the ‘pile-on’ of the mob on social media.”

A Change.org spokesperson called it an “open platform,” but said it removed personal identifying information that did not comply with its guidelines and could enable harassment, including in the Harris case.

But other petition sites have stricter rules. A 38 Degrees spokesperson said it did not host petitions calling for non-elected individuals’ resignations.

‘Schools walking tightrope until social media companies taken to task’

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said social media risks were “ever-present” and negative publicity could “snowball” fast.

“Schools and colleges will continue to walk a daily tightrope until the government takes the social media companies to task with legislation to make them accountable for content,” he added.

Bethany Paliga, an information specialist at Forbes Solicitors, advised reporting comments to online platforms and harassment or malicious communications to the police.

She added she often explained to schools that the ‘naming and shaming’ of staff online by individuals, rather than organisations, did not breach data protection law.

A government spokesperson called threats “unacceptable,” and new legislation



Protests outside Batley Grammar School, Yorkshire



would soon impose fines on social media companies that failed to tackle harmful content.

‘Culture does not allow for change’

But the incidents have increased scrutiny of school policies too, and whether mechanisms for raising grievances are up to scratch.

Adusei said he did not condone the death threats, but accused Change.org of “taking away the free speech” of signatories by removing all comments.

Rhia Gibbs, a London teacher and director of the Black Teachers Connect network, added: “The surge in students and staff speaking out is linked to a deep-rooted structural issue – the culture does not allow for challenge.”

She said issues in Britain had been “pushed to the surface” by George Floyd’s death.

Morales noted Sarah Everard’s murder had sparked a similar groundswell of students sharing experiences of sexual harassment in schools.

He said schools needed trusted safe spaces, whistleblowing and

appeals policies, and other “accessible channels” for raising concerns internally.

A government spokesperson also said schools needed published complaint processes, and said it encouraged “dialogue” with parents.

‘It’s a dangerous road if we start acquiescing in demands heads should roll’

Once issues go public, schools face a “difficult balancing act,” according to James Barron, an employment associate at Forbes Solicitors.

Efforts to save reputations through strong statements or information-sharing could undermine fair disciplinary processes, he cautioned.

But Gibbs said remaining silent had risks too, often sparking greater attention.

Jane Tozer, schools lead at PR firm Paternoster Communications, which will soon release a free school training package on crisis PR, said most schools’ biggest mistake was over-communicating or under-communicating. It was also easy to “fall into the trap” of assuming critics were more than a vocal minority, she added.

“It’s a dangerous road if we start acquiescing in demands heads should roll.”



Bethany Paliga

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Mixed signals: evidence for smartphone ban contested

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Evidence cited by Nick Gibb to support mobile phone bans in schools is from an eight-year-old study that some academics have criticised for actually showing “insignificant” impact on test scores.

The schools minister told MPs this week “there is evidence that those schools that do restrict the use of smartphones in schools [...] are seeing higher test scores and higher attainment as a consequence”.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson revealed plans to consult on how best to help heads ban mobile phones, alongside wider behaviour guidance changes.

Gibb told the education committee he wanted “more schools to be looking at that evidence and taking the decision to improve attainment by restricting the use of mobile phones”. Though “ultimately this is a matter for the profession and headteachers to decide,” he added.

Asked what evidence Gibb was referring to, the Department for Education pointed to a discussion paper published in 2015 by the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics.

The DfE claimed the study showed that after schools banned unrestricted access to mobile phones, “the test scores of students aged 16 improved on average by 6.4 per cent”.

What did the study actually find?

In 2013, academics Louis-Philippe Beland and Richard Murphy surveyed 91 schools in Birmingham, London, Leicester and Manchester regarding mobile phone policies and looked at administrative data.

The study, which was subsequently published in peer-reviewed journal *Labour Economics*, found that results indicated “an improvement in student performance of 6.41 per cent of a standard deviation in schools that have introduced a mobile phone ban”.

In a subsequent blog post, the report authors said this was equivalent to “increasing the school year by five days”.

The paper also concluded that banning



mobile phones had more impact on low-achieving students – 14.23 per cent of a standard deviation – but had “no significant impact on high achievers”.

The study also acknowledged that its findings “do not discount the possibility that mobile phones could be a useful learning tool if their use is properly structured”.

Academics point to paucity of data

But a recent article by Australia-based academics Professor Marilyn Campbell and Dr Amanda Third pointed out that the actual effect size found was around 0.06. It concluded there was not “sufficient data” to back a mobile phone ban.

“An improvement in student performance of 6.41 per cent of a standard deviation is actually an effect size of 0.06 – though it has been reported as a six per cent improvement,” they wrote.

“Effect sizes of 0.24 are considered small, 0.50 is moderate and 0.75 is large. So, an effect size of 0.06 is insignificant.”

The blog post was written in response to comments made by Australian education minister Dan Tehan regarding a school phone ban by the South Australian government, in which he too cited the study.

In a more recent article, Beland said studies in Spain and Norway “also show compelling evidence on the benefit of banning mobile phones on student performance”. He added a “similar conclusion can be drawn from the literature on the effect of computers used at school”.

But he warned: “These findings do not discount the possibility mobile phones and other technology could be a useful structured teaching tool. However, ignoring or misunderstanding the evidence could be harmful to students and lead to long-term negative social consequences.”

Sandra McNally, head of the education programme at the Centre for Economic Performance, said Beland and Murphy’s paper “does support the claim that banning mobile phones can have a causal impact on student achievement in England”.

“The magnitude of effect on low-achieving students is sizeable,” she said. “As stated by the authors ‘the results suggest that low-achieving students are more likely to be distracted by the presence of mobile phones, while high achievers can focus in the classroom regardless of whether phones are present.’”

The week in Parliament



Gibb brushes off £125m pupil premium 'stealth cut' complaints

FREDDIE WHITTAKER & JAMES CARR
@SCHOOLSWEEK

Nick Gibb has brushed off growing complaints about a "stealth" pupil premium cut that leaves schools £125 million out of pocket.

Two leading education charities this week urged ministers to reverse a change to how the funding is calculated. A Sutton Trust poll revealed that a third of schools now rely on pupil premium cash to plug budget gaps, up from a quarter in 2019.

The government has switched to calculating pupil premium funding based on eligibility for free school meals in October, instead of January.

As *Schools Week* revealed last week, it means that schools will not receive funding for an estimated 102,000 extra children who would have become eligible between the census dates. Schools across England face missing out on up to £125 million, our study found.

But Gibb, the schools minister, told education committee MPs yesterday that individual schools would not lose out "as a direct consequence of the change".

He added: "Whether a school gets more or less pupil premium will depend on its own circumstances but, if you take a typical school, an



Nick Gibb

average school, they will see their pupil premium increase from last year to this year.

"We don't know the actual consequence of moving to October 2020 from January 2021 because those figures haven't been calculated yet."

Gibb claimed that figures being "banded around" by newspapers and campaigns did not take into account those pupils who had become eligible for free school meals again having been eligible in recent years.

The pupil premium is paid to schools for any child who has been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years. Official figures will be published in June, he added.

The Sutton Trust and sister charity the Education Endowment Foundation want the change reversed. Sutton Trust chair Sir Peter

Lampl said: "At a time when schools are facing monumental challenges, the additional funding they get through pupil premium has never been more important."

The charity's survey found 35 per cent of primary school senior leaders say they are using pupil premium funding to cover other gaps, compared with 28 per cent in secondary schools.

Primary schools receive £1,345 per pupil, while secondaries receive £955.

The survey of 1,528 staff was conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research to examine how schools use the cash.

Shadow education secretary Kate Green called on Gavin Williamson to "come clean" and publish the financial analysis of the cut during questions in the House of Commons on Monday. But the education secretary dodged the calls for greater transparency.

Instead, he said that Green "forever moans and complains about the resources" and pointed to £1.7 billion allocated to help pupils catch up.

A DfE spokesperson said a "typical school will see an increase" in pupil premium allocations compared with last year, as the total cash distributed is expected to "increase to more than £2.5 billion".

They added that pupils who became eligible after October 2020 will "attract funding in the following year and the change helps schools to plan their budget earlier".

FRASER WHIELDON | @FRASERWHIELDON

Another UTC looks set to bite the dust

Another university technical college looks set to close just three years after opening.

Sir Simon Milton Westminster UTC, named after the former Conservative politician, announced last week it would be pausing student recruitment from the next academic year.

This is while "the UTC's future is decided", with chair Andrew Christie saying the "difficult but pragmatic" decision was taken as "the school has not attracted the level of interest that we had hoped from students looking at different options for their studies."

The UTC opened in 2017 and specialises in science, technology, engineering and maths. It has capacity for 550 students aged 14 to 19 but has just under 150 on roll currently. The college is yet to be inspected by Ofsted.

Christie appeared to indicate the UTC will close by providing assurance in his statement that "this does not mean the end of technical education being offered on our fantastic site".

When asked for more detail about this, a spokesperson said: "There is an ongoing commitment for the site to be used to support technical education moving forward."

"How this will be achieved will be discussed after the future of the UTC has been determined and agreed, and will be a matter for the DfE."

The UTC's 2019 accounts reveal the college had been in discussions to join Fulham Boys School multi-academy trust, with a decision on whether the DfE would approve the move scheduled for March 2020.

More than 50 UTCs have opened since they were launched in 2010 by former education

secretary Lord Baker. Many of the colleges have, however, faced difficulties recruiting students and staying afloat financially. Eleven have closed to date.

Academies minister Baroness Berridge was quizzed on the future of UTCs during an accountability hearing with the Commons education select committee on Thursday.

She told MPs the government hopes to have a "strong sustainable group of UTCs" by the autumn and claimed there is "no bar or prejudice against them".

Asked whether there should be more of them, she said only "if there is a bid with a clear vision for the involvement of employers and particularly with the support of the local authority".

News in brief

Attendance bounces back to pre-Covid levels

Attendance in state primary schools has returned to pre-pandemic levels, with attendance in all schools now the highest it has been during the crisis.

The Department for Education's latest survey data shows that primary attendance hit 96 per cent last Thursday. This is "broadly in line with attendance in a typical academic year", and an increase from 92 per cent on March 25.

Secondary attendance also rose over the same period from 87 per cent to 91 per cent.

Overall, attendance in all state schools increased from 90 per cent to 94 per cent. The DfE said this was the "highest it has been at any point during the coronavirus pandemic".

Primary schools reopened on March 8, with secondary schools given a week of flexibility to bring pupils back for on-site testing.

Attendance rates fell during March as more and more pupils were sent home to isolate, with data showing substantial variation in disruption.

Across the country, 25,200 pupils were absent because of potential contact with a Covid-19 case in school, down from 173,400 on March 25. Another 18,300 were



isolating because of potential contact out of school, down from 47,300.

There were 6,800 absences due to a suspected case of Covid-19 and 2,400 due to a confirmed case. This is down from 28,100 and 9,400 respectively on March 25.

School staff absences have also fallen to the lowest level seen since the DfE started collecting data in October.

Attendance of vulnerable pupils has also increased, but still remains below the levels seen in the wider pupil population.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson said the "hard work of staff is helping keep children in and the virus out of classrooms, and I'm incredibly grateful to all staff, parents and pupils for the tremendous efforts they are making every day".

Trust in GCSEs plunges after fiasco

Trust in GCSEs has plummeted after last summer's exam fiasco, an Ofqual commissioned survey found.

Just 27 per cent of respondents agreed that 'GCSEs are trusted' when asked about last year, when exams were cancelled due to the pandemic. This compared with 75 per cent in a normal year.

A doomed algorithm was used to standardise grades last year, but after issues were found, the government U-turned and awarded centre assessed grades.

The "perceptions" survey, carried out by YouGov from November 25 to December 22, asked parents, teachers, pupils and others about their thoughts generally on GCSEs and A-levels, as well as separate questions specifically on 2020.

Overall, 43 per cent of 3,078 respondents said they disagreed or strongly disagreed that GCSEs in 2020 were trusted qualifications.

More than half – 56 per cent – of head teachers who responded said they disagreed. A similar proportion of teachers – 51 per cent – felt the same.

Fewer respondents also agreed that GCSEs were good preparation for further study in 2020 – 38 per cent compared to 73 per cent in general.

At A-level, only 29 per cent agreed that AS and A-levels were trusted in 2020, compared to 82 per cent in general.

Boost pay and cut diktats, says union chief

The government must restore pay to "pre-austerity levels", reduce "centralised diktats" and fully fund schools to support their staff, the head of the NAHT leaders' union will say today.

General secretary Paul Whiteman will reel off a list of demands to the union's annual general meeting. His speech follows a year that has strained the relationship between leaders and the government over its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Whiteman will say that the NAHT has "always sought" to work with successive governments, but the current administration "makes it very hard to do that".

He will warn that the pay freeze for most staff announced last year was "tin-eared and wrong-headed". He will also accuse ministers of taking leaders for granted.

But he will resist calls for industrial action to achieve the union's demands, saying that



to "enter a pivotal moment, to try and grasp essential change from a position of open conflict is not strength, it's weakness".

EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The nudge towards all-out academies

After what's felt like an eternity writing about Covid – it's comforting to have some new policies to digest and analyse. It feels like another step towards normality.

Gavin Williamson unveiled his plan this week to sort out what he called the “pick and mix” education system.

There's a huge irony that said system is in such shape because of Williamson's party's drive to expand the academies programme.

But, forgetting that for the moment, the policies seem sensible and proportionate. Forced academisation would have been a disaster. Gentle nudging to speed back up the academies push will be more manageable.

However, there are a number of people who do not want to embrace the academies revolution. What do these plans do for them? Not much.

There's also the added complication of not just telling all council schools to become academies – Williamson went much further. He told standalone academies they should also join

multi-academy trusts.

Many of those single academy trusts will have taken up the government's attractive offer years ago to become an academy for the additional freedoms. Now they are being told to join a MAT and hand all that back?

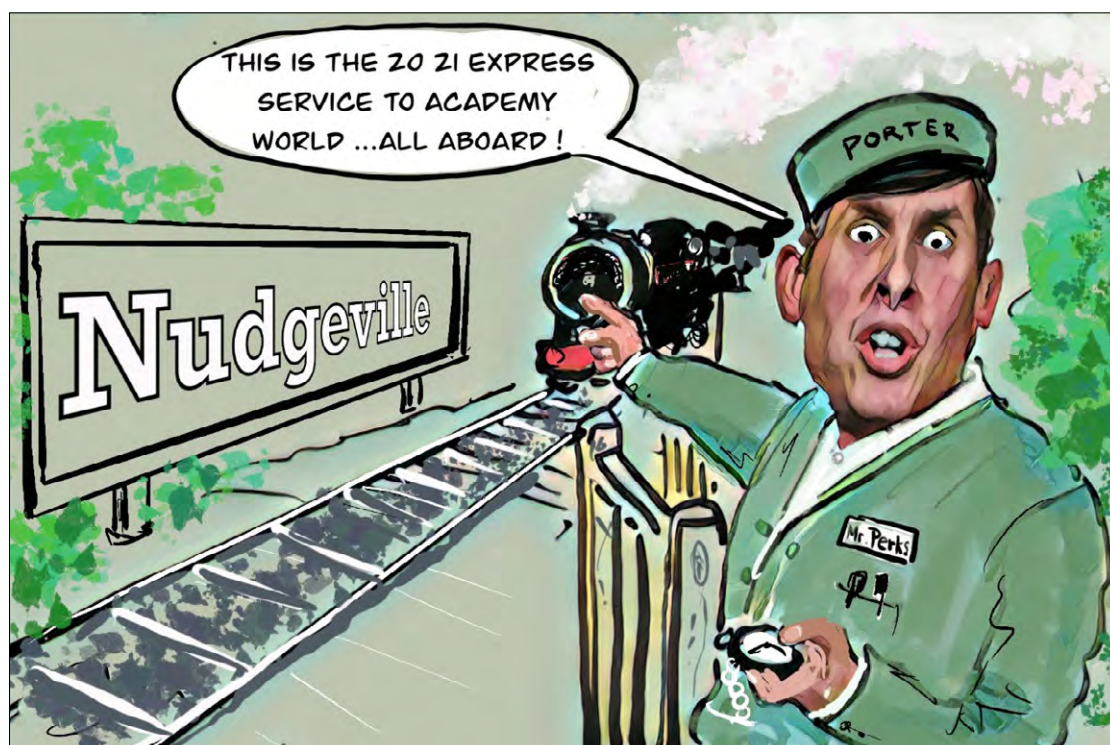
Berridge's argument that high-performing standalone schools have a moral duty to grow and spread their expertise could be persuasive.

But what if those leaders do not feel they have the expertise to grow? What happens if they take up the 'clarion call' and then it goes wrong and they soon have regional commissioners breathing down their necks?

The government could encourage good local authority education departments to create spin-out MATs. It could embolden schools nervous at the prospect of academisation.

But it would also mean putting aside the ideologically driven rhetoric from ministers of 'academies good, councils bad'.

Perhaps a good compromise for all?



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Ofqual reveals quality assurance evidence requirements

Graeme Bonzer, @Grabonzer

And I thought it couldn't get more shambolic! Millions of hours wasted filing now, for what? We are still dealing with Covid in schools and have enough to do as it is! I've had enough of this, it's bonkers! Why oh why didn't they just modify the bloody papers!

It turns out teachers aren't being trusted on grades

Crystal Wadsworth, @Crystalwads4

Yes, Jonny Uttley, well said! I really just want to get on with what I need to do for the students without them constantly pulling the rug from under our feet all the time.

The emerging 'super league' of academy trust CEO pay

Anita Kerwin-Nye, @anitikntweets

As predicted. Following pattern of other sectors. Not just about pay. Top 20 charities take most charity funding. Same emerging with MATS. As they are charities, interesting to see where MAT pay falls alongside @ThirdSector CEO pay. Also, both lists mostly white men, obviously.

Robert Campbell

Almost all are men... As a former academy trust chief executive, this issue is deeply embarrassing and untenable. There is no justification for these rates of pay.

Is future multi-academy trust consolidation inevitable?

James Smithers

It's almost like we could end up with some kind of authority that would cover an entire local education system... We could even call it a Local Education Authority!

Research: is all our evidence all it's cracked up to be?

Terry Pearson

Norman Denzin's work on triangulation highlights that when researching a complex phenomenon such as teaching, the use of alternative perspectives is likely to reveal confirmatory,

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Martyn Jones

Ofqual reveals quality assurance evidence requirements

This will cause massive issues for the art and design subjects. We run, amongst others, endorsements in 3D and Fine Art design at both GCSE and A-level which often involves the production of large-scale and/or 3-dimensional practical work. We

were planning for students to spend as much time as possible creating practical work before our assessment window in order to get the best outcomes for our students. Now we will have to ask students to spend time photographing and documenting all this work and adding this to their digital portfolios so that this can be submitted to the exam board. We will also have to quality check the photographs submitted to ensure they show the work in the best light. The only other option will be that we will have to spend time as staff photographing all the work and then organising and documenting this in an appropriate digital format. All this will impact on the time we need to mark all the work and result in us having to move the deadline for submitting work forward. The practical upshot is less time for the students to complete the work and will negatively impact the grades we can award. I feel this decision is morally reprehensible.



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

contradictory and contrasting results. It comes as no surprise really to find studies that shed new light on the three approaches that are the focus of this piece. Indeed, we should not be perplexed if we encounter confirmatory, contradictory and contrasting results from research of any education intervention.

All who work in education settings should be very wary of claims that one approach to teaching is by nature better than another approach. Alluring as it may be, the notion that it is possible to undertake research that can identify what works, or doesn't work, in classrooms is generally misleading and counterproductive. It really is time for prominent influential organisations and individuals to stop peddling such propaganda.



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'I would say to anyone outside government that it's a lot harder than it looks'

The Department for Education's former director of schools was in the hot seat during the free school meals voucher fiasco. Now an academy trust boss, she talks about never making assumptions

Sarah Lewis, chief executive, Langley Park Learning Trust

A week before Christmas, Sarah Lewis was sitting down in front of the public accounts committee for a grilling.

In front of her was formidable chair Meg Hillier. Sitting beside Lewis was Susan Acland-Hood, the Department for Education's relatively new permanent secretary, and Johann Vaucanson, chief executive of the company on everyone's

lips during lockdown – Edenred, the meal voucher firm.

Lewis was there as the DfE's director of early years and schools strategy, to answer questions about something that happened on her watch: the free school meals voucher 'fiasco'.

The voucher scheme was beset with technical issues when it launched, leaving some pupils without food. The multi-million-pound contract to run the scheme was given to Edenred without a normal tender process.

Lewis defended the decision to the committee. She tells me: "We could have tendered, but then there wouldn't have been a voucher scheme for several months. That was the choice."

But, with just a touch of frustration, she adds: "We're not hearing about the free school meals vouchers scheme now, because it's working brilliantly. That's the same team in the department."

What nobody on the committee knew was it was her last day. After the evidence session, she sent her thank you emails

Profile: Sarah Lewis



Lewis with her father at graduation

"popped up to say 'bye' to ministers and colleagues, put my kit on my boss's desk and walked out the door".

Lewis had been at the DfE for 12 years. She'd held deputy director roles in the Opportunity Areas and education standards directorate and oversaw the roll-out of free period products.

In January, Lewis took up the post of chief executive at the five-school Langley Park Learning Trust in south London. It was the only job she'd applied for in all her time at the department. "I said to colleagues, I've loved working in the DfE – how interesting and fast-paced the work is." But she was starting to feel "very distant" from policy on the ground and "quite remote from the real world".

Lewis was born in Derby and grew up in Medway the eldest of four children. Her mother was a housewife; her father was an engineer and later a vicar. She "can't really put a finger on what my background is – we never had any new clothes but we had a piano", she smiles. But the "unusual thing" about Lewis's childhood was the family had no television. "It broke and my parents just never got round to replacing it," Lewis laughs. It made for an upbringing filled with



Lewis outside her first childhood home in Derby

"I thought before I joined the DfE it would be full of very posh people, but it wasn't"

plays, reading, talking, "lots of music, and bad singing". She recalls feeling confident about a music test at school, only to be asked to match TV jingles to their products. She scored zero.

At grammar school she did well but "wasn't very good at respecting rules if I didn't understand the reason for them". Aged 16, she had to break the news to her family that she was pregnant. Her head of sixth form said she could come in for A-levels, but added "don't ever fall asleep in class and don't give me any excuses". That taught me you have to crack on." After A-levels, she studied social policy at Kent University before getting a job at Kent County Council. She worked on education policy, such as anti-bullying and sex and relationships education initiatives, before joining what was then the Department for Children,



Lewis as a child

Schools and Families, under Ed Balls, in 2008.

"I thought before I joined the DfE it would be full of very posh people, all from private school and London, but that was not what I experienced. The DfE has a huge number of former teachers, a lot of governors and lots are parents."

She says she has taken an online political compass test and falls "completely in the centre", adding that her vote can end up "not quite anywhere, but almost anywhere". But on this point, she speaks with real feeling. It is perhaps a result of being one of the few people who gets a ringside seat to

Profile: Sarah Lewis



“I’ve noticed how generous MAT CEOs are with their time”

Lewis in front of the public accounts committee in December 2020

watch the secretary of state make decisions. “It’s a huge privilege being the person who actually puts advice to the ministers,” she says.

She enjoyed working with former education secretary Justine Greening on Opportunity Areas, because her passion about social mobility made the initiative “really easy to get people behind”. But then she adds, to my surprise, that she “enjoyed working with Gavin [Williamson] on the pandemic – that sense of always being listened to by him. I always found Gavin respectful, and thoughtful.”

Cancelling exams was the toughest decision she was involved in. “Those were decisions no one ever thought they would be making and you’re having to make them at such a fast pace. To make a decision like that you’d want weeks to look at the evidence.”

She was sitting downstairs knowing exams would be cancelled, with her daughter revising upstairs. But she said nothing, waiting for it to be publicly announced. It’s one area in which she concedes the DfE could have done better. Decisions were not always communicated “as quickly as we would have liked, or the sector would have liked”.

Williamson has been widely lambasted

for his decisions during the pandemic. But Lewis says personal attacks are unacceptable. “I would say to anyone outside government that governing is a lot harder than it looks. I’d never want to get defensive and say everything was perfect all the time [but] people are human. To some extent when you put yourself up for election you are opening yourself up to scrutiny, but I cannot understand why our basic ways of treating colleagues, friends and neighbours cannot be extended to politicians.”

To illustrate her point, Lewis explains that she began volunteering at a food bank in September 2019. She remembers reading angry tweets about the DfE’s handling of the pandemic. “One I saw had a picture of people working in a food bank, saying ‘these are the real heroes’. And I thought, what am I then? Hero or villain?”

There is a reason Lewis offers these warnings. Her first daughter died two and a half years ago aged 24, during a mental health crisis. An NHS inquest found there had been a “gross failure” by services to treat her daughter properly. It has deeply reconfirmed her view that criticisms of others should never become cruel, and also that public leaders should not get defensive, and instead admit to “human frailties”.

Ensuring leaders and staff feel properly

supported is one of Lewis’s main priorities in her new role. “Being a head can be quite a lonely job, and I want everyone to feel they’re part of a wider team and that we’ve got their back,” she says, explaining she will look at what’s working “brilliantly” in each school and seek to “share that expertise more widely”. She herself already feels supported: “I’ve noticed how generous MAT CEOs are with their time. I was expecting to walk into quite a competitive world, and I’ve walked into a very collaborative world. It’s a pleasant surprise and it’s right up my street.” With time she would like the trust to be a “capacity-giver”, either by expanding, joining another trust or coaching other school leaders.

Unlike Jon Coles, another former senior DfE civil servant who leads a trust, Lewis does not have a PGCE or QTS. But she is clear a civil servant brings certain qualities. “It’s about being able to raise your head slightly above what’s going on and looking strategically down the line. That’s sort of inbuilt into civil servants.”

She’s both a symbol and advocate of movement between education staff and the civil service. To avoid personalised anger, perhaps all civil servants, and many more teachers, would benefit the whole system by spending more time in both camps.

Opinion

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

Letting schools and trusts try out collaboration before formalising their partnerships is an idea whose time has come, writes David Carter. But it isn't without some risks

A recent headline in these pages suggests the secretary of state is advocating a 'try-before-you-buy' approach to more schools joining multi-academy trusts. In principle, it is a good idea. It is also not entirely new; the regional schools commissioners and I were talking about an associate school partnership model in 2017.

I see this as a solution to the nervousness that good and outstanding schools feel about joining a trust. I also see it as a solution to helping trusts add capacity to their school improvement strategy, as well as providing support quickly to those schools that needed help but where capacity was limited.

For good schools, it presents an opportunity to become a school improvement support provider. The reduction in the number of teaching schools means that there are still great schools who want to make a wider contribution to school improvement, and this could be one way to achieve that.

Some trusts have schools that are geographically isolated, affecting their access to school improvement support. For these schools, forming a partnership with a good school that is located nearby makes sense.

For schools in need of more urgent help, this is a solution that accesses support quickly. Conversion from the maintained sector or from one trust to another is not a quick process. Every day the conversion takes is another day that children are being educated in a weak school. 'Try before you buy' has the advantage of getting the improvement cycle started without



SIR DAVID CARTER

Executive director of system leadership,
Ambition Institute

Try before you buy: the key to unlocking post-Covid support

having to wait for the legal process to catch up.

The benefit to a multi-academy trust is that schools who form this alliance partnership will experience the quality of educational thinking, support and development first hand. Trusts then have the opportunity to convince the

and clearly I am an advocate – but it isn't without its challenges, and these need to be factored in.

For example, consideration has to be given to the length of time this arrangement lasts. It has to be at least a year, and ideally two. A two-year arrangement with a break clause

“ It gets the improvement cycle started without waiting for the legal process to catch up

partner school to join them formally. In other words, the experience that the alliance school, staff and students get should become the compelling reason to join on a permanent basis.

So much for the model's strengths –

after the first gives sufficient time for the trust to demonstrate the value of being a permanent member. It also gives the school time to improve so that they have other options open to them.



But the inherent risk to both partners is that they decide not to pursue the partnership. This could mean the trust loses important capacity, or result in the school losing its support before improvement is consolidated.

The school that is being supported is not governed in the same way as the schools in the trust. The partnership function is improvement support, and the contract (there has to be a contract!) has to stipulate the indicators of success and how both the trust and the school should work together.

In the hands of weak leaders, the model has the potential to over-promise and under-deliver, so setting out the parameters of the partnership is essential. Included in the contract or service agreement should be a costing of the support and what the financial resource is going to cover. Global figures that state in vague terms what is going to be provided are not going to be easy to audit and will undermine a properly informed decision about the partnership's success.

Neither of these challenges – activation of the break clause and poor contracting – is insurmountable. As we think differently about how the sector recovers from the pandemic, it is ideas like this we should now be considering.

Trusts and their school communities have worked better together over the past year than at any time I can remember. The doors have opened to a different type of discussion, but it is right to acknowledge that doubts remain. By unlocking school improvement quickly and allowing partnerships to form, 'try before you buy' could become the key to building a better post-Covid sector.

Opinion

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

There would be nothing to fear from a genuinely impartial ITT review, writes David Spendlove, but does anyone believe such a thing possible?

In normal circumstances, a review of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) might be welcome and considered long overdue. But these are not normal circumstances. And given the Sewell Race and Ethnic Disparities report, concern over another government review conducted by handpicked 'insiders' selecting the evidence to fit a desired conclusion is well placed and fully justified.

The government's view – that universities maintain an unhealthy monopoly over ITT and that university departments are 'the Blob's' preferred breeding ground – are overt. In that context, stating an intent to establish a new 'Institute of Teaching' in tandem with the announcement of an 'ITT market review' clearly signals a foregone conclusion.

The policy direction is therefore progressively shaping up to be an existential threat to university education departments. Across the sector, many anticipate the review recommendations will emphasise increased marketisation of ITT, driven by cost reductions and increased control of content, and powered by new forms of provision.

Accordingly, the 'flagship', 'world-leading' Institute of Teaching will have its own awarding powers, and the simultaneous roll-out of new Teaching School Hubs means the government will have all its proverbial ducks in a row to increasingly control and compete in its own ITT market.

Taken together, reducing costs, increasing centralised control of content (as exemplified by the Core Content Framework), influencing the



DAVID SPENDLOVE

Professor of education,
The University of Manchester

ITT review: are universities heading for the 'Ex-ITT'?

market through its own institution and holding the power to award contracts to providers give the government unprecedented leverage to manipulate this 'market'. The government will consequently have the ability to disincentivise established universities

control of teaching, from classroom novice to school leader.

What is of particular concern within this continuum is the artificial inference that these organisations will be informed by the best available evidence. In reality, we are observing

“In this context, an 'ITT market review' signals a foregone conclusion

from remaining involved in ITT alongside the mechanisms to curate and shape new forms of provision.

But teacher training is only the first part in a continuum of centralised control through its 'shadow state' organisations. Initial teacher training, the Early Career Framework, continuous professional development and a new suite of NPQs launching this September add up to full-spectrum

the sustained bypassing of universities in conjunction with the removal of teacher autonomy and criticality through a combination of subterfuge and the blurring of 'governance' structures.

Inevitably, we are witnessing the structural reconfiguration and transformation of teacher development in favour of outsourcing to tight-knit, ideologically aligned



organisations, operating under the 'respectable' cover of low-cost imitation puppet institutes. Equally, can anyone honestly say that the DfE is best placed to identify what a 'world leading' institute looks like or what a teacher needs to enjoy a sustained career?

It all begs the question of what might have been achieved if the government had committed to investing in and developing the existing infrastructure of world-leading universities and local education authorities instead of succumbing to hyperbole and chasing hypothetical savings with half-baked initiatives. The decade-long attack on academics led by obdurate minister Nick Gibb makes little sense if it isn't precisely and cynically about control.

The longstanding absence of an authoritative voice advocating on behalf of universities further belies the accusation of an organised and obstreperous sector. Sadly, it is also why we may soon witness 'Ex-ITT' – a Brexit-styled departure of universities from initial teacher training. While there may be a similarly protracted transition period, it would appear to be a matter of time before the desired effect of lazy anti-expert rhetoric comes to fruition.

Of course, an independent review could look at all the evidence globally about the nefarious effects of marketisation. It could look at other sectors – and other parts of the education sector – in England that have been subject to similar policies. And it could recommend that the risks are too high.

Likewise, the review could look at the role universities might continue to play in teacher and leadership formation and conclude that Gibb et al are wrong.

Well, it could. Couldn't it?

Opinion

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

As a passionate advocate for school freedoms, this is why I support Gavin Williamson's proposal to ban mobiles in classrooms, explains Anna McShane

The last few days have featured a lively debate – one that has sometimes become heated – over allowing pupils to bring mobile phones into the classroom.

This is not new. It is an issue that sparks real emotion and one in which many have understandably sought compromise. Phones are after all part of the world we live in.

But I want to be clear from the outset: there is no middle ground worth scrapping over. There should be no time wasted on negotiation. Mobile phones are a damaging distraction; they undermine the work of teachers and, with a year to catch up on, they have no place in our classrooms.

I am a passionate advocate of school autonomy. I would rail against any secretary of state (including this one) telling heads how to run their schools. But on a national mobile phone ban I am happy to make an exception, because the scale of the task ahead is just too great.

Schools have before them an urgent need to recover lost learning – particularly for disadvantaged students, who were already 18 months behind their more affluent peers before the pandemic. They must also help children rekindle vital in-person friendships and the active lifestyle they've lost from a year indoors. I cannot see any way that the presence of mobile phones in classrooms, or indeed in playgrounds, will help teachers overcome these challenges.

There is a heightened urgency to this. The pandemic has accelerated children's use of mobiles. With little



ANNA
MC SHANE

Deputy director, Public First

No ifs. No buts. A national phone ban is necessary now

alternative to online learning, this was clearly something parents had to not only accept but embrace. But as children fully return to the classroom, we need to look again at providing the most suitable environment for them to catch up academically and rebuild their relationships.

the evidence showing that just having a phone in their bag can impair students' attention and diminish their working memory. Or how having copious amounts of screen time can make pupils less curious or less able to complete tasks. But of course, there will always be someone who counters

“There is no middle ground. Phones have no place in our classrooms

As with everything in education, there are arguments on either side of this debate. I could run you through

with some study or other that shows the academic gains facilitated by a miracle app or how phones foster



collaboration.

But a contested evidence base is no reason for inaction – especially as we can see the reality of the problem in front of our own eyes every day. Any adult who has emerged from the rabbit hole of social media only to realise an entire evening has passed them by should be fighting for our children to be free of similar distraction in classrooms.

There is also the school of thought that holds that, given children will need to learn how to navigate a world dominated by mobiles, it's surely better to have teachers on hand to foster healthy relationships with them. That might be true, but you can do that in an assembly; you don't need 30 phones buzzing in your classroom to prove the point.

When I reflect on my own classroom experience – impromptu bag searches for lost/stolen phones that pull in three members of staff; managing the fallout of a sext; time spent liaising with police to circumvent a fight planned over a WhatsApp message in the PE changing rooms; students late to class finishing a level of their game – I know phones are an unnecessary distraction that takes teachers away from what they are ultimately there to do.

Banning phones from the classroom shouldn't be dismissed as a political dog whistle but as a common-sense way to help get the best outcomes for pupils. Just as taking children out of school for a holiday during term is now widely seen as unacceptable, other avoidable distractions from learning should be treated the same way.

Now is the time to remove all mobiles from every school, and to put this tired old debate behind us for good.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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JO SALE

Vice principal, Impington
International College

A better alternative to A-levels? We already have one

A new report recommends revamping post-16 qualifications. Jo Sale agrees, but wonders why the proposed solution is to reinvent the wheel

Examinations are needed for many reasons, not least because they are an important ritual of closure. Their cancellation again this year has deprived students of that and given new life to the old arguments for and against them.

Amid the turmoil, a new report by think tank, EDSK makes a strong case for reform of post-16 qualifications while maintaining a breadth of assessment. That's a breath of fresh air, and its conclusions closely mirror my own from years of teaching alternatives to A-levels. Sadly, the report missed a solution to the problem it identifies – one that is ripe for picking.

I taught A-levels for many years. I know that for many, the end goal is securing a place at university. Students are often explicitly taught to the test, learning how to retain information but not developing a deep understanding of a subject or the key skills needed to thrive in higher education and beyond.

This is why EDSK is right that

a baccalaureate-style education is the perfect fit for our post-16 provision. But a revised suite of qualifications is hardly necessary when the IB stands so far above the rest. Among its many advantages is that its assessment methods focus on the development of skills and application of knowledge across a

broad curriculum rather than rote learning just a few subjects.

End-of-year exams feature, but so does ongoing internal assessment. The programme's 'core' elements include the theory of knowledge course and an extended essay. Through these, IB students develop communication, team work, research and analytical and critical thinking skills that are extremely sought after by universities and the world of work, and where A-level students are lacking.

Assessment doesn't stop when students leave sixth form, but they are tested in different ways. Students who have followed a linear assessment method like A-levels have been artificially exposed only to



one. In contrast, the IB gives students diverse approaches to demonstrating their learning, without sacrificing depth or breadth of knowledge.

The EDSK report suggests that all of England's qualifications could be "combined into the single baccalaureate, enabling students to mix and match courses which would be marked using the same grading and accountability system for all".

“IB programmes leave students far better equipped than their A-level peers

Again, this educational offering already exists with the IB's Career-related Programme (CP). As part of the CP, students study one Extended BTEC and undertake a minimum of two other subjects from the IB Diploma Programme (DP) alongside the CP core, creating the perfect blend of academic rigour alongside practical, real-world approaches to learning. Why reinvent the wheel?

Unlike A-levels, the DP gives students the opportunity to discover their academic passions before they reduce the breadth of their study and restrict their future opportunities. Students have the opportunity to tailor the programme to their strengths, selecting three of their strongest subjects to study at higher

level, alongside the remaining three at standard level.

This equal division between the higher and standard levels across a student's six chosen subjects means they are able to gain the depth of knowledge required to prepare them for higher education and life beyond the classroom. DP students are also asked to consider the links between the six subjects they take, a much more overt and better way to begin considering career options than A-levels offer.

With both the DP and CP, students get so much more than just subjects in isolation. A baseline of subject knowledge is valuable for any student transferring to university. But devoid of cross-curricular critical thinking, independent working and research skills – the development of which are central to the IB – they are being short-changed.

Through their two-year IB journey, students prove themselves thoroughly. By their very structure, the IB programmes leave students far better equipped for whatever comes next than their A Level peers.

So while the EDSK is right about the problem with England's qualifications system, its solution is just harder than it needs to be. But if it can move us on from reactionary pro- and anti-exam arguments, then we are all better off for that.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MICHAEL
SAMUEL MBE

Chair of the board of trustees,
The Anna Freud Centre

We must treat mental health as we do safeguarding

The experience of the past year has brought a greatly increased focus on mental health that should be sustained as a top priority, writes Michael Samuel

Over the past year, schools and colleges have faced an overwhelming increase in children and young people's mental health problems. It's not entirely surprising. When a child's relationships and routines are disrupted and replaced with isolation and uncertainty, there is bound to be a cost, even before we take into account the impact of illness and bereavement.

As we begin to look to a recovery and the long-term implications for education, I hope the experience will be the catalyst for rethinking our approaches to mental health. In years to come, I hope that we will treat it as we do safeguarding today, that is, as everyone's responsibility.

But it's not just about the pandemic. Even in normal times, children's experiences vary. Not all enjoy school. Some experience bullying. Some find the transition to secondary has made them anxious. Some can't focus on their work or are embarrassed they aren't succeeding academically. Poverty and challenging home circumstances are

consistent factors too.

Each individual is just that, and blanket responses don't work. As children and young people return to school and slowly readjust their lives, it is essential to pay attention to two things: each individual's

experiences and the insight that evidence provides. School must be an opportunity to address both, and that means not only supporting them with their mental health but giving them the tools to support themselves.

In March this year, the Anna Freud Centre carried out a poll of over 3,000 children and young people. Overwhelmingly, they said they wanted more information about all aspects of mental health, and 93 per cent said they wanted it taught in the classroom. Almost the same percentage said that friendships were the most important factor positively impacting on their mental health.

These figures suggest children and young people want more support (including peer support) and have a desire to learn about mental health. The most obvious way to do



this is to develop a whole-school approach – such as the 5 Steps approach developed by our charity. This is a free, simple and interactive framework designed to support schools and colleges to develop a whole-setting approach to mental

of developing whole-school approaches, neither should we ignore the incredible progress schools and colleges have made in supporting and promoting mental health, especially in these extraordinary circumstances. A new approach has begun to emerge during the pandemic that puts mental health and wellbeing first, and there should be no reason to go back. Instead, we should build on it.

The evidence tells us that there is nothing more important to adult life satisfaction than good physical and mental health in childhood. It also shows that children want to learn more about mental health.

We also know from ample research that school and college staff are both highly committed and highly stressed.

In an age of tight budgets, following this evidence and adopting whole-school approaches to mental health makes fiscal as well as ethical sense. Supporting staff is also supporting students, and every penny invested in that promises a far greater educational and social return.

The advances of the past few years have been profound. The pandemic has galvanised thinking around the issue. Now, it's time to make the recovery a launchpad to something better.

“A new approach has begun to emerge that puts wellbeing first

health and wellbeing.

But what does a whole-school approach mean exactly? On one level, it means making sure that your policies on bullying tie up with your policies on safeguarding. It might mean developing a separate policy on mental health. In 2018, government research covering 100 schools found that only four per cent of primaries and two per cent of secondaries in their sample had such a policy in place.

And it means making sure staff wellbeing is woven into the school culture. We know from research that when teachers struggle, pupils do too. That's why workload and working environments are so important. Everyone is affected by them.

But while we shouldn't underestimate the challenge

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



The Turning Point for the Teaching Profession. Growing Expertise And Evaluative Thinking

Author: Field Rickards, John Hattie and Catherine Reid

Publisher: Routledge

Reviewer: Terry Freedman, freelance ed tech writer and publisher

When the term “teaching profession” arises, my reaction is more often than not to borrow from Gandhi and opine that such a thing would be a good idea.

This is not to disparage teachers. Given that the government has laid down what must be taught, periodically pontificates on the ‘best’ teaching methods, goes so far as to indicate a preference for particular resources and has appointed an external organisation to oversee quality control, can teaching be truly thought of as a profession?

This is the question this book specifically sets out to tackle, and on most of its suggested criteria the answer is a resounding no.

The hope expressed by Field Rickards, John Hattie and Catherine Reid is that teachers might be held in higher esteem in the eyes of society at large. But who will argue the case for the suggestions they put forward, and who will listen?

The book makes the very valid point that these days schools – and that usually means teachers – are expected to do much more than address literacy, numeracy and core subject knowledge. More and more is added to the curriculum, but rarely is anything taken out.

One of the authors’ suggestions is that schools and other agencies should work together in order to address the needs of the whole child. This makes sense on paper, and indeed they provide several case studies of this approach working in practice.

But the practical obstacles to implementation are not adequately addressed. For example, the authors

cite a local authority attempt to get social services, education and health practitioners talking to each other under the auspices of the Every Child Matters initiative. The attempt was abortive because it ends up bogged down in communications issues like the word ‘exclusion’ having different meanings for different participants.

The authors’ suggestions are insightful and could easily inform policy on a smaller scale. But the question of whether any such collaboration can ever work as an add-on to existing practices is not dealt with. Having suspended my disbelief that the suggestions in this book might be taken up by politicians – it is co-authored by John Hattie, after all – the absence of that big-picture insight re-awakened my cynicism.

Nevertheless, as one would expect from a book co-written by Hattie, it contains a great many research findings and suggestions based on them that a forward-looking school or academy chain could take on.

Its two key principles are the idea of the teacher as expert, and what it calls ‘clinical

practice’. Thus expert teachers – clearly distinguished from novices throughout – should be involved in mentoring and quality assurance, and respected as the real drivers of change. The research findings also give the lie to the idea that ‘facilitators’ could do the job just

as well.

For instance, research is cited to the effect that experts and novices see problems, and go about solving them, in different ways. Hence, *The Turning Point* emphasises the potential benefits of collaborative and collegiate practice among teachers, and the use of expert teachers to mentor less experienced ones. The authors point out that the process of becoming an expert takes time, deliberate practice, continual learning and an openness to alternatives.

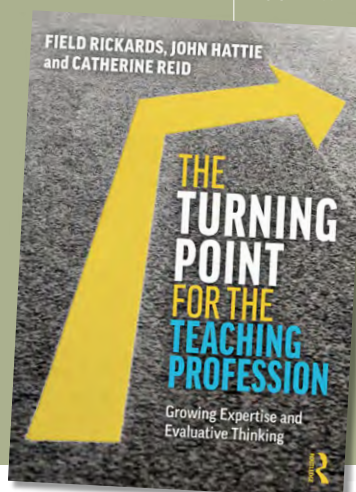
With regards to clinical practice, the authors define it as placing the student at the centre, and addressing six key questions I won’t list here. They take as its starting point the proposition that schools should provide a minimum of one year’s learning for each year of ‘input’.

It is easy to point out the difficulties of implementing a collaborative approach, and in fairness, the authors do just that. Timetabling constraints, teacher shortages and accountability mechanisms that leave teachers fearing that seeking advice will be seen as admitting to failure are just a few. And

without it, clinical practice seems a distant ideal.

But there is a plethora of research evidence here that provides great food for thought and could prove useful for a school or trust wishing to change things from the ground up, rather than tinkering around the edges.

If only policy makers will let them.



Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is Naureen Khalid, chair of governors and trustee, Connect Schools Academy Trust

@5Naureen

Gary Lineker is not dead and neither is football – yet
@daisychristo

If you follow Daisy Christodoulou on Twitter you'll know that she is very knowledgeable about assessment. You may also be aware that she is a keen follower of both cricket and football; the latter being the subject of this blog, which contains plenty of lessons for school leaders.

In April 1995, a spoof Channel 4 documentary predicted that in 2019 both Gary Lineker and football would be dead. Obviously, these predictions proved to be incorrect. However, Christodoulou suggests that although these predictions didn't come about, it doesn't mean that football will not die at some point.

She advises people to think about the threats that may reduce football's popularity in the future, and herein lies the leadership lesson. As leaders, heads and governors must keep an eye on the future and consider the factors that could threaten school sustainability, in order to mitigate them. Christodoulou concludes by noting that the biggest threat comes from leaders who are incapable of identifying what the problems are, let alone solving them.

TOP BLOGS of the week

Supporting your GCSE students: how to make the most of the time left
@missdcx

In this very timely piece for the Oxford Education blog, Dawn Cox shares strategies RE teachers can use to support students whose studies have been impacted by the pandemic. She notes that students have had different experiences in striving to complete their GCSE RE syllabus. Some will have had a full timetable of live teaching, some will have been set work to be done independently, and some may not have engaged with their studies at all.

Cox lays out three supportive strategies. Most of us, she argues, love listening to stories, so using narratives is a great way to teach beliefs, abstract concepts and practices. She also describes successfully using concept mapping with her students, and describes the technique. The third strategy involves low-stakes testing. Cox tests her students regularly, but doesn't call them tests and her students know the 'results' have no consequences.

As teachers across the board struggle to squeeze the most into the few remaining weeks, these strategies promise to be helpful far beyond RE.

Recruitment is at the heart of safeguarding efforts
@HelenStevenson4

Recent headlines about cases of professional misconduct and the shocking

disclosures on *Everyone's Invited* have reminded us of the importance of good safeguarding practices. In this blog for Satis Education, Helen Stevenson looks at the role recruitment plays in safeguarding. Governors and school leaders should take heed and make changes where necessary.

Stevenson makes the point that during times of high turnover and when leaders are under other pressures (such as those caused by the pandemic), a consistent focus on safeguarding is all the more important. Many schools are finding it increasingly hard to recruit to leadership positions. But, even in such cases, safeguarding and due diligence must not be neglected. This isn't something that should be compromised for a swifter or more financially efficient recruitment process. Safeguarding should be at the heart of all we do.

Leave her at the hospital
@bennewmark

This is a very moving blog by Ben Newmark that asks searching questions and invites us to reflect on society's attitudes towards disabilities. Newmark writes about the heartbreaking confessions people have made to him – people who were told not to love their own children or even "leave her and have another one".

As a society, we are still not comfortable with openly talking about disabilities and, when that happens, we exclude them. Newmark is the antithesis to all that. His openness about his daughter's diagnosis of Williams Syndrome is the example we all need to move to a place where every parent can be as open and no one is coerced into making decisions they know to be wrong.

We often struggle to find words to reason these situations and, because we 'lack' these words, awful things can happen. As educators, we have an important part to play in bringing society to this place, and Newmark is a guiding light.

Research

The Chartered College of Teaching will review a research development each half term.
Contact @CatScutt if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

How can we improve access to high-quality CPD?

Cat Scutt, director of education and research, Chartered College of Teaching

Extensive research shows how important effective teaching is for pupil outcomes – particularly for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. But how can we best develop teachers' effectiveness?

A number of factors are in play, including ensuring they are working in high-quality professional environments and that they have opportunities to learn and develop through collaboration with colleagues.

But one of the main levers is access to high-quality CPD opportunities. A new report from EPI, published this week, finds that teacher participation in at least 35 hours per year of high-quality CPD can not only influence their pupils' outcomes but ultimately their pupils' future earnings. So far, so good – but there are a number of issues here too.

To begin with, access to CPD is a problem. According to TALIS data, England's teachers participate in fewer hours of CPD per year than the OECD average, and as the Teacher Development Trust has noted, there is huge variation in the CPD budgets of different schools. While budget is not everything, this is indicative of wider disparities in the sector in terms of the time made available for this crucial activity.

And even where teachers do have access to it, not all CPD has the impact we might hope for. Sometimes, this is because it isn't of sufficient quality. At other times, it simply doesn't meet the needs of the teachers undertaking it. A 2014 Department for Education consultation found that teachers often reported the CPD they engaged in was of poor quality and had little or no impact on their teaching.

But why? First, while there is a



relatively large and widely accepted body of evidence about what makes effective CPD, there has recently been some challenge to how robust this evidence is. Even if we are confident we know the key principles of effective CPD, such as those that form the basis of the DfE's standard for teachers' CPD, there are certainly gaps on a practical level. For example, research suggests we need to understand more about what high-quality facilitation looks like.

And although there has been an increased emphasis on selecting CPD that is likely to have impact, it can still be challenging for school leaders to make good judgments about its quality, based on the information available.

So with no mandatory entitlement to CPD, no systematic way for schools to identify the quality of CPD provision, and some limits to what we know about high-quality CPD, the drivers for improvement of CPD provision are limited.

But a number of developments are in the works that may help us to tackle these issues. The CPD Challenge is a pilot looking at how a CPD entitlement might be established and implemented effectively, and a new guidance report on teacher CPD is due from the Education Endowment Foundation

later this year.

In addition, working with Sheffield Hallam Institute of Education and the Teacher Development Trust (and funded by Wellcome), the Chartered College of Teaching has just completed a pilot of an approach to CPD quality assurance, with some promising findings.

The pilot project's approach involved consideration of evidence against a set of criteria by a panel of trained teachers and other experts. The evaluation suggests it enabled valid judgments to be made and set a high bar for quality.

Encouragingly, it shows that the potential to raise the quality of CPD is there. Providers will engage in reflection and development and teachers and schools can be supported to make more informed choices.

Of course, the roll-out of such a system is far from straightforward. Avoiding market distortion or privileging larger providers must be at the heart of such developments.

But we hope that through these activities, and many others across the sector, we are seeing the development of a new phase of teacher CPD in England, one where we can ensure teachers have time to undertake the best learning opportunities that will have the most impact in classrooms up and down the country.



WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

MONDAY

It was a week of good news and bad news for Gavin Williamson.

The good news is his satisfaction rating among Conservative members has leapt by 17 percentage points. Wowzer!

The bad news is that he was starting on a whoppingly woeful -43 per cent. It means his satisfaction rating is now -26 per cent – making him still, by far and away, the least well-liked member of the Cabinet among his own party's grassroots, according to Conservative Home.

Still, Williamson's dogged loyalty to Downing Street continues to pay dividends by keeping him in his job (for now).

TUESDAY

We know that running and regulating exams is pretty technical work, but at a time when all eyes are on Ofqual, it would really help if they just explained things in plain English rather than unreadable nonsense.

A classic case in point was seen this week when the regulator issued its new tech strategy.

"As Ofqual evolves, innovating and evolving its approach, and responding to policy changes, we will ensure DDaT continues to act as an enabler of regulation."

Another is this zinger: "This is an ambitious strategy with known challenges, not least balancing the aims to continue to develop new solutions and consume more data with the need to ensure that the solutions we provide for our users are accessible, cohesive and

navigable."

Any idea what is actually going on? Nah, us neither.

Ofqual has acknowledged the problem, according to recent meeting minutes, stating in February that its consultation should be written in "student-centric language to explain the technical terminology to ensure maximum engagement".

Clearly that rule isn't being applied across the board...

WEDNESDAY

If Williamson's announcement of a "try before you buy" scheme for schools looking to join multi-academy trusts sounded familiar, that's because Schools Week coined the phrase... back in 2016!

Our invoice is in the post, Gav.

THURSDAY

Good to see the school uniform bill received royal assent this week. Given it had both Labour and government support, the private member's bill introduced by Mike Amesbury was pretty much guaranteed to pass.

The law means Gavin Williamson has to publish statutory guidance on the cost of school uniforms, which schools will have to consider when setting their uniform policies. He plans to do so in the autumn, the DfE said.

But government support for the bill meant compromise, and Nick Gibb has already announced the guidance won't ban sole supplier contracts. Amesbury also had to admit defeat on his

attempts to get a maximum number of branded items per child stipulated in the guidance.

Finally having guidance on a statutory footing is welcome and long overdue, but only time will tell whether the change will actually make school uniforms cheaper for hard-up families.

Talking of school uniform, Williamson himself was spotted wearing shoes that probably wouldn't pass muster at the country's strictest schools during a chat with recovery commissioner Sir Kevan Collins.

The ed sec posted a picture of the pair on twitter "catching up" in his office.

But instead of his usual boring brogues, Williamson appeared to be wearing a brand new pair of Dr Marten's shoes.

Onlookers also noticed that while Williamson had a nice cuppa in front of him, nobody appeared to have offered one to Collins.

Not only is the catch-up tsar not being paid, he doesn't even get a free drink.





Principal

Location: Richard Rose Central Academy
Salary: Competitive

Richard Rose Central Academy is a 11-18 co-educational Academy that forms part of United Learning, a successful national group of academies and independent schools. Our schools share a mission to bring out 'the best in everyone' and to improve the life chances of the children and young people in their care.

Richard Rose Central Academy is a good school, proudly serving its local community. The Academy's leaders have grown its educational success and created a school with a strong curriculum and good teaching, and effective pupil support. The school ethos is underpinned by the key values of care, community, and confidence. We are looking for a leader with the highest expectations, committed to continuous improvement, who believes that extraordinary success is possible.

If you are looking for an exciting, challenging and highly rewarding role where you can combine the opportunities of running a large secondary school with the benefit of working as part of a national group, and if you have an unshakeable commitment to improving the lives of young people, we encourage you to visit us.

Closing Date: 12th May 2021
Interviews: 24th and 25th May 2021



Newton Abbot College

Imagine what's possible ...

Assistant Principal

Required for
September 2021

Salary Range: L13 – L17

We are seeking to appoint a highly effective school leader who will use evidence-based research to drive improvement and implement change. The role represents an extremely exciting opportunity for an exceptional and committed individual to develop their career by taking on key senior leadership responsibility. The successful applicant will make a significant contribution to the further development of the College and will play a major part in helping us to achieve our strategic intent of "Excellence: for all and in everything".

Newton Abbot College is a mainstream, comprehensive, inclusive, large 11 – 19 academy within a three academy trust. The partner schools in the trust are Dawlish College (a smaller 11 – 16 academy) and Starcross Primary (a small village primary academy).

Newton Abbot College became an academy in 2011 and, after 8 years as a very successful stand-alone academy, was a forming partner of the launch of a new MAT, Estuaries, in December 2019.

Details available on the College website www.nacollege.devon.sch.uk.

Closing date:
10th May 2021 at midday

HEAD OF PHYSICS

TLR 2.3 £7,016

TMS/UPS

Full Time and Permanent – September 2021



SHIRELAND
COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

We are seeking an outstanding Science teacher with the ability to teach across the Science Curriculum, to take a lead role in our dynamic and successful Science faculty.

The Academy's strong staff development focus makes this an ideal post for teachers wishing to develop their career. Candidates should be able to respond to the busy and caring atmosphere of this outstanding Academy, be able to promote excellent results, be committed to extracurricular activities and be fully involved in school life.

For an informal discussion please contact our Human Resources Director on **0121 565 8811**.

An application form and job description are available from our website <https://www.shirelandcat.org.uk/working-for-us>

Closing date: 8.00am Friday 7th May 2021

'This is an exceptional Academy.'

Ofsted March 2013.

The Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment.



Featherstone High School

An Academy Specialising in Science & Sport



Teacher of French (who can teach KS3 Spanish)

MPS/UPR (Inner London)

Required September 2021

NQT's welcome to apply

We wish to appoint to this 11-19 multi-cultural school a highly motivated, ambitious and dynamic Teacher of French who can also teach KS3 Spanish. The candidate should be a hardworking professional, committed to thorough lesson planning, enthusiastic delivery and careful assessment.

Featherstone High is a friendly school that values teamwork and high achievement in all areas of our work with young people. We value our teachers and actively support their professional development; you will have access to on-going professional development.

Application forms and further details are available from the School's website www.featherstonehigh.ealing.sch.uk. Electronic application forms are compulsory, CVs are not accepted. Please email your completed application form to hr@featherstonehigh.ealing.sch.uk.

Closing Date: Friday 7th May 2021, 3pm, however we reserve the right to close the advert early if we appoint sooner.



St James' Catholic High School
Great Strand,
Colindale,
London,
NW9 5PE

PA TO THE HEADTEACHER/HR MANAGER

Salary Scale 28 (£34,209 pa - £36,705 pa)

An opportunity has arisen to appoint a full time PA/HR Manager for September 2021.

The role includes responsibilities that require a broad set of skills, enthusiasm and resilience. Applicants must have exceptional organisational skills and be able to multi-task, in a confidential environment. They must be personable, approachable, flexible and accommodating.

The successful candidate will ensure good communication to all stakeholders both internally and externally with a high degree of accuracy and attention to detail. As well as excellent interpersonal skills, you must have resilience and empathy and be able to work under pressure. A sound administrative background is essential; as is an excellent working knowledge and application of various IT packages.

The successful applicant will be required to undergo an enhanced DBS check.

Closing Date: 17.05.21 at noon Interviews w/c: 24.05.21

Email shmccgovern@st-james.barnet.sch.uk for an application pack.

Summerfields Primary School

Newport
Isle of Wight

Headteacher



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



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.



Principal Oxford Spires Academy

**Hours:
Full time**

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