

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

250th Edition

The primary school scooping DfE accolades



P12

Critics are wrong. Exam boards are busier than ever



P25

The non-existent Ofsted wellbeing review



P8

'Expulsions' expelled: another DfE U-turn



P13

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'YOU HAVE TO DIG DEEP AND RISE ABOVE IT'

Meet the CEO who nearly got sued by Gav for Christmas



PROFILE | PAGE 21-23

Cautious schools go slow on unmasking

- Localised outbreaks cause some schools to maintain mask rules
- DfE: Temporary restrictions will be brought back if cases spike
- School Covid outbreaks double, Sage meets over variant fears

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

INVESTIGATES

PAGE 4



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SCHOOLS WEEK

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Lifting the VEIL on hidden post-Covid suffering



Page 26



How a Dutch HR firm bagged the £62m tutoring contract

Pages 16



Why 'expulsions' undermined the Covid recovery

Page 24



Retention: It's other teachers that keep teachers teaching

Page 29

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Outbreak fears cause schools to keep mask rules

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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INVESTIGATES

Mask rules for pupils will remain in place at some schools across England next week amid fears about localised outbreaks and a highly transmissible new variant of Covid.

Several schools told *Schools Week* that they would continue to require masks in classrooms and communal areas even after the official government recommendation lifts the requirement on Monday.

Prime minister Boris Johnson said this week that the government would “no longer require face coverings in classrooms, or for students in communal areas in secondary schools and colleges” from May 17.

But Public Health England (PHE) data shows there were 48 new acute respiratory infection “incidents” involving Covid reported by education settings in the week to May 9, up from 23 the week before.

Government scientists held talks yesterday about the so-called Indian variant of the disease and its impact on schools and communities. Ministers also acknowledge that attendance restrictions in education may be needed to contain outbreaks of variants that are causing concern.

Wilsthorpe School in Derbyshire was forced to close last week after around 160 students and staff tested positive for the virus.

The school started staggering the return of pupils this week but says it will continue to recommend face masks for students and staff “following close consultation” with the local council and PHE.

“The wearing of facemasks will be under constant review. We would like to thank students, families and staff for their ongoing support in this matter,” a spokesperson said.

The outbreak at Wilsthorpe has prompted neighbouring schools to keep their mask recommendations in place.

Chilwell School in Nottinghamshire wrote to parents this week to say it was retaining its current arrangements until after half-term. Headteacher David Phillips said the school had been “concerned” by the Wilsthorpe outbreak and had also had to send a class of year 11s home this week, right in the middle



of their assessment for GCSE grades.

He said parents had been supportive and that half-term was the right time to review the rule, given May 28 is the final day of assessment for year 11 and 13 pupils “and I’m very, very keen to make sure that any disruption is minimised”.

White Hills Park Trust will also keep face masks at its two Nottinghamshire secondary schools until half-term.

Dr Paul Heery, the trust’s chief executive, said the DfE should have been clearer that the recommendation would not necessarily be lifted in all areas.

“The message that came out seemed to say ‘from this date, pupils will no longer be wearing masks in class...’ It’s not helpful when the tone is set and then schools are having to explain to parents why their approach is different.”

Schools in other areas have also decided to extend mask-wearing, including Harris St John’s Wood in north London, Philips High School in Manchester and Westhoughton High School in Bolton.

The DfE acknowledged this week that groups of schools may need to reintroduce masks in response to outbreaks. Such decisions would be made on a “case by case” basis by local public health directors for small groups of schools and by ministers in

the case of “widespread” issues.

Most of the schools keeping their mask rules said they were doing so after consulting local public health officials. The ASCL school leadership union has also said it will back its members “in the decisions they make”.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary, said: “They best know their context and how their parents, staff and pupils feel about the issue of face masks and they are therefore best placed to make a call on how to respond to the government’s guidance.”

A Teacher Tapp survey found a third of teachers wanted staff and students to wear masks in communal areas, while 27 per cent wanted them in the classroom.

But a third of teachers surveyed said they would prefer their school did not require face coverings.

A DfE spokesperson said: “In a small number of cases, such as if there were to be a highly localised outbreak, schools may be advised to reintroduce face coverings in certain areas for a temporary period.”

The DfE advised headteachers wanting to keep mask rules in response to outbreaks or variants of concern to seek advice from their local director of public health, but would not say whether heads could be prevented from doing so without their support.

PQA reforms could see students miss out on places, Ofqual warns

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

Exam results could be delayed and students could miss out on places if the government relies on slashing marking time to deliver a radical overhaul of university admissions, Ofqual has warned.

The regulator said post-qualification admissions (PQA) reforms would rely on results for level 3 qualifications, including AS and A levels, being released up to three weeks earlier than usual.

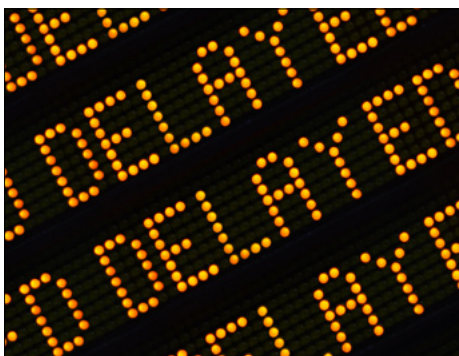
Education secretary Gavin Williamson has said the PQA model would see universities base offers on actual results, ending the reliance on predicted grades which is “letting down” bright disadvantaged pupils.

Research from UCL’s Institute of Education showed almost a quarter of high-ability applicants from lower-income households had their results under-predicted between 2013 and 2015.

But Ofqual has now warned that cutting marking time alone to deliver the reforms would “introduce delivery risks that are simply too great and would be unacceptable”.

It says current marking quality cannot be “compromised” by the reduced time for both individual examiners and exam boards carrying out quality assurance.

A shorter marking window will also require more examiners, but Ofqual says it “could not be



certain that there would be sufficient examiner capacity”. Recruitment is already sometimes “challenging” in some subjects.

This could see some results delivered late, “disadvantaging those whose results are delayed” in their bid to secure places.

The reforms could also erode the current “contingency time”, which factors in risks such as particular subject marking being slower than expected or technology outages.

Ofqual accepts that a “limited reduction in marking time could be explored” but says it “cannot bear all the weight” and changes must come across the system.

It proposes bringing exam start dates forward by a week, starting AS and A-level exams earlier relative to qualifications like GCSEs, and scrapping the one-week gap between issuing results to UCAS and to students.

Introducing a fixed results date could also help, according to the regulator.

Overall Ofqual argues in its response to the

Department for Education’s consultation that “a combination” of such adjustments would be needed to deliver PQA successfully.

It also proposes an initial pilot of any changes to boost confidence and “identify unforeseen and unintended consequences”.

The DfE has said its preferred route is “to compress the exam timetable, the marking period and the requirement for UCAS to receive results data well in advance of results day”.

Two models have been proposed. The first is to delay applications and offers until after results are released. The second would involve applications continuing to be made before A levels are sat, but offers being received afterwards.

School leaders’ union ASCL said this week that it was “cautiously” backing the second model.

But Geoff Barton, the union’s general secretary, said the challenges of this change “should not be under-estimated though, and we’re particularly conscious that students would need more support after results day under this new system because they would be juggling more options than is currently the case”.

He added: “Additional funding would be needed to employ dedicated advisers or pay overtime to teaching staff”.

Barton said it was a “crying shame” that the government decoupled AS levels from A levels, as the old system “provided a very good way of providing accurate predictions”.

The consultation on reforms began in January and ended yesterday.

TOM BELGER | @TOM_BELGER

Government waters down in-year admissions reforms

The government has watered down measures to speed up the in-year school admissions process after councils warned they lacked the staff to meet new time limits.

The Department for Education has confirmed that its shake-up of in-year admissions will take effect in September, subject to approval by MPs. The plans are designed to make the system “easier to navigate” for parents, fix long waits for places and stop schools turning away “challenging” pupils.

Previous investigations by *Schools Week* revealed how vulnerable children were being shut out by schools, and some pupils were waiting up to 10 months for places.

The government revealed its final plans this week, making multiple tweaks after a consultation last year.

It had previously planned to cap the time that admissions authorities have to make individual decisions at 10 school days, to “address concerns regarding the length of time some school authorities take”.

But 38 per cent of respondents to the survey warned that it would mean extra workloads for councils, which would require extra staff and investment.

The DfE has now extended the limit to 15 days, saying authorities should only “aim” for 10 school days.

A proposed limit of 20 school days for decisions made under fair access protocols will go ahead as planned, however. FAPs involve a panel of heads and council representatives meeting to find places for vulnerable pupils.

Councils will also be ordered to publish in-year admissions policies promptly on their websites.

Further reforms include adding a definition of “challenging behaviour” to the admissions code, to stop provisions allowing schools to reject such pupils being “misused”. This will include behaviour which is “unlikely to be responsive to the usual range of interventions” or “beyond the normal range that schools can tolerate”.

Other changes will limit FAPs to children unable to secure places through the standard in-year admissions process, and only if they meet certain criteria. It acknowledged FAPs are sometimes “used as the default way to process all in-year admissions,” when they should be focused on vulnerable children.

Exams declaration form must not put pressure on students, schools told

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Schools are being warned not to use a new form that requires students to declare they understand this year's grading process as a "waiver of rights".

The Exams Office, a membership organisation for exams officers, has drawn up a template of a "candidate confirmation form" after requests from its members. Exams Office founder Jugjit Chima says it could provide reassurance for students and support schools.

Ane Vernon, partner at law firm Payne Hicks Beach, said that, after last year's grading turmoil, it was not surprising schools were striving for "maximum clarity and transparency" this time.

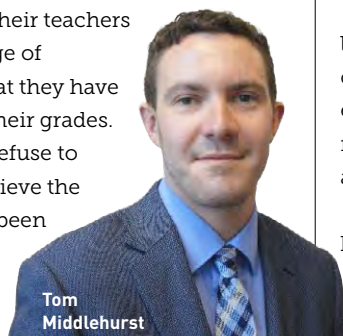
But she added: "Any attempt to obtain what could be seen as a waiver of rights or advance confirmation that the pupil accepts the school's policy is likely to give rise to its own problems."

"At a time when students and their parents are under an enormous amount of stress, this could lead to complaints that such an approach constitutes an underhand attempt to close the door on routes of appeal."

The template provides two suggested forms: one to sign prior to grading and another for use when teacher-assessed grades have been calculated, but before submission. There are up to 12 suggested check box points, but a school can adapt them as it sees fit.

The first suggests students sign to say they are aware of and understand how grades will be awarded. Another asks signatories to confirm that their teachers have used a range of evidence and that they have not negotiated their grades. Students could refuse to sign it if they believe the process has not been followed.

Chima said



Tom Middlehurst

This completed form must be returned to the Exams Officer by Friday 14th May 2021

I confirm that the following has taken place: (Please tick each box to confirm each statement)

- ☐ I have been given an explanation of how my grades will be determined in summer 2021
- ☐ I have received a copy of the Joint Council for Qualifications[®] (JCQ) document *Guidance for students, parents and guardians: GCSEs and AS/A Levels in England Summer 2021* (published here www.jcq.org.uk/summer-2021-arrangements/)
- ☐ I have a full understanding of the process undertaken by my school which is line with Ofqual, JCQ and awarding body (exam board) requirements
- ☐ The professional judgement of teachers has been based on what I have been taught
- ☐ My teachers have used a range of evidence from across the course of study to make their decision
- ☐ My teachers have informed me of the pieces of work which have been used as evidence either completed or partially completed, to inform my overall grade for each subject for which I am entered
- ☐ (Only tick this box where you have approved access arrangements/reasonable adjustments) Where I have been granted any approved access arrangements/reasonable adjustments my school will ensure that these are in place when evidence is gathered. Where appropriate reasonable adjustments are not in place when I take an assessment that is being used as evidence, my teacher will take this into account when determining my grade or considered alternative evidence
- ☐ I will have had the opportunity to raise any concerns about the evidence being used with my teacher

where for example, the evidence is self-

the template had been well received as it provides "clarity to both students and teachers and for ensuring that the [grading] procedure and processes ... are adhered to". It also reduces confusion and uncertainty for students, he added.

Ofqual has confirmed to *Schools Week* that the forms are optional, so they would not be studied as part of any quality assurance or when appeals were considered.

The Joint Council for Qualifications, which is coordinating approaches for exam boards this summer, said it was not involved in the production of the forms and that there is "no JCQ requirement" for centres to complete these forms.

Joe Woodcock, community engagement manager at The Student Room, said the forms could be a "springboard" for students to fully understand the grading process and encourage them to ask questions.

Tom Middlehurst, a specialist at school leaders' union ASCL, said "schools and colleges may find them helpful in ensuring they are consistently and fairly applying their own procedures and policies".

But Jonathan Mountstevens, deputy head at Beaumont School in St Albans, Hertfordshire, said: "I

do not think it is fair to require students to confirm things which they cannot know for sure, such as how a judgment has been reached or reviewed... Students are going through a very tough time and I think there is a danger of making it even more stressful for them if we ask them to plough through a complicated checklist."

In a normal year, students would be required to sign a declaration when submitting work for subjects with coursework and non-exam elements to confirm that the work is their own.

Mountstevens said a "short, simple declaration" for students to confirm that the work is their own and that they understand "attempts to gain an unfair advantage will be reported to awarding bodies and could hold serious consequences" would be better.

"These things are under their control and it is fair to hold students to account for them," he added.

An Ofqual spokesperson said: "It is for membership organisations like The Exams Office to respond to questions and requests for information from their members, and to provide support materials where that might be helpful.

Schools and colleges can then decide if they want to use them."



Jonathan Mountstevens

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Ofsted accused over 'disingenuous' wellbeing review

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted's pledge to review whether inspections are affecting staff wellbeing has been branded "disingenuous" after it emerged that no new action is actually being taken.

The Department for Education and Ofsted made 12 commitments under an education staff wellbeing charter published this week to help "protect" the mental health of school staff.

One of Ofsted's three commitments was to "review whether the framework is having inadvertent impacts on staff wellbeing (for example, creating unnecessary workload) and take steps to alleviate any issues".

However, this pledge will not result in a dedicated review of how inspections impact staff.

When asked for further details of the review, the inspectorate told *Schools Week* it related to "ongoing work with the sector".

The examples of action Ofsted said it was taking were monitoring post-inspection surveys and "continuing our conversations with unions and the wider sector about how inspection is working on the ground".

Ofsted said it committed to review the impact of its education inspection framework (EIF) when it was introduced in 2019 and the charter "sets out that commitment".

But Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union (NEU), warned that Ofsted was "overpromising and under-delivering, and being quite disingenuous in the process".

She said an independent review was needed to properly assess the impact of inspections.

"As long as Ofsted is allowed to be its own judge and jury, the workload pressure and the epidemic of mental ill-health of education staff will continue to rise," Bousted added.

An NEU survey of more than 10,000 school and

college staff last month revealed 50 per cent of staff thought the reduction of stress from external accountability measures such as inspections would improve their mental wellbeing.

Ofsted say inspectors look to staff wellbeing as part of the EIF's leadership and management judgment.

However post-inspection survey data from 2019-20 does not include specific questions regarding wellbeing, although it does ask how effective inspectors leadership and management feedback was.

Ofsted said the latest iteration of the survey now asks whether "the benefits of my inspection outweigh any negative aspects" and there is also a free text facility for schools to pass on relevant feedback.

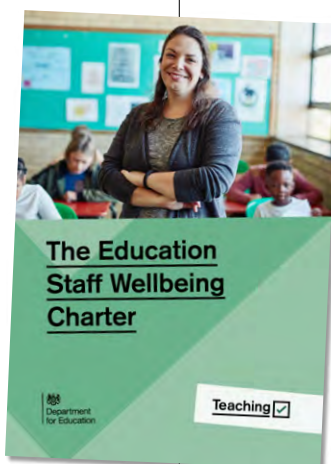
The review pledge was viewed by most in the sector as a fresh initiative from the inspectorate.

A separate Ofsted pledge, which was not new, was also clearly labelled as such. The inspectorate promised to "continue to clarify" that providers are not expected to create documentation for inspections.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the

Association of School and College Leaders, said that while some proposals may not "appear to be new", the pledges made by DfE, Ofsted and education unions in one place for the first time ensure wellbeing "stays at the top of the agenda".

The charter was drawn up in conjunction with teaching unions, several schools and mental health charities such as



Your wellbeing matters. Ofsted will:



Ensure that inspectors take staff wellbeing into account in coming to their judgements and monitor this through quality assurance and evaluation.



Review whether the framework is having inadvertent impacts on staff wellbeing (for example, creating unnecessary workload) and take steps to alleviate any issues.



Continue to clarify that we do not expect providers to create documentation for inspection, to try to reduce administrative workload.

Education Staff Wellbeing Charter
For more information: www.gov.uk/dfe

Mind and Education Support.

Schools will be able to sign up to a voluntary charter of 11 pledges from the autumn. The charter is designed to "protect, promote and enhance" staff wellbeing.

Pledges include having a "sub-strategy" for protecting the wellbeing and mental health of school leaders.

Schools signing up also agree to "hold ourselves accountable" by "measuring staff wellbeing" and monitoring trends over time.

Elsewhere, the DfE pledged to ensure its guidance meets user needs – including publishing gov.uk updates aimed at educational professionals "only during working hours".

This will happen unless there is "significant user need" or a "legislative requirement", the DfE said.

It also said it will "continue to strengthen support for professional development" and ensure wellbeing is embedded in training.

The government will review the progress that has been made against the commitments in 2023 and schools will also be surveyed to assess the charter's impact.

Investigation



Is the government fulfilling its £300m school mental health support promises?

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Theresa May's 2018 Green Paper on transforming children and young people's mental health committed to a radical £300 million shake-up of support in schools. The government promised its plans would tackle the "burning injustice" of mental health illness.

But the impact of Covid and ad-hoc announcements tacked on to the existing promises mean it is not clear just how much progress has actually been made. *Schools Week* takes a look at the key proposals ...

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAMS

The promise: Covering 20 to 25 per cent of the country by 2023

Funding: At least £215m

Reality: On track

The government pledged £215 million for local support teams to work between schools and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to provide early intervention on mental wellbeing and emotional wellbeing issues.

It said there could be "as many as 8,000 additional staff supporting schools and colleges across the country in the long term".

It promised to roll them out to cover between a fifth and a quarter of the country by the end of 2022-23.

They received a funding boost this year – as part of a new £79 million package – but the government did not say how much of this would go towards mental health support teams.

NHS England said the extra cash would mean it could meet its commitment by March 2022 – a year ahead of schedule.

However just 15 per cent of pupils are



currently served by such teams. The NHS says there are currently more than 280 teams set up or in training. Of these, 183 teams are operational – covering 15 per cent of pupils in England.

A further 103 are in development, with "more" to be commissioned this year. Around 400 teams will be up and running by 2023.

Although not a formal target, the NHS expects 35 per cent of pupils to have access to a support team by 2023.

An evaluation commissioned by the government's health and education departments has been delayed due to the pandemic. An interim report on the trailblazer areas – which include 59 support teams – is due this summer.

Sophie Corlett, director of external relations

at Mind, told a health and social care committee in March that "we need to know whether they are working".

SENIOR MENTAL HEALTH LEAD IN SCHOOLS

Target: To support all state schools to identify and train a senior lead for mental health by 2025

Funding: £9.5 million

Reality: Only starting this autumn, but committed to hitting 2025 target

Senior mental health leads would have knowledge and practical skills to develop a whole school approach to wellbeing and mental health. This was another government pledge in the 2018 Green Paper.

However, more than 18 months since an

Investigation



initial procurement exercise was launched, the training has still not started. The DfE blamed the delay on the 2019 election and impact of the pandemic.

But the plan is slowly kicking into action. This week, the Department for Education said £9.5 million allocated in last year's spending review will be offered to 7,800 schools and colleges to pay for the training from September.

It is not clear how schools will be chosen, but cash will be in the form of an approximately £1,300 grant. Of that, £800 will be for training with the rest for supply costs or backfill while the staff member attends training.

Courses will be quality assured by a DfE-commissioned body before being published ahead of a roll out in September. The documents say it is anticipated to be a "multi-year" provision of grant funding, subject to spending reviews.

A DfE spokesperson said it was still committed to the 2025 target.

4-WEEK WAITING TIME FOR SPECIALIST NHS SERVICES

Target: Covering 20 to 25 per cent of the country by end of 2022-23

Reality: Pilots delayed due to Covid

The government said in 2018 it would carry out pilots to understand the "benefits, challenges and indicators of success" of introducing a four-week waiting time.

In a January report, former children's commissioner Anne Longfield found that just 20 per cent of children referred to services started treatment within four weeks in 2019-20.

She also uncovered a postcode lottery on waiting times. Thirty local areas had an average waiting time of less than 30 days, while 34 had average waiting times of more than 60 days.

NHS England said the 12 pilots have been extended into 2021-22 to complete work "delayed due to the impact of the pandemic", such as data collection.

Despite the disruption, Claire Murdoch, national mental health director at NHS England, told a health and social care



committee in March it was still "on track" and would appear in a review on NHS standards. The NHS Long Term Plan made £785 million available for this, but the funding package also included cash for the mental health support teams – so it is unclear how much was distributed to each.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS TRAINING

Target: Training for every secondary school by 2019 and every primary school by 2022

Funding: £200,000 a year

Reality: Not all secondary schools completed training; question marks remain over primaries

In 2017, Theresa May promised training for every secondary school over the next three years to "make a real difference to children's lives".

The £200,000-a-year scheme was part of a key manifesto promise to improve mental health support.

But, as *Schools Week* revealed last year, just 2,710 of the 3,456 state secondary schools in England had completed the training.

In the response to the 2018 Green Paper, the government said it was "scoping out delivery" of the commitment to roll out

mental health awareness training to primary schools, which it hoped would "begin soon". But it refused to provide the latest update on primary school progress despite repeated requests from *Schools Week*.

COVID SCHOOL SUPPORT SCHEMES

Target: Training schemes to help students returning to school

Funding: £15 million

Reality: 9 in 10 councils offer support, funding extended

The DfE announced a Wellbeing in Education Return programme to help staff support the "wellbeing and resilience" of pupils, students, other staff and parents from September. The DfE contributed £6.6 million to the £8 million pot.

It says 90 per cent of local authority areas told it they were delivering additional training and support because of the programme's funding.

This week a new £7 million Wellbeing in Education Recovery fund to run until September was also announced.

The DfE said the cash would provide free expert training, support and resources for staff dealing with pupils experiencing additional pressure from the past year, including trauma, anxiety or grief. ■



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News feature

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'You grow with the grant, then shrink back at the end': the primary scooping up DfE accolades

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

From the outside, Charles Dickens looks like any other inner-London primary school.

But behind the walls of its building in Borough is a team that has worked on five different government school-to-school support initiatives in just four years.

This year alone, Charles Dickens has become a behaviour hub, a teaching school hub and a flexible working ambassador school. It has been a research school since 2019, and received money to aid school improvement in neighbouring settings in 2017.

In fact, Charles Dickens has led more such programmes than any other individual institution in recent years.

Cassie Buchanan has been head of the school since 2008, and now also leads the Charter Schools Educational Trust, which it joined when it converted from a foundation school to an academy last year. The school was rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted in 2019.

Buchanan told *Schools Week* the school had always been "outward-facing", and that "part of the moral purpose – the vision – for the school is to be able to give back and contribute back to the system, rather than kind of holding it all as one school".

Involvement in the various programmes has also brought substantial extra cash into the school – over £650,000 since 2017.

This includes £200,000 in teaching school hub funding (replacing the £40,000 annual funding for teaching schools), £60,000 for flexible working, and at least £12,000 for the behaviour hub.

Research school funding is £40,000 a year, and in 2017 the school received £190,000 from the strategic school improvement fund for a collaborative project across 13 Southwark schools.

The school has also received £65,000, the majority of it from the Greater London Authority, for its Stepping into Leadership programme, which aims to make the teaching workforce more ethnically diverse.



But Buchanan is keen to point out that Charles Dickens isn't the only beneficiary. Its teaching school alliance, for example, has another school leading on teacher training, while other heads lead "different bits of school improvement".

Asked why she thinks her school is so successful in obtaining Department for Education grants, Buchanan says government was "really clear about what they're looking for" in the bidding processes.

"They look for track record and capacity. So I guess if you can demonstrate that you have done that quality of work and that quantity of work and you're able to work with different partners, and you can demonstrate how you can kind of grow with the grant and then shrink back at the end, then you're meeting the criteria."

The collaborative approach allows Charles Dickens to help other schools even beyond its immediate network, for example, by publishing all of its online learning materials on its website at the beginning of the pandemic.

But Buchanan said the school's own pupils benefit too – both from the expertise of teachers working on the various projects and from improved retention.

"There's no better CPD than working in other schools. And it means we haven't got churn. We get people who stay for a long time, but also stay and are committed to getting better. So it's the best of both worlds, isn't it?"

For assistant head David Windle, this outreach work is a "defining feature" of the school where

he has now worked twice – as a newly qualified teacher in the mid-2000s and again since 2015.

"It definitely helps us grow as a school and it helps individuals in the school grow, and I think people do stay around for that reason. Because you can progress here, you can still learn new things, no matter how long you've been here."

Teacher retention was also at the forefront of Buchanan's mind when the school bid to be part of the flexible working pilot.

"I see particularly women leave the profession because teaching isn't always compatible with having a family or having caring responsibilities. I've got three children, and I found it very difficult. I couldn't have done it if I hadn't had somebody at home, my husband, looking after them."

"It's about making teaching a more a more flexible profession. And that means we get to keep all those people who couldn't stay because of the job. That seems like a terrible waste to me."

Education ministers have often been accused of playing favourites, particularly with the big academy trusts. But could the success of a small school in a tiny trust change this in the future?

A DfE spokesperson said successful bids to school-to-school support programmes were awarded with a "high bar and following open and transparent tender processes".

"Charles Dickens champions the evidence-based approaches that are so beneficial for high-quality teaching and pupil development. They help foster close partnerships and collaborative learning between schools, benefitting all the schools they work with."



Cassie Buchanan

News

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'Expulsions' expelled: Critics persuade DfE to U-turn on exclusions lingo

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education is ditching its use of the "dated" word "expulsions" to describe permanent exclusions, after concerns were raised that it harked back to the era of corporal punishment.

However, the government will continue to refer to fixed-term exclusions as "suspensions", despite worries that the word "trivialises" the action.

Ministers switched to using the terms to describe the two different types of exclusions in the wake of Edward Timpson's landmark review in 2019, despite the fact the review did not recommend the language changes.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson used "expulsion" twice in his speech to the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) conference this month.

Williamson said the change in terminology was because "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".

Schools minister Nick Gibb has also used the phrase in answers to parliamentary questions.

But the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) told children's minister Vicky Ford they were "deeply concerned" about the use of both "suspension" and "expulsions".

In a letter, also signed by Ambitious About Autism and Special Educational Consortium, the CDC said: "The word 'expulsion' conveys a more vigorous, or even aggressively physical, approach to removing children from schools and, for some, the language provokes a visceral reaction.

"The language is dated and evokes an era that pre-dates the abolition of corporal punishment in schools."

The letter also warned that it risked "undermining any constructive proposals" in the SEND review, due to report next



Ed Timpson

month, and was "at odds" with prime minister Boris Johnson's messages on "levelling up". It continued that the term "suspension" seemed to "trivialise the action of exclusion and suggests that this is not really an exclusion".

"Yet, we know...that a number of fixed-term exclusions can combine to have a detrimental impact on outcomes for disabled pupils."

Children's minister Vicky Ford said yesterday that the language was "not a change in policy", but after listening to worries raised by the sector "the department has concluded it will reinstate 'permanent exclusion' when referring to a permanent exclusion while continuing to use 'suspension' when referring to fixed-term exclusion".

In a letter sent to the charities, seen by Schools Week, she added: "I have made it a priority to protect and support children and young people with SEND throughout the pandemic and to put them at the heart of our wider recovery work."

Writing for Schools Week, Philippa Stobbs, assistant

director at CDC, said her organisation was "delighted" at the change. She added: "There are important messages here for recovery. These messages are all the more important for particular groups of pupils who are disproportionately excluded.

"The foundations are laid for a well-informed recovery. It will work better with less punitive language supporting it."

It also marks a win for Timpson who last week told Schools Week he was "not keen" on using the word "expulsion", as it sounded "too definitive, as if you are being removed from education all together".

In response to the review in 2019, the government said it would "return to referring to fixed-term exclusion as 'suspension' and permanent exclusion as 'expulsion', to prevent confusion and conflation between the two terms".

But Timpson said his review was not asked to look at language, and he was "surprised" to see the comment. His review only recommended renaming pupil referral units.



Philippa Stobbs

Spielman set for two-year extension as Ofsted chief

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

Amanda Spielman is set to stay on as Ofsted chief inspector for an extra two years, Schools Week understands.

While the extension to the role is believed to have been agreed by government, it still has to be officially signed off by the Privy Council, the queen's formal body of advisers.

Should it get approval, Spielman would become the longest serving Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, at seven years – with Sir Chris Woodhead previously leading the watchdog for six years during the 1990s.

The HMCI began her five-year term in January 2017 and was originally due to hang up her hat at the end of this year.

But, should she leave at the end of this year, the education inspection framework (EIF) which she introduced and helped mastermind would only have been in place for less than two terms because of Covid.

Ofsted introduced the EIF in September 2019 but just six months later was forced to suspend all routine inspections when the Covid-19



Amanda Spielman

pandemic took hold in March the following year.

Schools Week understands Spielman is eager to extend her reign in order to ensure the changes she introduced have an opportunity to become fully implemented within the sector.

The new framework saw the inspectorate place more focus on schools' curriculum and less emphasis on exams results and hard data.

Despite the changes Ofsted admitted in December 2019 that schools with more pupils from deprived backgrounds are still less likely to be judged 'good' than those with more affluent pupils.

In lieu of normal duty the watchdog has been conducting remote monitoring inspections of schools graded 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' since January 25.

Ofsted said these visits were in place to reassure parents and support school improvement

Visits resulted in a judgement as to whether the school was taking effective action to provide education during the pandemic – so far only 10 schools have been found to be ineffective.

On-site monitoring visits resumed on May 4 but full-graded Ofsted inspections are not slated to return until September.

The HMCI is appointed by the Queen for a term of five years, however there are a number of steps candidates must complete beforehand.

The education secretary must give them the green light, before it goes to the parliamentary education committee.

Finally agreement is sought from the Privy Council, the queen's formal body of advisers. An appointment cannot be confirmed until an order is laid by the Privy Council.

A DfE spokesperson said: "Planning for the appointment of Ofsted chief inspector from January 2022 is ongoing, as the current chief inspector's term concludes at the end of the year. We expect to confirm next steps in the coming weeks."

TOM BELGER | @TOM_BELGER

Home education soars among pupils with EHC plans

The number of children with education, health and care plans being educated at home has risen by almost a quarter in just one year.

Data published by the Department for Education on Thursday shows parents had chosen to educate 3,660 pupils with EHC plans at home in January, up from 2,983 a year earlier.

It comes after the Association of Directors of Children's Services reported a 38 per cent annual increase in the number of all children in elective home education as of last October.

This week's data shows that 1,460 children of compulsory school age were awaiting provision specified in their plans, and not currently in education.

The figures also point to increased EHC plan delays over the past year, with the number that were issued later than the 20-week statutory time limit reaching 42 per cent.

The share of pupils with plans and statements who were not in education, employment or training also rose to 2.5 per cent, up from 1.7

per cent in 2019.

Data also reveals the proportion of pupils with EHC plans taught in special schools has continued to decline, while the proportion in mainstream schools continued to rise.

It came as Ofsted warned some pupils were "not getting enough help" in mainstream schools, even when specialist support was provided.

Research by the inspectorate found multi-agency services' support was "not always timely or implemented appropriately".

The report also highlighted "long wait times and high levels of bureaucracy" in the EHC plan process, with some families forced to pay for additional services.

Ofsted looked at 21 pupils' experiences in depth across seven mainstream schools for the qualitative research, carried out before the pandemic. Further issues included "gaps" in staff understanding of pupils' needs and schools teaching a curriculum "not properly sequenced

or well matched" to those needs.

Ian Noon, head of policy at the National Deaf Children's Society, said the report showed the SEND system "isn't fit for purpose".

"The government has the necessary evidence, so it must address these issues when it reviews the country's SEND provision later this year."

Ofsted's national director for education Sean Harford said many children had found it harder to engage with remote education during Covid making providing the right support "more important than ever".

A DfE spokesperson said it was "reassuring" that provision of EHC plans had continued throughout the pandemic. They highlighted £1.7 billion in education recovery funding to "tackle the impact of time out of the classroom" and rising high-needs funding, but acknowledged there was "more to do".

The ongoing SEND review will make the system "more consistent, high-quality and joined-up", they said.

Parents protest as head loses job while CEO gets £25k pay rise

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

An academy trust has blamed "significant funding challenges" for its decision to scrap a headteacher's job, even though a £25,000 salary increase has made its chief executive one of the best paid in the country.

Parents at St Mary's Broughton Gifford, a primary school in Wiltshire, have launched a petition to save headteacher Pauline Orchard's post. It says children will lose a "fantastic figurehead" and claims the wages of Dr Nicholas Capstick, chief executive of The White Horse Federation which runs the school, show there is "enough money to go around".

Parents cite *Schools Week's* recent trust CEO pay analysis, which found Capstick's minimum pay band jumped £25,000 to at least £220,000 in 2019-20. It put him among the 20 best-paid chief executives in the country.

Dr Mary Boustead, general secretary of the NEU, said she recently warned a group of trust CEOs that soaring executive pay would cause "rising tension" amid teacher pay freezes.

She said "questions would come up" from parents and staff over pay rises whenever financial difficulties led trusts to cut pay progression or jobs. "It's not good for industrial relations and goodwill," she added.

A White Horse spokesperson said Capstick's pay was "fair" given his



St Mary's Broughton Gifford

responsibilities as the one of the country's longest-serving chief executives at the 32-school trust. His salary equated to £18.32 per pupil, when dozens of other leaders' pay is more than £100 a head, the spokesperson said.

Capstick has also covered as principal this year at Swindon's largest primary, which will save around £108,000 and is "just one of many examples of how CEOs go above and beyond", they added.

But Suzi Shingler, whose son attends St Mary's, said: "It seems wrong to pay an inflated executive salary at the expense of educators on the ground... None of the parents who have spoken out can see how having one principal looking after three schools is going to work."

After Shingler wrote to school governors, the trust explained the decision by

highlighting the "significant funding challenges" schools face, which have been "further perpetuated by declining pupil numbers due to low birth rates".

Schools nationwide needed "adjustments to overheads to make ends meet", the trust added.

Candida Hutchinson, a principal at two other trust schools, will become principal at St Mary's too, while the number of classes will be cut from four to three for its 83 pupils next year.

Emma Hughes, head of HR at law firm Browne Jacobson, warned last month of "bubbling tension" over executive pay, amid frozen teacher wages and Covid-hit family incomes.

The Harris Federation recently came under fire over job cuts at its Tottenham academy, which put CEO Dan Moynihan's salary under fresh scrutiny. It rose to £455,000 last year. The restructure was blamed on "very real financial challenges" amid lower demand for places.

Meanwhile Star Academies highlighted "financial problems" at Starbank Academy in Birmingham after it recently cut a total of 26 jobs. It told *Schools Week* that a 2019 pay rise of £14,000 for CEO Hamid Patel, now on £250,382, was in line with other staff rises in percentage terms, and pay reflected benchmarking and DfE guidance.

The parents' campaign at St Mary's is at least the eighth Change.org petition since early March to call for school staff to be sacked or reinstated.

TOM BELGER | @TOM_BELGER

Free school meal supplier Chartwells to repay furlough millions

A catering firm at the centre of the free school meal parcel fiasco has announced plans to repay millions in furlough cash.

Official figures show Compass Services UK claimed up to £25 million between December and February alone to pay furloughed staff wages. Earlier claims data is not available.

Chartwells, the UK education arm of Compass, was forced to apologise over inadequate food parcels provided to children entitled to free school meals at the start of the

last lockdown.

Images of food parcels shared on social media by parents sparked uproar. Chartwells, part of the Marcus Rashford Child Poverty Taskforce, said some parcels "fell short of our usual standards" and it would make no profit on the provision.

Now the multinational Compass has confirmed furlough grants will be repaid amid rising profit margins, despite the heavy toll of Covid shutdowns on sales.

Its half-year financial results on Wednesday revealed it made a 4.2 per cent profit margin on global revenues between January and March. But margins remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Within its European education division, sales slumped 22 per cent year-on-year to £360 million between October and March.

Compass suspended dividends last year, but told investors it would resume shareholder payouts and hand them any surplus cash "at the appropriate time."

'The stakes are high': how a Dutch HR firm landed the flagship tutoring contract

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Standing at the despatch box yesterday shadow education secretary Kate Green took her opposite number to task over the flagship National Tutoring Programme "being taken out of the hands of experts".

Citing an i newspaper report that the £62 million contract to run year two of the NTP is to be handed to Dutch outsourcing giant Randstad, Green demanded what "expertise in education, teaching and learning they will bring".

The news certainly surprised the sector, with incumbents the Education Endowment Foundation in the process of appointing a chief executive for the new charity set up specially to run the contract.

So how did a huge multi-national private company – that is already paid to be a tutoring provider – win out?

Multiple sources told *Schools Week* the firm undercut EEF, which was bidding under the new National Tutoring Foundation charity. While independent, the NTF would include EEF as a board member.

One source told *Schools Week* that Randstad's bid was deemed "better value for money". Two others said the bid was cheaper, with one source claiming it could be as much as £10 million less.

Neither the Department for Education nor Randstad would confirm details this week, saying the procurement process is being finalised. EEF said they could not comment on the bid outcome until it is announced.

The tutoring programme will double next year – reaching more than 500,000 pupils. The EEF has been criticised for its performance this year, as only 110,000 pupils have started tuition – despite 210,000 having signed up. The target is to enrol 250,000 pupils this year.

According to sources, the NTF had bid to target disadvantaged schools, rather than areas, next year. It follows criticism that just 45 per cent of students enrolled so far are pupil premium eligible. The DfE was looking at a target of 65 per cent for next year.

But one source said: "EEF has a very strong



track record as a partner to the government and they know an awful lot about tuition.

"There was a great deal of support for the NTF organisation. It was not a done deal, but I think it was a surprise the NTF didn't get it."

He claimed there is also some "reticence" in the DfE about the decision.

Recruitment for the inaugural NTF chief executive, run by headhunting firm Perrett Laver, closed on April 25, with interviews slated for this month. They wanted someone with "clear, strategic leadership" to ensure NTF is "positioned as a significant, expert voice integral to the national education debate".

Eyebrows have also been raised as Randstad is already one of the 33 approved tuition partners, and whether it can carry on delivering tutoring as well as running the programme.

Schools Week understands that in response to a question during the procurement process, the DfE said it would not "absolutely prohibit" the accreditation of a potential tuition partner "being affiliated to the prime delivery provider".

But it would have to be satisfied conflicts of interests can be "satisfactorily addressed".

Julie McCulloch, director of policy at school leaders' union ASCL, said the decision-making behind the NTP remains "opaque" and leaders need "reassurance that the process is both robust and transparent if they are to place their trust in it".

One source said the government outsourcing

the contract to a private company was an "open goal" for criticism, adding: "If this goes badly wrong this sets back the concept of tutoring... the stakes are quite high."

There are also questions about what will happen to Teach First's involvement. The charity currently runs the academic mentors arm, and was listed as a subcontractor on NTF's bid.

Teach First did not respond to a request for comment.

An EEF spokesperson said it was "proud" to have helped establish the NTP. "We responded to unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic, and today, hundreds of thousands of pupils in thousands of schools across the country have been able to access high-quality tutoring and support," they added.

EEF is on track to meet this year's target of 250,000 enrolled by the end of this academic year by July, they added.

EEF previously said if the bid was unsuccessful the charity would be dissolved.

A DfE spokesperson said: "We are finalising the procurement process for the supplier of the programme for next academic year, and will set out further details shortly."

What do we know about Randstad?

The Dutch giant is a multinational HR firm operating in 39 countries. Founded in 1960, it covers a range of industries from cleaners to sports coaches.

Last year, it was appointed one of the 33 NTP providers, with a maximum allocation of tutoring 25,000 pupils across 1,500 to 2,000 schools.

The company told *Schools Week* in November that it had experience in tuition but did not say whether this was experience of direct provision of services rather than recruitment.

It was reported in 2019 that Google had subcontracted workers employed by Randstad to scan homeless people's faces in exchange for a \$5 gift card, as part of a project to improve the search engine's facial recognition algorithms.

In 2017, inspectors found that Spanish airline Iberia had required Randstad to carry out pregnancy tests on candidates along with other medical checks, according to reports.

News in brief

Tool to measure cyber security after 70 attacks

The Department for Education is developing a tool to help schools measure their cyber-security provision. More than 70 ransomware attacks have hit schools during the pandemic.

Schools minister Nick Gibb told the National Cyber Security Centre's online conference that all schools should take advantage of the provision when it becomes available next year.

The NCSC revealed in March that schools had lost financial records, students' coursework and Covid-19 testing data during a spike in cyber attacks targeting the education sector. There was a similar warning in September 2020.

Gibb revealed that more than 70 ransomware cases had been recorded during this time, with additional attacks in higher and further education.

"Not only does this threaten children's education, it can be really frightening for schools and can distract teachers

from doing their jobs", he warned.

He wants schools to be "proactive and on the front foot to improve their cyber resilience".

He added: "We're developing a tool for schools to measure their own levels of cyber security and this will provide valuable signposting to a range of advice and guidance that schools can use to make positive changes to their technology environments."

Ransomware is a type of malware that prevents users from accessing their systems or data. Following the attack, victims receive a "ransom note" demanding payment in exchange for the return of data.

Academies minister Baroness Berridge revealed last month that the DfE would undertake a Risk Protection Arrangement

cyber risk pilot with over 500 schools. Each will be supported to achieve certification which helps to protect them against 80 per cent of the most common attacks.

Trusts that have been victims of attacks are helping to provide guidance.



£15m catch-up resource contract pulled

The decision to pull a £15 million contract to produce catch-up resources was "not taken lightly", the DfE said.

A procurement process to find a supplier to produce free, non-mandatory "in-class curriculum resources" was due to close this week but has instead been withdrawn despite "positive interest".

The DfE is "now working on a longer-term strategy to support education recovery, building on evidence that is still emerging".

Last month the British Educational Suppliers Association said the tight tender timescale might "potentially discriminate or prohibit" some bidders.

It was also concerned by the "potential impact" on the "wider educational publishing industry resulting from the government's provision of free resources".

There were fears it could cost schools millions of pounds if they were "printable" documents, as *Schools Week* revealed.

The contract had a price cap of £4 million for development and delivery of resources in the initial subjects – maths, English and science in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. It had an estimated total value of £15 million over the full period, which could have meant extending into other subjects.

Primary geography teachers are not trained

Very few" primary school teachers are trained to teach geography, with nearly half of schools not meeting national curriculum standards, according to Ofsted.

The finding follows subject inspections at 23 "outstanding" schools between January and March 2020.

Iain Freeland, Ofsted subject lead for geography, said "very few teachers had actually been trained in teaching geography, although some could remember a brief session as part of their initial teacher training".

Teachers were introducing errors or not drawing out important concepts. Pupils struggled to recall places they had studied, including UK cities and oceans.

Skills such as using maps, globes, aerial photographs and location

language "were not taught particularly well". Very few primaries were working with secondary schools, which limited the precision with which they set curriculum goals.

Freeland said the vast majority of schools inspected were now "significantly revising their curriculum plans for geography".

While leaders were using the national curriculum as the basis for planning, just under half of schools did not meet its scope or ambition. The most significant gaps were in key stage 2.

The watchdog previously found "limited communication" between primaries and secondaries after a similar review of languages. Overall, however, inspectors found curriculum planning was "well thought through" and built on previous knowledge.

Politicians want GCSE language reforms delayed

MPS and peers want to delay "risky and untested" reforms to modern language GCSEs. An all-party parliamentary group urged the DfE to think again after being "inundated with messages of concern".

The government began consulting on revised content for French, German and Spanish GCSEs in March. Pupils would be "expected to know" up to 1,700 words, at least 90 per cent of which must be among "the 2,000 most frequent words" in each language.

The group wants more time to find consensus across the sector. Language experts fear the changes will limit teaching. The intervention is backed by the British Academy, Chartered Institute of Linguists and education unions.

The changes were proposed following a review in 2019 led by academy trust boss Ian Bauckham, now interim chair of Ofqual.

Communications released under the Freedom of Information Act show how Nick Gibb pushed for Bauckham to be on the panel, alongside Professor Emma Marsden, Professor Katrin Kohl, John Bald, David Shanks and Dr Rachel Hawkes.

The DfE spokesperson said the schools minister chose the panel after recommendations from civil servants. They said the revised content would "encourage more students to take up these important subjects, broadening their horizons and improving their employment opportunities".

EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Covid caution is rightly a matter for schools

It is to be welcomed that face mask rules have been dropped. Overall, the numbers are moving in the right direction. The vaccination programme is working.

But there are emerging warning signs, especially the rise in the Indian variant cases. There is also a doubling of Covid outbreaks in education settings.

That is why it's right that schools are able to make their own decisions on removing restrictions based on their local situation. This seems to be what's happening - with schools, councils and local public health bodies coming up with local solutions.

Should schools choose to be more cautious - and not drop the face mask rules, for instance - they may be challenged by some parents, and they need government to back them up.

Let's hope ministers have learnt lessons from earlier this year to allow some local flex, rather than threaten legal action against schools that don't follow the government mandate.

Proposed new tutoring firm comes with a warning

The government's expected decision to hand its tutoring project to a Dutch, for-profit HR giant surprised many in the sector.

The incumbent EEF - which bid under a new charity founded to run the programme - was thought to have all but won the contract.

They had encountered some criticism over the roll-out, particular the reach and speed, but they appear to have met what was asked of by the government.

The deliberate decision to be exclusive over tuition providers - with the aim of ensuring only the best were chosen - was laudable. But it could have gone quicker. Can Randstad now provide that turbo boost?

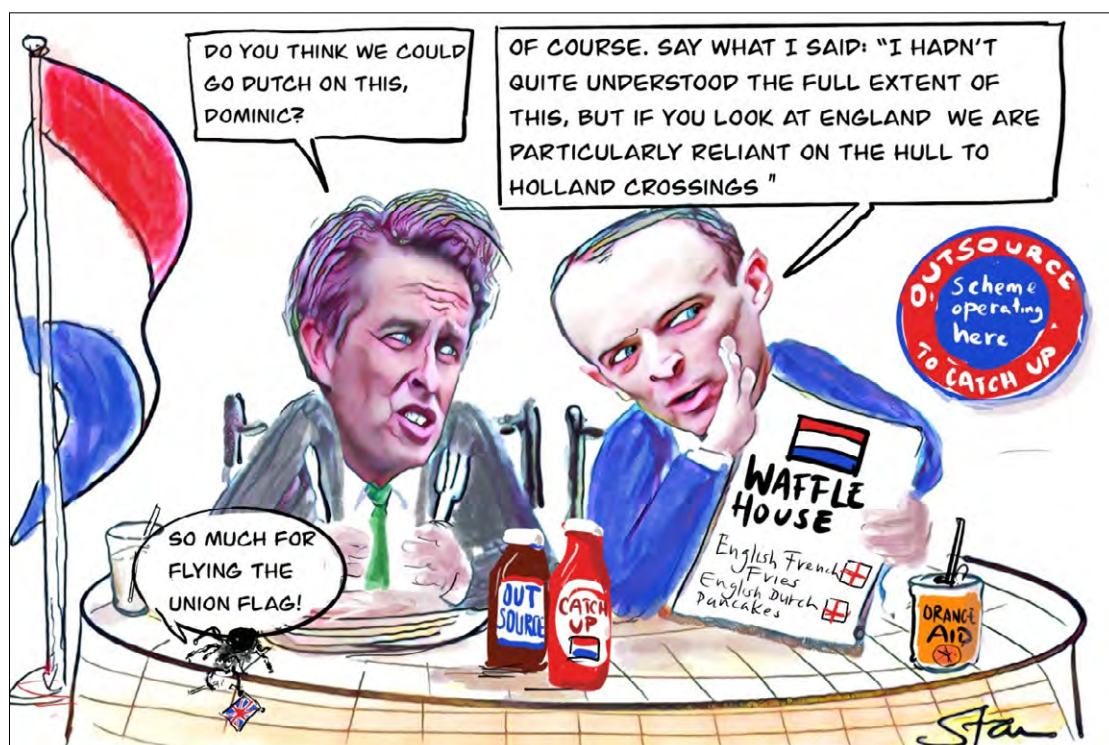
It's not clear. Neither are the firm's credentials in tutoring. It is currently a tuition provider - which throws up big potential conflicts of interests.

There's also the incredibly sensitive topic of the £62m deal being handed to a for-profit company. Add in the government's scratchy track record with outsourcing firms and there's plenty of cause for concern already.

SCHOOLS WEEK



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Look to the system – not schools – for ‘moral purpose’

Bill Thompson

Excellent analysis, exposing a concerning lack of clarity in the argument put forward. Are we willing to care enough about the kids in the school down the road as much as our own? Not sure with this system-led moral purpose hope.

DfE extends school leaders wellbeing service to 160 more heads with £62k

Tara Hanley, @reading_woman

Yes, wellbeing services are all very nice but fixing root causes of burnout noted in the piece would be more effective, decent and significantly better for school productivity, recruitment, retention and culture.

Keep face masks in the classroom for another month, urge unions and scientists

Ben Whitney, @C21sttheology

It's a balance but we have to remove the masks at some point and there have been virtually no cases this term. Teaching, learning and behaviour are all suffering. And no masks at all in primaries of course, which doesn't seem to have caused any issues.

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

Colin Grimes, @MrGPrimary

Great piece here showing that evidence can be flawed at times. Makes me wonder again if we know enough about the brain to make sweeping statements about how we learn.

Etak Nipsa, @etaknipsa

We are edging closer, but with everything there is no 'truth' as yet. That's why we need to always be a little circumspect and as a profession stop looking for a silver bullet. We chip, chip, chip away instead.

Keith Turvey, @Keith_Turvey

All evidence is always flawed in different ways, but the issue is how it's interpreted and translated. It's why medicine has a wealth of implementation studies, too, that actively involve practitioners and users. We have nothing like this in education.

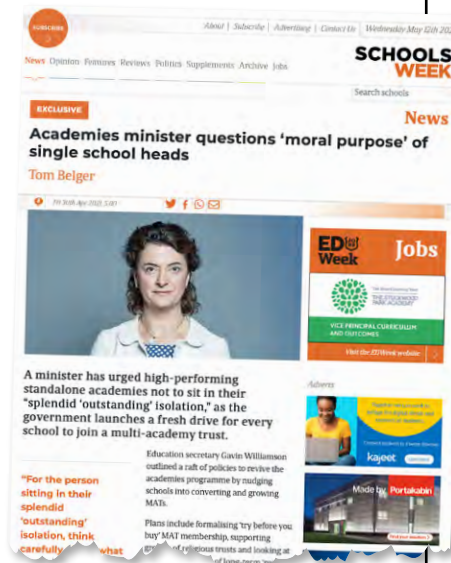
REPLY OF THE WEEK

Greg Coleman

Academies minister questions ‘moral purpose’ of single school heads

I find it frustrating that the government still has the view that MATs are the only way. Gavin Williamson has heaped praise upon MATs during the pandemic. In so doing, he has largely ignored the fantastic work done by local authority and diocesan schools – whether standalone or, like mine, a federation. We are seeing a move to larger federations in Kent and East Sussex and we are fully aware of the enormous benefits of collaboration as a group of schools.

However, we do not believe we need to change our legal status and acadmise to continue to provide the high quality of education to our pupils or to improve it further. In fact, it is likely that the additional expenditure on back office staff, auditing and accountancy fees may well divert funds away from frontline teaching and learning. Hopefully, the government will take the time to reflect and acknowledge that federations of LA/VC/VA schools can and do achieve the benefits of collaboration and that a MAT is not the one and only way.



Ofsted to review framework's impact on staff wellbeing, new charter pledges

Polly Way

Or even better, transform Ofsted into what it always should have been, a supportive organisation that guides and helps school that are struggling, instead of a punitive force that exists as a supplementary layer of expensive bureaucracy designed to create unnecessary league tables and unnecessary stress to an overworked and underfunded sector.



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Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



'You have to not look like you're giving up'

Jess Staufenberg talks to the trust boss the government threatened to sue, who values autonomy and wellbeing for her schools and staff above all else

Helen Rowland, chief executive, Focus Trust

There are very few school leaders who have been threatened with legal action by their own education secretary. Focus Trust chief executive Helen Rowland's crime was that she wanted to run remote education, instead of in-school learning, for a week before Christmas.

A quarter of the north-west trust's pupils and over one-third of its staff had already been sent home to isolate by the end of

November. With rising Covid cases, closing a week early would "safeguard the wellbeing of staff and pupils and protect precious family time together" during the Christmas break.

But the plans put her at loggerheads with Gavin Williamson, the education secretary whose reputation had taken a battering for his botched back-to-school policies earlier in the year. He had insisted keeping schools open was a "national priority".

"We thought, we've got freedoms to do what we want as academies!" Rowland said.

Staff had agreed to shorter Easter holidays, to bring the days forward to before Christmas, she explains. The plans had the backing of trade unions.

"Just out of politeness, I let our contact at the DfE know. And they phoned me up, and said, 'You can't do that.' I said, 'Why not?' and they said, 'No.'"

Not so easily put off, Rowland immediately called a trustee meeting and also requested a meeting with Vicky Beer, the regional schools commissioner for Lancashire and West Yorkshire.

Profile: Helen Rowland



Rowland with her parents

In an official letter, Beer said it was not “appropriate to extend the Christmas holiday”. If Rowland’s team didn’t U-turn, ministers “may wish to consider further action” using powers granted under the emergency Coronavirus Act, she warned.

Two things struck Rowland. First off, the Coronavirus Act 2020 had not been made clear to school leaders. “No one had heard of it!” she hoots.

It gave the education secretary the power to issue a temporary continuity direction “requiring the taking of reasonable steps” to keep a school open and also “require the alteration of term dates”. Of course, Boris Johnson then “closed” schools at the drop of a hat at the start of January as Covid rates soared.

The second point was Rowland’s team were not trying to “close” the school or “extend” the holidays, but run a remote education week. When they requested the same at Easter for one primary school, they were again blocked. Ten staff and 60

“I just felt really determined to show courage”

children in the trust ended up spending their holiday in isolation, she tells me.

“If we delivered remote education really well for 11 weeks, why not for four days?” she asks, eyebrows raised. “What really got me was that we’d told families and staff one thing, and then we had to tell them another. I said to Vicky Beer, ‘In order that they don’t think I’m deranged, I’ll need to share your letter.’”

Rowland said she was prioritising the school community that she knows best, which spans 15 primary schools across Manchester and West Yorkshire. But each time, she has been blocked by the government.



Rowland 13 miles in to the Manchester marathon



Rowland skiing with her family

It must have been a challenging experience for someone as driven and effective as Rowland, who tells me she has always “organised things”.

She is the eldest of three children in a “big, tight-knit family”, who was helping her mother out “from about four years old”. At nursery, she says her teacher described her as “very chatty, and likes to organise everything”. That kind of energy is apparent as we speak – multiple times she dives out of sight to rustle among papers only to emerge, triumphant, brandishing another book.

Teaching is in her blood: her mother was a primary school headteacher and her father a secondary school teacher. They tried to put her off joining the profession – “my mum said, ‘It’s too hard work’” – but

Profile: Helen Rowland



Rowland with all her headteachers and principals

when she had to find a career placement in sixth form, she chose a school. Then it was straight on to a four-year teaching degree and her first classroom. "I'm still in touch with families of children I taught in my first school," she grins.

Rowland exudes the confidence of a locally grown leader, having been born in Oldham where she still lives today. As a young teacher she took an interest when a new school opened nearby, and moved over. "To be part of a brand-new school, that really opened my eyes. Ever since then I've been someone who's looked out beyond the school to others, to learn." That school is now in her trust today.

By her late twenties, Rowland was already a deputy head at a primary school, and later moved to a rural primary school where she remained for 12 years. "It was brilliant. We took it from 150 to 210 children – we couldn't make it any bigger." The school became 'outstanding'.

Then Rowland heard the Focus Trust was being set up and once again, she was interested in a project where staff could input from the ground up. "At that time academies had a bit of a negative image. But I believed in the vision. It was a big leap, and it was the best thing I ever did." Rowland became the academy trust's improvement officer, and by 2015 she was chief executive.

Rowland strikes you as someone with a great sense of agency – something the teaching profession often reports it lacks – and seems to value it highly for her staff. The "biggest thing" the Focus Trust has done is introduce "a culture of collective efficacy", she says. The concept was defined in the 1990s by psychologist Albert Bandura as "a group's shared belief" in its abilities to "organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment". In other words,



Rowland and pupils from Roundthorn primary academy

"If we delivered remote education really well for 11 weeks, why not for four days?"

teachers strongly believe they can do what's needed to help the kids. Bandura's research found the effects of this "collective teacher efficacy" outweighed the negative effect of pupils' low socio-economic status.

Teacher autonomy has since become the cornerstone of Rowland's approach. She introduced peer review to the trust five years ago, so all headteachers are in "triads" to provide feedback, inspired by educationalists such as Michael Fullan, who taught her to "let the staff own the change".

Rowland has also created "community champions" among non-teaching staff, who tell senior leaders what challenges the school faces in the community. These champions have warned that some families couldn't afford clothes, which has prompted action. Many have "told me they've found their purpose," she beams.

Rowland tells me her philosophy is summed up in a book, and dives out of sight to find it. "I carry it around with me all the time, it's called Putting Staff First!" she calls from somewhere below her desk. It's by school leaders John Tomsett and Jonny Uttley.

"When I first saw the title last year, I thought, surely we put children first," she pants, re-emerging. "But when I read it, it

totally resonated with everything I believe in." The book blurb says: "The longer our schools are populated with hypoxic adults, we imperil all our futures." Hypoxic, I find out, means gasping for air, or without oxygen.

Rowland adds her own twist: work is important, but it's not that important. "I once read that life is five balls. Work is a rubber ball – it will bounce back. But the others – family, friends, integrity, health – are glass balls. They will scratch or break, perhaps for ever, if you drop them."

With this in mind, Rowland's approach in November last year makes sense. But for someone who places such value on agency, it must have been a strange pill to swallow.

Rowland says she turned to her coach and her staff for support. "That Friday evening when the department told us 'no', that was a bit of a shock[...] It was very emotional at the time. You have to not look like you're giving up or collapsing. I just felt really determined to show courage."

Rowland breathes and grins. "You have to rise above it to be honest. You have to dig deep.

"I think it's shown that we were trying to live by our values. We care for our communities. We care for our staff."

Opinion

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

Ministers have agreed to reconsider new language around exclusions that caused a visceral reaction. Philippa Stobbs explains why words matter

Nationally, disabled pupils are more likely to be absent, excluded or bullied. At the Council for Disabled Children, we devote a lot of energy to understanding and preventing that, and we know the language we use is crucial.

So we were dismayed when we heard the words 'expulsions' and 'suspensions' being used instead of 'permanent exclusions' and 'fixed-term exclusions'. And we weren't alone. A number of people contacted the Council for Disabled Children about the change in language.

'Expulsion' implies a more vigorous approach. Meanwhile, substituting 'suspension' for 'fixed-term exclusion' implies that this is not an exclusion at all, when in fact these can add up to a term's worth of lost school time.

In a period of recovery, we need to analyse and explore the behaviours we observe and understand what they are telling us. We need to avoid punitive and rejecting responses – because absence from school for whatever reason rarely solves an underlying problem and often causes new ones.

That's why we wrote to ask the minister to reconsider the language of expulsions. Offering a hand up while castigating the person you're helping to their feet won't work. And we are delighted to say that we have just heard the change is going to be reversed. In addition, the minister is going to meet with stakeholders to maintain the dialogue.

There are important



PHILIPPA
STOBBS

Assistant director,
Council for Disabled Children

Why we asked ministers to mind their language on exclusions

messages here for the Covid recovery. These messages are all the more important for particular groups of pupils who are disproportionately excluded. Our response needs to explore and analyse the underlying

mutual respect and trust. In between lockdowns, we were in schools meeting people face-to-face and getting a feel for the impact of Covid on the vulnerable children we work with, and seeing the positive reactions of both staff and pupils.

“We are delighted the change is going to be reversed

reasons for this uncomfortable fact. Because only when we understand the drivers for this can we start to address them. Endorsing a more vigorous approach to exclusion will fail to do that.

We undertake our work with schools and families in a spirit of

There were fears, and we were concerned, that the re-opening of schools to all pupils would see a significant deterioration in behaviour and an increase in exclusions. Along with everyone else, we were pleased it broadly failed to materialise.

But that is not to say that

all is well. There is evidence of the significant impact of the lockdowns on the mental health of children and young people themselves. Gaps are widening between disadvantaged and disabled pupils and their peers. Among younger children, there is growing evidence of an impact on their early language development.

On top of all of that, we also know the impact of the lockdowns has been hugely variable for different children.

Given all this evidence, it is heartening that the government is committing to substantial investment in a recovery package for schools and their pupils.

Wellbeing and learning go hand in hand. All the research shows that poor wellbeing undermines learning, and poor learning undermines wellbeing. Recovery needs to turn this into an upward spiral, restoring learning and wellbeing together, not as separate endeavours or separate timetabled activities, but as a whole approach. So too with government support and communication.

With more recovery funding announced in the Queen's speech this week, the government's commitment is evident. And these programmes are being overseen by the new Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins, recently chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation. That strong foundation in evidence is encouraging too.

The foundations are laid for a well-informed recovery. And most encouraging of all, perhaps, is the department's willingness to engage and to adapt in response to feedback.

One thing is for sure, any initiative to make up the lost ground from the pandemic will work better with less punitive language supporting it.



Opinion

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

Far from twiddling their thumbs, exam boards have been pressing on with a variety of often 'invisible tasks', writes Dr Philip Wright

With no exams happening this summer for the second year running, and with teachers working flat out to deliver grades for their students, it's not surprising that some people have been asking what exam boards are doing to earn their fees.

It might be tempting to assume that, while teachers are facing the enormous task of assessing and grading their own students, exam boards have much less to do. But this is far from the truth.

The reality is that everyone involved in the exam system is having to work harder than normal this summer. We know many schools are still in the thick of assessing and marking. But exam boards are working harder too.

Like any other year, for this summer's students to be able to move on with their lives, they need to receive formal qualifications, certified by exam boards. But, with those qualifications being awarded in a very different way, exam boards have had to rip up their playbooks and devise a completely new way of working.

As Ofqual has acknowledged that designing and implementing a new assessment system would normally take years, and exam boards have had to do this in a few months. A lot of this work isn't immediately visible, which is why it's understandable there are myths about exam boards not doing enough to justify their fees. However, exam boards are required to cover their costs. Many of our members are registered as charities or not-for-profit organisations.

Some of the work is already complete – such as everything that's gone into



DR PHILIP WRIGHT

Director general, JCQ

What are exam boards actually doing this summer?

creating this new assessment system in such a short space of time. But much lies ahead. Exam boards still need to collect grades, support schools and colleges, and implement a quality assurance process required by the DfE and Ofqual.

When that's complete, the most

with exam board staff to check evidence and verify grades.

This external quality assurance process will ensure that this summer's grades are recognised and valued by the rest of the education sector and employers – and give students and parents the confidence

“No one benefits from wrongly portraying this as ‘teachers versus exam boards’

important phase of a brand new and extremely complex quality assurance process kicks in. This will involve a large number of examiners working

that the process has involved an independent pair of eyes.

And then there's the culmination of everyone's work this summer:



the issuing of results to schools and colleges. This is the same mammoth administrative task this year as it is in any other, which will see exam board staff working around the clock.

In many cases, new activities have meant the need to develop new systems in a very short space of time. We know that the assessment resources provided by exam boards haven't been able to be all things to all people. But this is due to the very tight window they've had to produce, not lack of effort.

And as well as these major and essential operational processes, the amount of support exam boards are giving schools and colleges this year is unprecedented. To guide teachers, exams officers and other school and college staff through another very different summer, exam boards are providing extra customer service support, extra online training and other guidance.

At a time when many businesses have furloughed staff, exam boards have needed to retain all the specialist expertise required to support teachers this summer, and ensure the sustainability of the system when we need to run exams again in 2022.

At any given time, exam boards need to look much further ahead than the current exam series. They're currently working on plans for exams in the autumn, next summer and even beyond.

No one benefits from this summer's unique situation being wrongly portrayed as “teachers versus exam boards”. We recognise the enormous responsibility placed on schools and colleges and its implications for teacher workload.

Because, far from twiddling our thumbs, we feel it too. And just like teachers, our goal is to help students get the qualifications they need.

Opinion: mental health awareness week

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



A growing number of young people report keeping their suffering to themselves. Simon Walker explains the evidence and how to support them

It used to be that most pupils with challenging emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) were difficult to miss. Challenging needs almost always meant challenging behaviours. But not any more. The majority of pupils facing challenging needs today are currently hiding them from teachers and peers alike, and you may well be missing them.

Since 2015 my organisation, STEER Education, has been tracking pupils' social-emotional development as they progress from years 3 to 13. With six years of data from over 70,000 pupils, we are the only UK organisation to have large-scale pre-, during and post-pandemic data.

One of the measures we track is self-disclosure. Think of each pupil having a frontstage and a backstage; low-disclosing pupils hold what they are really thinking and feeling backstage which you cannot see. What you see is their frontstage, which is a deflection.

Since 2016, there has been a steady increase in pupils becoming low-disclosing. One possible driver of this is the rise in social media use, an environment that punishes young people for disclosing anything that may be mocked. But the pandemic has accelerated these hidden risks.

Before Covid, for example, among girls in secondary schools, nearly six in ten masked their thoughts, feelings, needs and ideas from those at school – friends and teachers alike. That number has now risen to eight in ten, and low-disclosing boys have also increased by over 20 per cent.

What we are seeing is a generation of young people turning inwards.



SIMON WALKER
Co-founder, STEER Education

VEILED needs pose a hidden risk to post-Covid catch-up

The pandemic has made them more self-contained and autonomous, and curtailed their relationships and social interactions. At the same time, parents and teachers have been much less available to them.

The mental health implications of this low self-disclosure are serious. Think

More concerning, 40 per cent of such girls are now developing a psychological pattern called internalised control. A mechanism for coping when the world seems both unsafe and unavailable, it involves containing our thoughts and feelings internally, often by ruminating and

“What we are seeing is a generation of young people turning inwards

of the year 11 boy completing your ‘wellbeing recovery survey’; he won’t tell you he is struggling with exam pressures or bullying. Or think of the year 9 girl meeting her tutor; she’ll try to avoid any indication she is struggling with anxiety or that her situation at home is difficult.

worrying. It tends to lead to high cortisol levels. It sometimes escalates into unhealthy self-soothing activities.

Worse still, these hidden needs risk becoming entrenched into long-term problems if we don’t deal with them. But how do you help someone you don’t know needs it? Our four-step



guidance plan, under the acronym VEIL, can help.

VALIDATE losses and focus resources

Pupils may be anxious about what they have lost through the pandemic. Validate those feelings but explain how you will be putting support in place. Don’t simply focus on exam years. Year 6 pupils are especially anxious about transition to secondary school, and Year 10 at teaching loss.

EQUIP your team and anticipate concerns

Don’t mistake quietness for wellness. Remind pupils they can contact tutors or trusted staff through email, which may feel less threatening. Train tutors to notice when their tutees’ mood, routine or attitude changes and to ask, “How are you finding things at the moment?”

INVITE years 11 and 13 to contribute post-exams

Consider how you can extend the school provision for years 11 and 13 after their exams rather than letting them drift through more damaging unaccompanied summer months. Why not invite them to train as your peer resource for the next step?

LISTEN: Build peer listening into your school structure

Consider how to build in peer listening into the school from September. Peer listeners may be more effective channels for pupils to share their concerns than adults.

The major problems our pupils are grappling with are behind this veil. Unless we create ways to lift it and face up to them, the pandemic’s impact risks haunting them – and us – for years to come.

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



A School Built on Ethos. Ideas, Assemblies and Hard-Won Wisdom

Author: James Handscombe

Publisher: Crown House Publishing

Reviewer: Debra Kidd, author and teacher trainer

I read this book as I watch those episodes of *Location, Location, Location* in which property hunters have a million-pound budget and I get to indulge my voyeuristic instincts to see how the other half live. Half in wonder, half in envy, with some concern on the side.

If you enjoy peeking into a world you're unlikely to ever inhabit, this one's for you. Imagine having £45 million to build a small sixth form that only takes students who have passed both a demanding examination and interview; where assemblies take place in Westminster Abbey; where you can enhance curriculum provision by sending students off to study some subjects at the independent Westminster School; where Boris Johnson ("that tousle-haired celebrity") turns up to your launch – in the House of Lords...

Of course, the author makes clear that it is a unique circumstance and that not all ideas to be found in the book will be replicable. What he offers is a series of assembly speeches outlining the ethos of the school and all it stands for. These form an important part of communicating expectations to the students, and you can imagine as you read how they might impact in a setting as grand as Westminster Abbey.

As I read them, I found myself bombarded with cultural references from the past – a catalogue of mostly dead, white men from whom the students (many from disadvantaged immigrant communities) may draw

inspiration. References to women are few and to people of colour even fewer. His contemporary references are strangely juvenile too, which Handscombe excuses away with a confession that his post-1900 references come from his young daughters.

Students are told from the start that they are there to change the world, to be more than the exam they will sit (though the importance of the exam is constantly stressed and presented to students as a "celebration of how clever you are"). They are charged with the responsibility to immerse themselves in all that London can offer them to enhance their learning.

Perhaps as a consequence of the very tight selection process, the school doesn't seem to have a problem with discipline, so even the rules feel idiosyncratic. "Don't drink in a pub within 200 metres of the school because I drink there" is one of them. I doubt many of the students can afford to drink in Westminster at all.

There are moments of bewilderment. One enthusiastic assembly tells these

young people to look to Laurie Lee walking across Spain for a model of courage and curiosity. Handscombe asks them to consider how a young man might find the courage to leave his home. Then he gives them the answer: "He had a violin." I wonder how that plays with students – who either

have direct experience, or have heard their parents' stories of leaving home – to hear from someone who thinks the world is that simple.

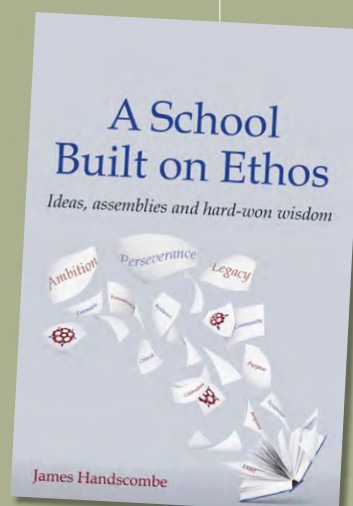
Another clanger appears in a rare reference to a woman of colour. One assembly presents Shami Chakrabarti in the same list of flawed heroes as Ramses II, Cecil Rhodes and *Heart of Darkness* character Charles Marlow. At this point, I began to wonder if the aim of the school really is to educate young people to change the world or really more about keeping it exactly the same, albeit with slightly better representation at the top.

And yet, there are moments of wonder in this book too. In spite of all my concerns, the students are creating spaces for themselves to explore their identities, with groups to explore race, intersectional feminism and other issues. It is clear that they take the mantra "Learning is Amazing" to heart.

They are constantly praised. Teachers go out of their way to offer broader experiences. They are encouraged to

think for themselves. And the beautiful and quite touching result is that it becomes clear the teachers have as much to learn from these young people as the other way around.

If they can then go on to really change the world, it will have been a journey well worth taking, with or without a violin.



Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is Gerry Robinson, executive headteacher, Haringey Learning Partnership

@gerryrobin5on

SEND and Social Justice v2

@NDempseyDTA

It is refreshing to read a blog that doesn't shy away from addressing the uncomfortable truth about SEND and inclusion: many schools are just not doing enough. I firmly believe the majority of school staff want to ensure students with SEND are able to thrive. However, Dempsey's assertions are backed up by national data published by the DfE which identified that, "the attainment difference between pupils with SEN compared to pupils with no identified SEN remains the largest difference of all characteristics groups".

Never a fan of problems being presented without practical solutions, I was pleased to see that Dempsey provides extensive advice about how SEND inclusion should be interwoven into the fabric of school. From lessons to lunchtimes, teachers to SLT – inclusion can't just be an afterthought or add-on to other projects or conversations. Instead, Dempsey says, every aspect of school life should be approached with the thought, "what works for every child, not just most children?"

Too often, the inclusion of those with SEND is considered too complex to address immediately. But, as Dempsey points out, "Children in our schools right now don't have time to wait".

TOP BLOGS of the week



Values in action – where rhetoric meets reality

@DrHeery

In this powerfully worded piece, Paul Heery shares how his personal experience of raising his daughter, Molly, who is diagnosed with cystic fibrosis and Williams syndrome, has influenced his personal and professional values. Molly's own experience of school was incredibly positive, Heery says, but he recognises that this is not the case for plenty of students "whose lives aren't running on the conventional trajectory".

His message is one I unequivocally agree with: success will look different for every child – considerably different for some – but every single child deserves the support, kindness, time and investment which will allow them to realise their potential. As Heery concludes, "If a school ever turns away a pupil because they are too challenging, or too complex, or not clever enough, then no matter what they achieve, according to the value system that I hold, those achievements are empty".

For those who really want to understand what living your values is, this blog post is essential reading.

Thoughts on assessment

@MaryMyatt

Someone else whose work I've long admired and who I often quote when it

comes to discussions around shared values (namely, that they should be "lived, not laminated") is Mary Myatt.

In her latest post, she shares her thoughts on assessment. Particularly since the shadow of coronavirus swept over schools in 2020, the word 'assessment' has become one that evokes a visceral response from school staff and immediately leads us to think of high-stakes exams on which a child's entire future rest.

This post reminds us that assessment takes place in many forms throughout an effective lesson, from "high-quality conversations" to "more formal but still low-stakes" quizzes.

Myatt advocates "thoughtful, sensitive and robust assessment" so that we can "see the distance travelled" by students. At a time when TAGs are dominating the narrative, this is a timely and welcome reminder about other, powerful ways to support students to reflect and build on their learning.

People power: working together to make a difference

@sebchappleau

I reviewed Schools in their Communities: Taking Action and Developing Civic Life by special school executive head and Citizens UK community organiser Seb Chappleau for Schools Week last year. So I knew that his latest blog would be well worth a read.

Not strictly an educational post, the focus here is on how grassroots community organisers can and should influence decision-makers to bring about meaningful change for their communities. This may make some feel uneasy, Chappleau acknowledges, but it is vital that citizens feel able to participate in decisions that influence their lives.

And after all, what is education if not empowering people to take an active part in their community? Covid has thrust values back on to schools' agendas and schools back into the hearts of their communities, and now seems a good time to ask how to build on that.

Research

TeacherTapp will review a research development each half term.
Contact @TeacherTapp if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

What inspires teachers to teach?

**Eve Debbage, project assistant,
Teacher Tapp**

Needless to say, the past year has been a challenging time for teachers. A quick glance at social media confirms it still is. Based on that, it would be easy to assume they feel weighed down by the job.

But are we making assumptions about what affects their commitment?

Almost every one of us had a teacher who significantly affected our outlook. Because of that, we tend to think of teachers as people who set out to make a difference, who get a buzz from making their students feel proud of their achievements and from creating nurturing environments where children can recognise and set out to accomplish their ambitions.

But do we really know what inspires teachers to teach, and what keeps them inspired in the profession? And how do inspiration levels vary across the sector?

Last month we asked the 8,500 teachers on Teacher Tapp to share their thoughts on the matter, and it turns out many of the stereotypes are accurate.

Many said they were inspired to teach by other people in their lives. The most popular answer – given by over one-third (36 per cent) of respondents – was to credit their own teachers.

A further 15 per cent were inspired by a parent or friend. We know that around one in four teachers had a parent who worked as a teacher, so it may well be that teachers are again the biggest source of encouragement.

And another third said they were drawn into the profession by an 'innate calling' which, though harder to classify, only further confirms the popular tropes about teaching being inspirational in itself.



Why teachers stay in the profession, however, is another matter. An important factor according to our respondents was rewarding relationships with pupils and colleagues. Positive work relationships evidently help to keep inspiration flowing. Most teachers were much happier to be back teaching face-to-face when schools reopened in March, confirming that in-person environments (and relationships) really matter to teachers.

Indeed, teachers told us one key reason they feel inspired is the environment in which they teach. But this is where sector divisions begin to appear. Teacher Tapp figures show that about half of primary school teachers are inspired by where they work. Their secondary colleagues, on the other hand, were far less optimistic, with the only exception being teachers in fee-paying schools, who are the most positive of all. Over half (54 per cent) say they are inspired by their environment. Could it be that state secondaries are less conducive spaces?

Or could it be that secondary teachers' inspiration has another source? Our research shows that the subjects teachers teach also has a big impact on their feelings of inspiration. The most inspired groups are English, humanities and arts teachers. Meanwhile, language teachers are far less inspired by their subject than any

other group. In fact, 23 per cent say they are uninspired! Could this be down to the way subjects are prioritised politically?

And another political context is at play. We found that teachers were also less positive about how much their students contribute to the learning environment and how much pride pupils take in their schoolwork in secondaries with the most deprived incomes. But while it is most pronounced in the secondary sector, this correlation between socio-economic context and negative perceptions is observable everywhere.

The good news is that teachers express strongly that they are inspired by their students regardless of that socio-economic context. Secondary teachers are almost as inspired as primary teachers, which confirms that teachers are universally receptive to seeing their students develop at school. Indeed, many express seeing their students overcome challenges and their teaching making a difference as the best parts of the job.

In any case, next time a student asks whether they should become a teacher, let them know how good it feels to be changing lives and, in doing so, you can be safe in the comfort that you are shoring up future generations of teachers (and your pension!).

Meanwhile, let's see how inspirational a return to normality turns out to be.



WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

TUESDAY

The government has finally fulfilled its pledge to deliver 1.3 million free laptops to disadvantaged pupils – five weeks later than ministers promised.

New figures from the Department for Education show it had delivered or dispatched 1,313,449 devices by May 6.

Schools minister Nick Gibb previously pledged that all laptops and tablets would be “delivered by the end of March”.

Pupils returned to on-site education on March 8, significantly reducing the need for equipment to access online learning.

By April 8, the government still had over 4,000 devices that had not been sent to schools, councils, trusts and colleges from its 1.3 million pledge.

The government said while these devices were available for schools to order, they had not yet been requested.

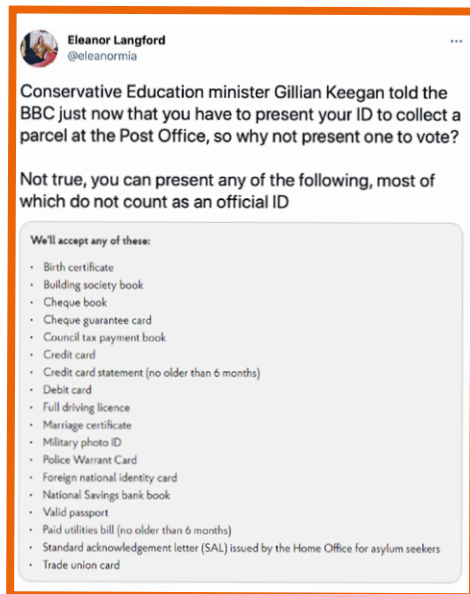
However, the new figures show the government has now surpassed its pledge – with an additional 17,697 devices dispatched or delivered within the last month.

Better late than never!

Skills minister Gillian Keegan had the misfortune of being sent out to bat for the government after the Queen's speech this week.

We say misfortune, because broadcasters clearly didn't want to speak to her about the government's skills agenda, but about more controversial elements of its legislative platform, including voter ID.

Defending the government's plans, Keegan argued that people already needed to show photo ID when collecting parcels at the Post Office, so providing it to be allowed to vote shouldn't be too much of an ask.



But as several onlookers pointed out, that isn't actually true.

Forms of ID accepted by the Post Office when collecting parcels include debit cards, credit card statements up to six months old, cheque books and birth certificates, none of which include a photograph.

Never let the truth get in the way of a divisive policy!

WEDNESDAY

Robert Peston, ITV correspondent for tweeting every ridiculous notion that pops into his head, managed to alienate the entire teaching profession in one fell swoop the other day, when he tweeted about how the government had been “paying teachers for not very much teaching, when lockdown closed schools”.

Of course, context is everything, and he was actually talking about ONS inflation figures and data on reduced teaching time as a result of lockdown. However, his reductive tweet failed to take into account all the extra non-teaching work we know school staff have had to do over the past

14 months.

How did he respond to the criticism? By digging himself further into a hole...

THURSDAY

Despite the need for absolute clarity over plans for assessments this year, Ofqual seems hell-bent on announcing different parts of its plans every week, just to keep everyone on their toes.

The latest missive from the exams regulator was about the autumn exams series, details of which have been drip-fed to desperate schools and pupils over the past few weeks.

Ofqual confirmed this week that exams will be in their “normal format” with “no adaptations” (apart from reasonable adjustments for disabled students).

But the regulator has confused matters somewhat by announcing that exams will assess students “in the same way as had been planned for exams in summer 2021”.

Readers will remember that some changes to exams were proposed for this year before their cancellation. Ofqual says, for example, that students will answer questions on a “reduced number of topics” in GCSE English literature, history and ancient history.

And in GCSE and AS geography, students “will not have to answer questions in the exam about their own fieldwork experience”, while in GCSE MFL “students will have a speaking endorsement rather than a speaking test”.

So when Ofqual said exams would be in their “normal format”, it meant they would be in their “normal format”, except some of them will cover reduced topics, geographers won't have to talk about fieldwork and linguists won't have a speaking test.

Simples.

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DIRECTOR OF ENGLISH (MATERNITY COVER) HARBORNE ACADEMY

Birmingham, L6-L11 (£47,615-£53,958)

Harborne Academy is looking to appoint an enthusiastic and dynamic Director of English to join a thriving and highly successful curriculum area within the Academy. The school is seeking to appoint a leader who is hardworking, committed, and knowledgeable in their subject area, as well as curriculum planning and delivery. You will have a passion for working with young people, be well organised, a reflective practitioner, and an outstanding leader.

Contact Alison Clements on 07713 388230
or email harborneacademy@hays.com



SENIOR ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL

High Wycombe, L16 (£61,166)

To ensure the continuous, strong leadership of St Michael's Catholic School, the Governors are seeking to appoint a Senior Assistant Headteacher at its High Wycombe campus. This exciting opportunity is due to commence in September 2021.

Contact Hazel Baxter on 07872 672282
or email hazel.baxter@hays.com



SEND HUB LEAD ASTON MANOR ACADEMY

Birmingham, L1-L5 (£42,202-£46,796)

Aston Manor Academy and Saint John Wall Catholic School are currently offering a unique opportunity for an inspirational leader to be at the forefront of a new project, providing rapid intervention for secondary school pupils. The successful candidate will lead a two-year project across the two schools, reaching small cohorts of pupils who need high-quality literacy intervention that will enable them to access the mainstream KS3 curriculums.

Contact Paul Hunt on 07921 583731
or email paul.hunt@hays.com



EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL ST AUGUSTINE'S PRIMARY, ST MARGARET CLITHEROW PRIMARY AND ST THOMAS' PRIMARY

West of Kent, L27-L31 (£79,958-£88,187) (negotiable)

The Trust is seeking to appoint an inspirational and dedicated Executive Principal from January 2022 for this three-primary cluster. The successful candidate will be at the helm of a flagship primary enterprise for Catholic education.

Contact Dion Mills on 07899 063321
or email dion.mills@hays.com





Vice Principal (Outcomes)

Wymondham High Academy, Wymondham, Norfolk
L20-L24

We are looking to appoint a Vice Principal to join the Academy, one of the highest performing schools in the region. This VP role is pivotal in the development of the Academy as part of the Enrich Learning Trust and becomes available because of the promotion to Headship of the current postholder, an example of the quality of the senior team at Wymondham High.

The Academy is increasingly popular within the local community, having increased the number of pupils on roll by over 200 in the last 3 years. The appointment of a Vice Principal - Outcomes will support our next step of development. The successful applicant will have a wide remit in terms of strategic leadership and management, fundamental to their role will be delivering our curriculum and outcomes strategies, supported by a team of Assistant Principals

The closing date : 20th May at 9am

Interviews : w/b 24th May



DEPUTY HEADTEACHER

Following the promotion of the current postholder we are looking for an inspirational Deputy Headteacher to join our senior leadership team. This is an exciting opportunity to play a key role in our continuing school improvement journey.

Our ideal candidate would have:

- A proven track record as an excellent primary classroom practitioner and the ability to share your passion for learning and teaching with all stakeholders.
- Proven leadership, interpersonal and management skills, the strength to inspire, challenge, motivate and support colleagues.
- A collaborative approach to working, and one who is able to bring their team with them.
- Willingness to accept nothing less than a fully inclusive education for all the children in the school.
- Experience in data analysis and target setting.
- A commitment to promoting positive behaviour strategies.
- The ability to continue, build on and improve relationships with parents and the wider community.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION (SECONDARY)

Location: Unity Schools Partnership Trust Office, Haverhill, Suffolk
(Schools are mainly in Suffolk, and also in Cambridge, Essex and Havering)

Salary: L37-L43 (up to £125,000 per annum for exceptional candidate)
(Teachers' Pension Scheme)

Job start: September 2021 / January 2022

Job term: Full time, Permanent

We are looking for an Executive Director of Education to lead improvement across the current ten secondary schools serving over 7,000 students. This is a new high-profile post which comes at an important point in the development of the trust. We are inviting candidates with extensive educational leadership experience, knowledge and understanding of creating and maintaining outstanding secondary practice to apply for the role. You will have a background as a Secondary Head and are likely to have been in a leadership role in an existing MAT of more than 3 schools (with at least 2-3 being secondary).

You may have the ambition to become a CEO in your career and for exceptional candidates the role of Deputy CEO maybe available.

The role will take a key part in setting the strategy for the Trust and its daily operations. This is an opportunity to help shape the future of secondary education and strive for excellence. An innovative and creative approach is key as well as the ability to influence and build relationships. The Trust is looking for a candidate to match the ambition they have and create a culture of collaboration to achieve it.

USP is a MAT of 30 schools, with approval to open four further new schools. The ambition is to achieve a step change in the quality of education provided by primary, secondary and special schools and to achieve top quartile performance by 2023.

For further information, please contact **Tim Coulson**, CEO on tcoulson@unitysp.co.uk or 07388 949917

Closing Date: 9.00 am, Tuesday 25 May 2021

Interviews: Thursday 27 May 2021

Unity Schools Partnership is committed to equal opportunities, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. An enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check will be required.

UNITY SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP – WELCOMING DIVERSITY.



TRAINING MANAGER MATERNITY COVER (13 MONTHS, FULL TIME)



The Bell Foundation is a Cambridge based educational charity working to overcome exclusion through language education and is delivering its vision through four programmes which focus on pupils, young people and those involved with the criminal justice system for whom English is an Additional Language.

The Foundation has an exciting opportunity for a Training Manager (Maternity Cover) to lead on the operational management, development and implementation of training and resources across the Foundation's integrated programmes including the EAL Programme, Language for Results International, the ESOL Programme and the Criminal Justice Programme.

The successful candidate will manage a team of trainers to develop and deliver high-quality training and resources in line with agreed programme objectives and timelines. You will have a proven track record of operational management and course development and will have experience of working in a comparable role in either the UK or international context.

With excellent attention to detail and an eye for quality, you will ensure high standards for all outputs developed both internally and by external consultants or partners.

Training Manager: £37,565-£45,912

To apply

To download the application form please visit:

<https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/about-us/vacancies/>

The Bell Foundation is committed to building a diverse and inclusive organisation to better represent the communities we serve. We welcome applications from all regardless of age, gender identity, disability, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, race or ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, transgender status, or socio-economic background.

The Bell Foundation is committed to promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment.

A DBS check will be requested in the event of a successful application.

Closing date: 17:00 Tuesday 25 May 2021

Interviews: Tuesday 1 June and Thursday 3 June 2021



Digital Skills Programme Manager

Do you think that your socio-economic background should determine your career prospects? upReach's vision is of a society in which everybody has an equal opportunity to realise their full career potential. We help young people from less-advantaged backgrounds achieve their career potential by providing an intensive programme of support that addresses socio-economic barriers to graduate employment.

upReach is seeking to hire a **Digital Skills Programme Manager**, an exciting opportunity for an individual to design a comprehensive training programme for students who are interested in careers in the Technology sector. They will also design an enhanced set of Digital Skills training opportunities that will be available for students across upReach's range of programmes, to increase their employability skills for all sectors regardless of their career preferences.



Discover more and apply now:
www.upreach.org.uk/vacancies



Principal

Paradigm Trust is looking to appoint a Principal for Murrayfield Primary Academy.

This is a great opportunity for a highly-motivated, ambitious professional who wants to make an impact.

Our vision is to develop and sustain great schools where we can make the biggest difference to pupils. We are strongly values-led (integrity, community, excellence) and work hard to be inclusive. We deliver high quality education and play a positive role in local and national education systems.

You will strive towards ensuring there is a positive ethos in the school in which individuals feel valued, and where you will encourage your team to ensure that the school provides an excellent education for all pupils.

If you have a passion to make a difference, we would love to hear from you.



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

DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEAD (DSL)

Hours of work: 36 hours per week
42 weeks per year (TTO+ 2 weeks)

An opportunity has arisen to appoint a non-teaching Designated Safeguarding Lead for September 2021

You should have some experience of working in a pastoral capacity in a school/FE setting. The DSL will take lead responsibility for safeguarding, child protection and student well-being across the school, taking part in strategy discussions and inter-agency meetings, and contributing to the assessment of children.

The successful candidate will ensure excellent school communication to stakeholders internally and externally with a high degree of accuracy and attention to detail. As well as excellent interpersonal skills, you must have resilience, empathy and be able to work effectively under pressure. You should have excellent communication skills in written and spoken English, and the ability to keep accurate records.

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

Closing Date: 19.05.21 at noon | Interviews w/c: 24.05.21

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



Assistant Principal – Inclusion

Wymondham High Academy, Wymondham, Norfolk

We are looking to appoint an Assistant Principal to join our already strong and dynamic leadership team. This AP role is pivotal to the development of the Academy as part of the Enrich Learning Trust. The successful candidate will be responsible for leading a large, experienced team to deliver an outstanding inclusion strategy for the Academy. The Assistant Principal – Inclusion will lead our behaviour, wellbeing, safeguarding and attendance teams; supporting and challenging colleagues to provide the highest standard of provision. The successful candidate will liaise with parents, external agencies and medical professionals to support the needs of our young people. They will use data to drive improvement and will have high expectations of the pupils.

This is a hugely exciting opportunity and would suit not only experienced colleagues but those wishing to take the step into senior leadership. The successful candidate would be joining one of the largest and highest achieving schools in the region.

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Director of Sixth Form (Deputy Headteacher)

**Based at Sir Frederick Gibberd College,
Harlow, Essex CM18 6RW**

**Salary: Leadership Scale,
Points L19 - 27 (£66,900 - £81,124)**

KS5 Experience Essential

Sir Frederick Gibberd College (SFG) is an 11-19 school that opened in September 2019. Having operated from a temporary site for two years, we are now moving to our state of the art permanent building with 21st century teaching spaces and opening our highly academic sixth form.

We are looking to appoint a Director of Sixth Form (Deputy Headteacher) with a proven track record of leading a successful sixth form either at Deputy Head or Assistant Head level. As a senior leader in our school, the post-holder would be expected to be involved in all areas of school life and work closely with other schools across our Trust.

This is a unique opportunity to join a dedicated team of staff who are driven and passionate about transforming young people's lives through education. Joining the SFG family will mean you become part of a legacy that will last generations. Visits to our current site would be welcome and will give you the opportunity to experience our extraordinary school.



For more information and to apply, please visit:
<https://www.bmat-trust.org/304/current-vacancies>