

SCHOOLS WEEK

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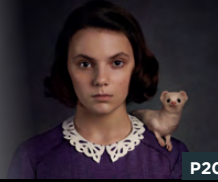


'Challenge the CEO too much and you can lose your job'



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The real Lyra Belacqua deserve better



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Meet the teachers standing in the general election



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Three-year GCSEs? No 'outstanding' for you...

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- First complaints over curriculum 'bias' lodged, but others back Ofsted's focus
- 'Confidential' deep dive guidance leaked - inspectorate promises to publish

INVESTIGATES

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Headteachers' Roundtable

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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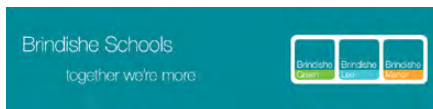
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Editor's top picks



Why doesn't inclusion apply to our workforce?

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Academy bail-out cash to be revealed



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Ofsted

Heads challenge Ofsted's curriculum 'bias'

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS

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Inspectors allegedly told school leaders that awarding an 'outstanding' rating was out of the question because they ran three-year GCSEs.

The findings question Ofsted's insistence it has no "preferred curriculum" or stance on the length of a school's key stage 3 and 4.

More than half of schools now run lengthened key stage 4, dropping a year from key stage 3 to cater for new, tougher GCSEs.

The inspectorate has insisted it has no rule barring schools with three-year GCSEs from achieving 'outstanding'.

But Ryan Kelsall, head of Impington Village College, in Cambridgeshire, claimed inspectors would not convert a section 8 visit into a full inspection to be upgraded to 'outstanding' because it ran three-year GCSEs.

During an inspection in November, Kelsall claims the inspector asked him if it was a "genuine two-year key stage 3" and warned there was "no way you could possibly teach the national curriculum then."

"When we got to the final meeting, his response was 'you know what it says in the handbook. It says the curriculum needs to be broad at key stage 3 and because you do your options at the end of year 8 I don't think it's broad enough'. That was the end of the discussion."

The academy, which retained its 'good' rating, is an international baccalaureate world school with all pupils studying six subjects until the end of year 13.

Kelsall said the school has an intensive enrichment programme with 70 per cent of pupils taking the English baccalaureate. He claimed Ofsted's inspection dashboard shows Impington is also in the top 20 per cent of schools for every category.

The inspectorate pledged its new framework would focus more on curriculum and less on outcomes.

But Kelsall said: "It asks some significant



EXCLUSIVE

questions about what the role of Ofsted is and whether it's its position to make those kind of ideological or curriculum-based decisions.

"It is making judgments about things it really doesn't need to."

Bramhall High School in Stockport was rated 'requires improvement' after an inspection on September 25.

Lynne Fox, its head, told *Schools Week* the lead inspector referred to the school's two-year key stage 3 curriculum as "the elephant in the room" during a telephone conversation the day before the inspection.

She claimed the inspector repeatedly – and incorrectly – said the school could not be "legally compliant" as a maintained school with that curriculum.

The school, which has now been rated 'requires improvement' three times since October 2014, had a positive monitoring visit in April 2018.

Fox said Bramhall was due for inspection during the summer – when it would have been judged under the old framework – but Ofsted delayed the visit until September.

She claimed the lead inspector told her the "argument would have been whether [the school] was 'good' or 'outstanding'" under the old framework.

Bramhall's inspection dashboard also shows it is in the top 20 per cent of schools nationally for attainment and progress.

Fox said Ofsted's view on the curriculum was "so biased that the inspector would just not see beyond it."

"We've ended up with a really damaging judgment that will be here probably for two or three years."

The school and 300 parents have complained to Ofsted about the report, published on November 5.

Three secondaries have been rated 'outstanding' under Ofsted's new framework. One of those, Castleford Academy in West Yorkshire, has a shortened key stage 3.

But Daniella Cook, Castleford's associate head, said the school used year 9 as a "gateway year" where GCSE options were not taught until the Easter term. It "thoroughly checks" all elements of the national curriculum are covered by the end of year 8.

Dan Townsend, head of history at a secondary school in London, was supportive of Ofsted. He understood difficulties for schools whose students struggled with the new GCSEs "but the erosion of key stage 3 should not have been the answer. Instead schools should have ensured ample hours were provisioned at key stage 4."

A spokesperson for Ofsted said it had "no view about whether key stage 3 should last for two or three years, and this is not a determining or limiting criterion within the handbook".

But they added research showed that a "narrowed curriculum" could limit pupils' choices and have a "disproportionately negative effect" on disadvantaged pupils.

See next page

Ofsted

Revealed: 'Confidential' deep dive documents leaked

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS

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EXCLUSIVE

Confidential documents used to train Ofsted inspectors for curriculum "deep-dives" have been leaked to at least one school, prompting fears of unfair advantages under the new framework.

The inspectorate insists the documents are still in development and will not give any school an undue benefit over others, but confirms inspectors have been instructed not to leave them in schools.

Schools Week has seen two training documents covering primary school history and modern foreign languages (MFL), which are marked with "official – confidential" on every page.

It is understood an inspector working as a consultant gave them to a school.

Both cover in detail what questions inspectors should ask, what responses they should and should not receive and what constitutes good practice.

A spokesperson for Ofsted said the documents were created to help inspectors carry out subject-specific visits in 'outstanding' primary schools. But he added they were "works-in-progress and should not be left with any individual school".

As the documents were "at an early stage of development and will no doubt change considerably", the inspectorate has insisted they do not give schools any advantages. It also confirmed the final versions would be published online.

However, Ross Morrison McGill, the founder of Teacher Toolkit, said schools judged under the deep-dive process without this guidance were at a "disadvantage". It was "rubbish" to suggest otherwise.

"If Ofsted had conducted its initial research phase adequately, this should have been completed during the pilot development of the framework," he said.

"We should also question why these documents, marked 'confidential', have been shared by HMIs in a consultancy role. In terms of a new era of transparency, this is



Ross Morrison McGill



Stephen Rollett

Inspecting the subject school: Primary History
Official - confidential

Inspecting the subject school: Modern Foreign Languages
Official - confidential

definitely a blow to Ofsted's trust within its own team members."

Both draft documents outline six focus areas for inspectors, suggested questions to ask, outlines of good practice, and possible responses or findings on the curriculum.

Stephen Rollett, a curriculum and inspection specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders, said the circulation of the documents was a "problem" as some schools "may have the advantage of seeing them".

"The stakes of school inspections are incredibly high and we just cannot have any hint of inequity.

"We would urge Ofsted to publish the final versions as soon as possible so that everybody has the same opportunity to view them."

For history the 35-page draft guidance includes warnings that the "study of history can easily be lost" within 'topic' work.

It says "inviting moral judgment" or teaching history as "caricature . . . which tends to reduce people in the past to the

status of violent idiots compared to our wiser selves" should be avoided. It also notes that how knowledge organisers are used "is much more significant than if they exist".

If the class is keen to talk about why spotting bias is bad and primary sources are more reliable, the guidance says: "Oh no! Somewhere a secondary history teacher is screaming in agony. Encouraging such notions is extremely unhelpful."

The 18-page MFL guidance warns inspectors to look for pupils being taken out of lessons because of interventions in other subjects, or for lessons to be based around increasing vocabulary rather than linguistic complexity.

Stephen Tierney, chair of the Headteachers Roundtable, said the leaked documents were a further example of how 'outstanding' schools, often in the least disadvantaged areas, had "always had an inside line" to Ofsted.

He said the documents could be an attempt by Ofsted to "reduce variability" in inspections, but asked if they were also needed "because inspectors aren't sure what they are actually inspecting, because of a lack of subject knowledge and the new methodology."

A spokesperson for Ofsted said HMIs have been reminded they could share the documents' contents with school leaders "but should not leave them with a school".

"We would advise school leaders and teachers not to do anything to prepare for an inspection other than check our inspection handbook and run a good or better school."

Election watch



Union warns Labour's class-size cap will worsen recruitment crisis

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Labour's pledge to cap secondary school class sizes at 30 pupils risks worsening the recruitment crisis, a union leader has warned.

Angela Rayner vowed to extend the primary school class cap to secondaries yesterday, promising to hire another 20,000 extra teachers to cover the additional classes it would create.

But NAHT general secretary Paul Whiteman said the party's projections won't even be enough to meet the demand of rising pupil numbers – let alone the fallout from the class-size cap.

"Labour are well short of the 47,000 secondary teachers and 8,000 primary teachers that are needed by 2024 in order to keep pace with growing pupil numbers," he said.

"We need significantly more recruits than Labour are suggesting just to meet rising demand, never mind reduce current class sizes."

The Department for Education has now missed its secondary teacher recruitment target for seven years running.

The shadow education secretary also said her party would make sure 25,000 unqualified teachers are trained during the first term of a Labour government.

However, this figure also includes unqualified teachers who are already working towards qualified teacher status.

Whiteman also warned the recruits needed "will not magically appear", and won't stay in the profession unless problems with stress and workload are addressed.

The Education Policy Institute said this week the government has "limited levers" to improve recruitment numbers.

Labour believes it can attract the new teachers by making the profession more attractive – both through efforts to reduce workload by scrapping



Angela Rayner

Ofsted and SATs, and through improved pay and working conditions.

Rayner said her party would launch "one of the most ambitious teacher recruitment drives in history" if it wins the election. The recruitment campaign would focus specifically on the party's reforms for teachers.

However, the jury is out for capped class sizes.

The Education Endowment Foundation states that the evidence "does not show particularly large or clear effects until class size is reduced substantially to fewer than 20 or even 15 pupils".

But Dr Timo Hannay, the founder of SchoolDash, said: "One argument I've heard is that teachers prefer smaller classes, so this is one way to attract more good people into the profession. That makes some sense – and teacher effectiveness certainly makes a huge difference to educational outcomes."

Labour has costed delivering the new teachers at around £1 billion a year, which will be met from the £10.5 billion rise in school spending already proposed.

But Labour has not said how many extra classes

would be needed if the cap was introduced, nor how much it would cost for new classes.

However, capital funding would come from its £150 billion social transformation fund.

"Labour will transform education standards in this country for every child, capping class sizes and ensuring every child is taught by a qualified teacher in a safe school building," Rayner said.

At the moment only infant classes are capped at 30, but schools are still allowed to breach that limit in order to admit certain pupils, including those in care, the children of service personnel or those with education, health and care plans.

Under Labour's plans, that limit, along with the rules around which pupils are exempt, will be extended to other phases.

A total of 8.4 per cent of all secondary school classes now have between 31 and 35 pupils, up from 7.7 per cent last year and considerably higher than the 5.6 per cent recorded in 2014.

Analysis by Schools Week of government data shows there are currently 12,398 secondary school classes and 12,393 junior classes with 31 or more pupils.

Labour extends free breakfasts pledge

The shadow education secretary has also announced plans to roll out free breakfasts to all primary schools – and pilot the service at secondary level.

The party estimates extending breakfasts to primary schools will cost £275 million, based on a 25 per cent take-up.

Piloting the breakfasts in 20 per cent of secondary schools is costed at £40 million, again based on a 25 per cent take-up.

Both proposals would be funded from the £10.5 billion additional revenue funding for schools.



Jeremy Corbyn

Election watch



Johnson's no-notice inspections 'won't amount to much'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Boris Johnson's plan for "no-notice" Ofsted inspections is unlikely to come to fruition, say former government advisers.

In a surprise announcement last week the prime minister said that if he won the election he would pilot snap inspections to get a "true reflection" of how well schools were performing.

Ofsted would get an extra £10 million, with inspections stretched from two to three days.

At present schools are told of a visit about noon on the working day before the start of the inspection.

So-called "dawn raid" inspections have been mooted before, but have never come to fruition following resistance from the sector.

Jonathan Simons, a former Downing Street education adviser under Gordon Brown and David Cameron who now works for the lobbyists Public First, said the policy would probably not see the light of day.

"This is a good example of policy by announcement, but also a good example of why announcement never becomes policy," he told *Schools Week*.



The move was "instinctively attractive" to parents and to politicians promising high standards, he said. "Yet, when the problems are flagged, it turns out there's a reason why all the previous announcements didn't get anywhere. "So it quietly dies, only to re-emerge a couple of years later when the cycle begins again."

Earlier this year Ofsted dropped plans for inspectors to arrive at schools for on-site preparation a few hours after headteachers were

told of the visit.

Three quarters of respondents opposed the plans. Instead there is a 90-minute phone call between the lead inspector and head the day before an inspection.

Tom Richmond, who worked at the Department for Education during the tenures of Michael Gove and Nicky Morgan, agreed the announcement probably wouldn't amount to much.

Richmond, who now runs the EDSK think tank, said Ofsted's own research showed parents were concerned about schools getting advance warning of inspections, meaning it was "politically attractive to call for no-notice inspections".

But he added: "Even so, we have been down this road several times before and it always ends in politicians having to retreat."

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said the proposals would do "more harm than good", wasted inspectors' time and disrupted schools and pupils.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said it was "difficult to see any purpose in flogging this dead horse yet again".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Statistics watchdog chastises Labour and Tories

The Conservatives and Labour have made "unclear" claims in their election manifestos, says the UK Statistics Authority.

The Conservative manifesto claimed the party was providing "an extra £14 billion funding for schools".

The watchdog previously ruled this claim could be misleading without further context, explaining that the figure added together increases for each year.

Meanwhile, Labour's manifesto included a claim that the Conservatives' spending plan "leaves 83 per cent of schools still facing cuts next year".

The UKSA said it had previously investigated a similar statistic – from the union-run School Cuts campaign – which it found was "misleading" for creating a "worse picture" of school funding.

On the Conservative claim, the UKSA said the manifesto "fails to provide" the clarity demanded after the government was warned

over using the figure in October.

The UKSA said the £14 billion was produced by "adding together and then rounding increases across three years".

The watchdog's statement read: "The manifesto introduction mentions a time frame when referring to this increase. However, when explaining changes in school funding, dates or baselines are not given."

School budgets would rise by £7.1 billion in cash terms by 2022-23 if the Conservatives implemented their plans.

Labour's claim that the Conservatives' spending plan "leaves 83 per cent of schools still facing cuts next year" is based on a comparison between 2015-16 and 2020-21, not a change that would specifically occur next year.

In January the UKSA warned School Cuts that its earlier headline figure, which said that 91 per cent of schools faced funding cuts, risked giving "a misleading impression of

future changes in school budgets".

The authority said this week the group's website had been changed to explain the methodology.

But it added: "Without this context, the headline statement is likely to give an unclear impression of future changes in school budgets."

The Conservatives were criticised last month after a figure in their "cost of Corbyn" dossier was for a policy that the party had not announced.

This week Labour also came under fire for supposed savings it would deliver for voters.

Its document contained just one reference to schools policy – the extension of free school meals to all primary pupils – which it predicted would save the average family £437 a year.

This is based on the current £2.30 spend on each meal, multiplied across the 38 weeks of a school year, which stacks up.

Key findings



The verdict on top parties' pledges

The Education Policy Institute has delved into each party's election commitments to see if they will boost outcomes, particularly for vulnerable children. Here's what they found on the three biggest parties

Conservative policies risk widening the disadvantage gap . . .

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) identified areas where the proposed policy agenda was "unlikely" to support the party's pledge to raise attainment and ensure "greater equality of opportunity".

Its manifesto had "little to say" about improved early years education, and the gains provided by its funding proposals would be "limited". In fact, the EPI said it would be a "major concern" that additional funding would be skewed towards schools in less disadvantaged communities.

A lack of policy commitments on unexplained pupil exits, uneven access to top-performing state schools and teacher shortages in more disadvantaged schools was noted, as was the lack of commitment to protect the pupil premium against inflation.

Natalie Perera, the EPI's executive director for research, said there was a "big gulf between the bold ambitions and what they actually set down".

. . . and selection could expand by the back door

The party has pledged to "ensure that parents can choose the schools that best suit their children".

The EPI warned that it was not clear what this meant in practice, but "does leave open the option to expand places in selective schools (or create new selective schools)".

Jon Andrews, the EPI's deputy head of research, said any expansion in selection was "likely to lead to a widening in the attainment gap".

Labour's plans could raise attainment and help poorest . . .

The party's proposals on early years education, children's mental health, school and college funding and teacher pay "could all help boost attainment and narrow the disadvantage gap".

For example, Labour's plan to increase school spending by about 14.6 per cent by 2022-23 offered "materially higher" per pupil funding than in 2009. Pledges to protect the pupil premium in real-terms and boost SEND funding also "could be expected to help with efforts to narrow the attainment gap".

. . . but scrapping Ofsted could cancel out gains

Labour's plans to dismantle the current accountability system – through the replacement of Ofsted and abolition of SATs – could have a negative impact on value for money and offset gains from other policies.

Andrews said international evidence showed inspections and testing raised standards, but admitted the way Ofsted inspected schools and how the Department for Education published performance data "tends to be biased against schools that are in more challenging circumstances".

The report also warned that Labour's policies on private schools "could lead to additional costs from pupils being diverted into the state-funded sector by higher private fees". But the institute flagged that Labour's promises were more "at risk" if the large additional funding needed "proves unreliable".

Lib Dem policies a mixed bag

Proposals on early years and wider child support could "positively impact on attainment and the disadvantage gap".

But proposals on accountability and a failure to protect the pupil premium in real terms were "likely to have a negative impact".

Meanwhile, the pledge to boost teacher numbers by 20,000 "may not be deliverable" as government has limited levers to guarantee the total.

The report said investing more on early years was significant, but claimed the cash would be better spent shared across later education phases.

Labour and Lib Dems may have undercosted free meals

Both parties said they would extend universal free school meals; Labour to all primary pupils. It pledged £900 million, but the EPI estimates this is "around £140 million lower than is needed due to increases in staffing costs". If the minimum wage were increased to £10 an hour, as Labour has announced, this shortfall could double.

The Liberal Democrats will extend free school meals to all primary children and to all secondary children whose families receive universal credit.

The party estimated this would cost £1.16 billion in 2024-25, but the EPI estimates the likely cost would be £180 million more.

THE VERDICT:

Conservatives: Unlikely to deliver on bold pledges, risk policies could actually widen disadvantage gap

Labour: Funding and pay pledges could raise attainment, but scrapping Ofsted and tests could offset progress

Lib Dems: Early years boost could close gap, but better to share cash across later education phases

A photograph of four young women sitting around a table, engaged in a craft or art project. They are smiling and looking at their work. One woman is using a red tool to cut something.

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Election watch



Life as a teacher – and candidate

JAMES CARR
@JAMESCARR_93

Schools Week catches up with teachers standing in next week's general election

Juggling a full-time teaching schedule and an election campaign can be tricky.

Vix Lowthion, the Green Party's candidate for the Isle of Wight, has a year 13 parents' evening at The Island VI Form before she dashes off to Thursday's count.

Meanwhile the Liberal Democrat candidate for Torbay, Lee Howgate, an assistant headteacher at Saltash Community School, is taking unpaid leave to allow him time to canvass.

Both say funding cuts are a big issue on the doorstep.

Lowthion – a teacher of more than 20 years and her party's education spokesperson – claimed severe cuts had resulted in some Isle of Wight SEND pupils being sent to the mainland.

The island is a target seat for the Greens, but they are currently polling third with YouGov labelling it a "safe Conservative" seat.

Torbay is also predicted to remain Conservative. Howgate, a former diplomat, said: "It's very obvious the number of children with more severe and complex needs is rising at the same time the budget is falling."

Florence MacDonald, a fellow Lib Dem candidate, is campaigning in Camborne and Redruth. Her party won 6 per cent of the vote in 2017.

The primary school music teacher wants to end the increasingly "data-led" testing culture, adding "there have been lots of times when I wanted to quit or find ways out".

One teacher who is forecast to win is Jonathan Gullis, the Conservative candidate for the hotly contested Stoke-on-Trent North.

YouGov has predicted the Conservatives have a slight lead in the Labour-held seat.

Gullis, head of year 9 at Fairfax Academy in Birmingham, said his party's pledge to put £780 million into special needs funding was key.

"If we get education right we can bring



Vix Lowthion



Jill Borchers



Jonathan Gullis



Florence MacDonald



Dan Greef

about more social mobility across the country and level up the skills in the Midlands and the north."

Mark Lehain, who founded Bedford Free School before going on to lead the New Schools Network and more recently the Parents and Teachers for Excellence campaign group, is standing for the Conservatives in Newcastle upon Tyne North.

He claimed voters in the area were "more nuanced in their take on schools than campaign slogans might suggest . . . Generally, people have positive views on recent times and are pleased that more money is going into schools, whichever party forms the next government."

In South Cambridgeshire, Labour candidate Dan Greef is hoping to upset the bookies who are predicting a narrow Conservative victory ahead of the Lib Dems.

Having worked in primary, secondary and SEND schools since qualifying in 2011, Greef said he had watched the devastating impact of cuts and Ofsted.

"Schools are under so much pressure and

just cracking."

Jackie Schneider has been a music teacher for 29 years in the south London borough of Merton, where she is running as Labour's candidate for Wimbledon.

Schneider, who has campaigned for better school meals and playing fields, and for more help for refugees, wants to see schools used more by their communities and believes lifelong learning is "vital".

She said Ofsted "gets in the way of education and does nothing to help a school improve", and should be replaced with a "robust inspection system" that focused on how to ensure every school became "brilliant".

Meanwhile fellow Labour candidate Jill Borchers is standing in Stevenage. While the polls predict a Conservative majority, Labour was only seven percentage points behind in 2017.

The former principal and maths examiner said teaching had become "distorted by targets" and without more funding would see the "reality of child poverty".

Election watch



Will the familiar education MPs be back?

The general election is entering its final week – and we've got the lowdown on the odds of education MPs returning to parliament



Gavin Williamson
Education secretary

Constituency: South Staffordshire
Majority in 2017: 22,733 (69.8 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Safe Conservative



ODDS (OF WINNING SEAT): 1/200



Damian Hinds
Education secretary 2018-19

Constituency: East Hampshire
Majority in 2017: 25,852 (63.6 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Safe Conservative



ODDS: 1/50



Michael Gove
Education secretary 2010-14

Constituency: Surrey Heath
Majority in 2017: 24,943 (64.2 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Safe Conservative



ODDS: 1/12



Nick Gibb
Schools minister

Constituency: Bognor Regis and Littlehampton
Majority in 2017: 24,943 (64.2 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Safe Conservative



ODDS: 1/100



Kemi Badenoch
Children's minister (on maternity leave)

Constituency: Saffron Walden
Majority in 2017: 24,966 (61.8 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Safe Conservative



ODDS: 1/200



Michelle Donelan
Temporary children's minister

Constituency: Chippenham
Majority in 2017: 16,630 (54.7 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Safe Conservative



ODDS: 1/4



Angela Rayner
Shadow education secretary

Constituency: Ashton-under-Lyne
Majority in 2017: 11,295 (60.4 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Likely Labour



ODDS: 1/5



Mike Kane
Shadow schools minister

Constituency: Wythenshawe and Sale East
Majority in 2017: 14,944 (62.2 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Safe Labour



ODDS: 1/12



Layla Moran
Education spokesperson

Constituency: Oxford West and Abingdon
Majority in 2017: 816 (43.7 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Likely Lib Dem



ODDS: 1/6



Robert Halfon
Chair of education select committee

Constituency: Harlow
Majority in 2017: 7,031 (54 per cent of vote)
Prediction: Safe Conservative



ODDS: 1/20

Nicky Morgan and Justine Greening, who served as education secretary from 2014-16 and 2016-18 respectively, will not be standing in the upcoming election.



Justine Greening



Nicky Morgan

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PISA proves Gove's reforms were spot on, says Williamson

SCHOOLSWEEK REPORTER
@SCHOOLSWEEK

Education secretary Gavin Williamson says the UK's rise up the PISA tables is evidence that his party's controversial reforms – driven by Michael Gove – are “working”.

However, experts have urged caution interpreting the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment results, with only outcomes in maths showing a “statistically significant increase”.

Science and reading have not significantly improved for 13 years, despite the country moving up league tables for both disciplines.

Meanwhile, unions say any success has been “tarnished” by findings that England's pupils are more likely to feel “miserable and worried” (see story below).

All political parties picked up the results, published on Tuesday, as a verdict on the former education secretary Michael Gove's controversial reforms.

The near 5,200 15-year-old English pupils who took the tests last year are the first cohort to be taking all their GCSE exams under the new 9-1 grading system, without coursework and under the new curriculum

Williamson tweeted this week the results showed “our standing rising strongly. Conservative reforms are working and deliver greater opportunity for every child”.

The UK moved up the league tables for each of the subjects – shooting from 27th to 18th in maths and from 22nd to 14th in reading. The rise in science was much smaller, up just up one place to 14.

For English pupils, the average maths point score rose from 493 in 2015 to 504 in 2018 – described as a “statistically significant increase”.

The rise is attributed to boys scoring significantly better than in the previous cycle of tests, with lower achievers also improving at a faster rate.

But there were no statistically significant changes in reading and science.

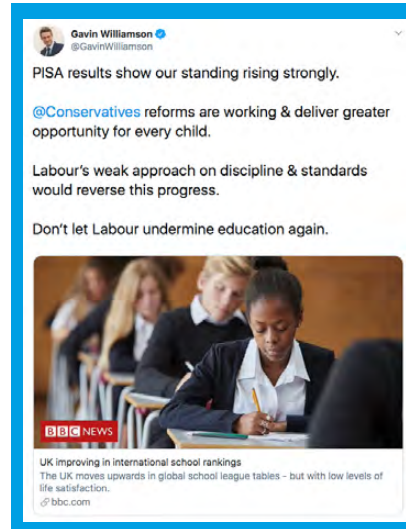
The average reading score rose slightly to 505, up from 500 in 2015. However this is attributed to the most able pupils scoring higher – the performance of lower-attainers has flatlined.

Results in science dropped (from 512 in 2015 to 507 last year) with the gap between high and low-achievers larger than the OECD average.

However, English pupils still scored significantly higher in reading and science, on average, than their counterparts in other OECD countries.

In evidence to the parliamentary education committee in 2015, the Department for Education named PISA as one of the ways it would measure “the increased performance of the school system as a whole” under its reforms.

Gove spearheaded many of these while education secretary, including



expanding the academies and free schools programme, separating AS and A-levels and reforming exams.

He gave weighty credence to PISA data, saying the 2012 results showed why “we need to press ahead with further reform of the system”.

He said this week the results were “great news”, adding: “Huge thanks to our wonderful teachers delivering a sustained improvement in standards.”

But John Jerrim, a professor of education at the UCL Institute of Education and a

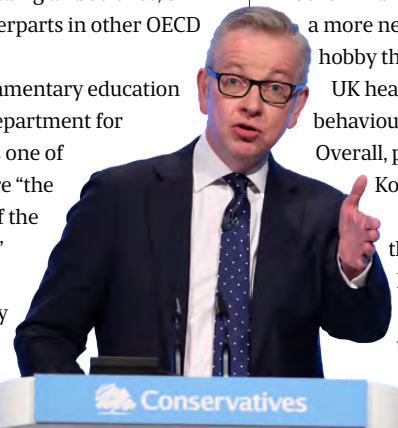
PISA guru, warned that “one set of good results is not a trend”.

Writing for Education Datalab, he said such swings could “simply be a result in changes in methodology. We need to wait until the next PISA results in 2021 before we can start to say anything concrete.”

Other findings included English pupils having a more negative attitude towards reading as a hobby than the OECD average.

UK headteachers also reported fewer pupil behaviour problems than the OECD average. Overall, pupils in China, Singapore and Hong Kong continued to lead the way.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, warned against “over-claiming or over-blaming” based on the results.



Michael Gove

... BUT, pupils feeling more ‘miserable and worried’

The life satisfaction of 15-year-olds in the UK has fallen faster in the past three years than in any other country.

Findings from the PISA results also show they are more likely to feel “miserable and worried”.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said any improvements in academic achievement were “tarnished by the worryingly high percentages of miserable and worried pupils”.

Analysis by Education Datalab found the proportion of pupils who rated their life

satisfaction as 7 and above (on a 0-10 scale) has fallen 13 percentage points since 2015.

It was the largest drop in the PISA study. John Jerrim, a professor of education at the UCL Institute of Education, said the OECD report noted a correlation between life satisfaction and a fear of failing.

The strength of the link was also stronger in the UK than almost all other countries.

However, he said one possible explanation was that UK pupils took the PISA tests in the build-up to “high-stakes GCSE exams”.

Jerrim said while there needed to be “caution

when talking about trends”, the findings might still “raise concerns”.

Carole Willis, the chief executive of the National Foundation for Educational Research, said pupils’ perception of their wellbeing “requires further analysis and consideration”.

However, pupils in the UK were more likely to report that they had a “growth mindset” – the belief that traits such as intelligence and talent can be developed through hard work (70 per cent compared with the OECD average of 63 per cent).

Research report, page 22

EXCLUSIVE



Government to publish multi-million pound bail-outs to struggling trusts

JAMES CARR
@JAMESCARR_93

The government has promised to publish for the first time a full account of the bail-outs it hands to struggling academy trusts.

However, the department refused to provide details of the pay-outs it dished out over the past few years – stating it “does not hold the information in the format requested”.

Schools Week had asked under the Freedom of Information Act for a spreadsheet with the costs broken down by the various strands of grant funding.

New guidance, published last month, showed there were five avenues of financial support available to cash-strapped trusts.

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the NEU, said the government’s failure to provide historic figures was “neither credible nor acceptable” and “deeply worrying”.

“When dealing with taxpayers’ money the department has an obligation to account for its spending and to be open and transparent, so that the public can be assured that education spending is being administered wisely.”

The Department for Education, in its response to *Schools Week*, said as the guidance was new it would “require us to categorise all the historical funding, in scope, in line with the new guidance”.

The department said, under FoI laws, public authorities are not required to create new information.

But they did reveal the information regarding financial support to trusts in difficulty will be published in the sector annual report and accounts. They aim to publish the document in June 2020.

Courtney said the need for openness was “particularly important at a time when schools across England are strapped for cash due to the current government’s austerity policies”.

“Funding must not only be fair, it must be seen to be fair.”

Academies are responsible for managing their own finances but under “exceptional circumstances” the government will help out.

The new guidance in November revealed for the first time the five avenues available for struggling trusts.

Academies are eligible for up to £200,000 in a ‘short-term advance’ to ease cash flow. It’s expected to be paid back within 12 months.

The other four grants don’t have a cap on the funding that can be issued.

The ‘enabling financial recovery’ grant is to “secure a return to financial stability for a trust in cumulative deficit” with a repayment plan “ideally within three years”.

The option of ‘building capacity’ aims to help “prevent financial failure” at trusts with a projected cumulative deficit.

Finally, trusts can apply for cash when ‘facilitating transfer’ of academies.

If ‘financially triggered’, the aim is to secure rapid transfer of academies out of a closing trust into one which will stabilise the school.

While if “educationally triggered”, the cash will provide financial stability to the incoming trust so they can prioritise school improvement.

Schools Week previously revealed the government paid £27 million in deficit funding to struggling academies in 2017-18.

However, interventions are not always successful. Between 2017 and 2019, £4 million was dished out to schools which ultimately closed.

Academies minister Lord Agnew says academies are more transparent over their finances than council-maintained schools.

The DfE has consulted on proposals to “address the disparity” – including requiring council schools to get permission for any related-party transaction and publish their annual finances online.

Attainment gap widens when off-rolled kids included

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
@PIPPA_AK

The attainment gap between poor pupils and their peers widens when off-rolled youngsters are taken into account, a new study has found.

At present 47 per cent of disadvantaged pupils in mainstream schools achieved a grade 4 or above in English and maths GCSE in 2018, compared with 72.6 per cent of non-disadvantaged pupils, an attainment gap of 25.6 percentage points.

However, a study by Education Datalab published yesterday found once school results were recalculated to take into account pupils who left before the end of year 11, the gap widened by 1.3 percentage points.

The recalculated figures showed 45.2 per cent of disadvantaged pupils got a grade 4, compared with 72.1 per cent for their peers.

Philip Nye, a researcher at Education Datalab, warned that “until all pupils are taken into account there will be an incentive to off-roll pupils”.

Datalab found the number of pupils leaving mainstream secondary schools for an unknown destination grew from 22,000 in 2016-17, to 24,600 in 2017-18.

About a third were disadvantaged. The researchers estimate up to 9,200 of the pupils who left in 2018 remained in England, but did not count in league tables or take any exams.

Datalab is calling for the next government to adopt “reweighted” school league tables that take into account the length of time a pupil spent at a school.

But Rosamund McNeil, an assistant general secretary at the National Education Union, said league tables were “the heart of the problem – not the solution”.

Meanwhile a study by the Sutton Trust, also published yesterday, found test scores in reformed exams for disadvantaged pupils fell slightly compared with their classmates.

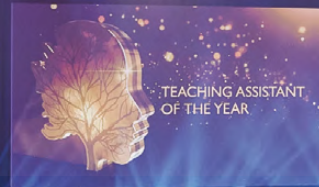
The dip was small – just over a quarter of a grade across nine subjects.

But the research also found half as many disadvantaged pupils received the top grades under the new 9 to 1 GCSEs.

The drop for non-disadvantaged pupils was smaller, creating a growing gap that could hit social mobility, the report said.

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EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Ofsted has promised no preferred curriculum - heads are right to challenge

Amanda Spielman has been clear about her new framework.

Writing for *Schools Week* in January, she said: "We have taken pains to be clear that there will be no Ofsted-approved curriculum. There are a variety of approaches to the curriculum and we do not have a preference among them."

Do those words still hold up?

Some headteachers will tell you 'no'. They believe they've been marked down solely for having three-year GCSEs - despite offering their pupils what they argue is a rounded curriculum.

Our front-page story is important - more than half of schools have three-year GCSEs. How Ofsted inspects these schools sends ripples through the sector.

Either way, Ofsted is living up to its word on shifting the focus away from just test results.

Both the schools we spoke to had good outcomes. But this was trumped by, in Ofsted's view, the narrowing of the curriculum.

We should also point out the new framework has really won some people over, too. But there will always be problems along the way - and we'll

keep looking into them.

Just as we have with our second story this week.

Ofsted's draft training materials to help inspectors in their deep dives - which are "confidential" - have somehow ended up being given to a school. It appears this may have been by an inspector working as a consultant.

This is worrying for a few reasons.

One - it appears to show the desperation from schools for guidance.

Two - there is a problem with the system if well-connected schools can get their hands on these documents (which include what inspectors will be looking for, and what the best answers are) while others miss out.

There's clearly huge public interest in all schools seeing these documents. But as Ofsted told us they were in draft form - and have pledged to publish the finalised versions - we have taken the decision not to publish them in full.

We don't want to drive even more unnecessary workload.

But we will be making sure Ofsted keeps its word.

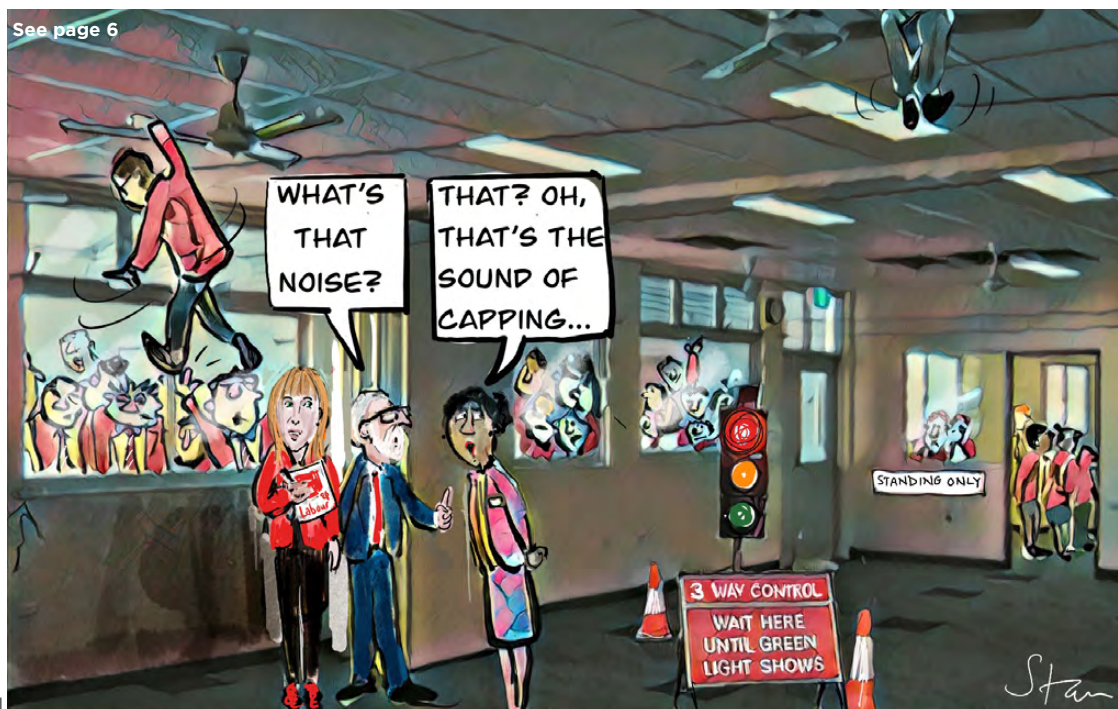
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See page 6



Interview

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



“I’m committed because I know some children get really raw deals”

Micon Metcalfe’s rise was never a given. Jess Staufenberg meets the school secretary turned government adviser

Micon Metcalfe, one of the best-known figures in school finance, seems to have got here almost by accident. She wanted to be a school secretary. With an O-level in maths

and a history degree, she wasn’t a chartered accountant and hadn’t worked in schools. It was 1997 and she needed a job that gave her holidays with her young daughter. Her husband was a teacher in London, so it made sense.

But Metcalfe, who is now a fellow of the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL), a government school resource management adviser

(SRMA), and a regular adviser to the Education and Skills Funding Agency, couldn’t get work in schools for “a long time”.

“I came up with this idea I’d be a school secretary, but I was going for jobs and they kept saying ‘you’ve got no experience in schools!’” Eventually she landed an admin job at a one-form entry primary school in South London. She was 33.

Interview: Micon Metcalfe



Micon Metcalfe at 13



In her first school admin job, 1999



With her husband and daughter, Christmas 1993

Her meteoric rise since serves as a lesson in the (often overlooked) potential of back office staff. She's been headhunted by Sir Jon Coles at United Learning, the biggest academy chain in the country, and now Dame Rachel de Souza at Inspiration Trust in Norfolk, where she was appointed chief operating officer in September. I find her in the trust's large, airy boardroom above the old fire station in Norwich, which the trust converted in 2013 into the Sir Isaac Newton Sixth Form. There is a long board table with about 15 chairs; she is happily perching on one of them.

It is clear as we talk it could have all turned out rather differently. When Metcalfe, with her twin sister, went to a state comprehensive in Leicester, it caused her parents "some consternation". Both were from working-class backgrounds and had got into grammar schools. Her father became a lecturer in education. Both were anxious for their children to succeed. But her father died when Metcalfe was 13. "He was ill for about a year. When you're that age, it's hard." Her mother retrained as a computer programmer and moved the family to Somerset.

The disruption meant Metcalfe managed to get a few O-levels. Things didn't much improve at college. "I don't think anyone checked I was attending. We were also taught the wrong syllabus for one subject and got completely different questions in the exam!" Most of the class failed, but Metcalfe, who had been predicted an A, managed a C. She'd scraped into university. "It's unthinkable

now, isn't it? I guess that's why I'm so committed to education... because I know some children get really raw deals."

She says "it wasn't really by design" that she worked her way up the school finance career ladder. "It was the times." She points to the 1988 Education Reform Act, which introduced local management of schools and grant-maintained schools (the forerunner of today's academies, responsible for their own finances).

"I did a lot of spreadsheet work — and I enjoyed it"

"Schools had a lot more autonomy and heads were starting to do financial planning," she says. "I did a lot of spreadsheet work — and I enjoyed it."

New Labour even had an initiative called the "entrepreneurial school", which sparked her interest in generating extra income. But she was also "motivated".

"If you're doing back office work, you've got to make it interesting. You poke your nose into things." She became a governor at her daughter's school and got the level 4 diploma for school business managers. She soon moved to a bigger primary, before moving to Dunraven School, also

in south London, where she stayed for a decade, building a reputation as a knowledgeable director of finance.

"You know how they say men apply up? This job was my one time of applying up. It was a massive stretch, from a two-form primary to an eight-form secondary. I thought, 'oh my gosh, what if I can't do this?'" Metcalfe, who weighs all her responses, replies with uncharacteristic intensity when I ask how she found it. "I really did enjoy it." Under her watch, the school underwent a £22 million refurbishment through the now-scrapped Building Schools for the Future programme. "Those were great times, when you'd go and put your hard hat on and look at what you're helping with."

More mysterious is a four-month stint as head of growth at United Learning soon after. By this point Metcalfe had a level 7 certificate in school finance and operational leadership, but it was still a huge step. "It's a great organisation, but it was the wrong job. I hope we parted on good terms. Having thought I'd had enough of finance and spreadsheets, I really hadn't. I got it wrong. I should have stuck it for longer." She looks rueful. Meanwhile she is enthusiastic about Inspiration Trust. She spends three days in Norfolk each week and says she is still getting to grips with it.

Such broad experience in the sector, at a time when the government has laid pressure on schools to cut costs, has made Metcalfe sought after.

Interview: Micon Metcalfe



Metcalfe and Inspiration Trust chief executive Rachel de Souza

Half of academy trusts had an in-year deficit last year, according to this year's *Kreston Academies Benchmark* report. And Metcalfe, although she weighs her words carefully, does not mix them.

Writing for *Schools Week*, she has warned: "If the government says, 'this is the funding you're going to get', you have to cut your cloth accordingly." She's also defended the government's SRMAs, who she joined in 2018, as a "great deal for schools", challenging the sector on its "unwillingness to engage" with finance.

So what's it like being an SRMA? To get the role she had to examine a real-life case study of a school in financial difficulty and "turn around recommendations in 24 hours" ahead of a face-to-face interview.

"Now I tend to choose deployments that are interesting to me. They've all been different: one was about falling pupil rolls, another was a trust entirely of free schools. I would hope they all found the visit positive."

It's difficult to imagine she wouldn't be helpful. But she admits a red flag flutters if staff salaries cost more than 80 per cent of income – she'd keep it between 75 and 80.

I ask why SRMAs are needed. Surely it shows too many school business managers aren't good at their jobs? "I'm not sure there are enough people with these skills, no. The workload can also be as heavy as for a chief executive, so it's about making



With a cheerleader and mascot from the Jacksonville Jaguars, Florida

it do-able, too.

"But also if you challenge the CEO and chair too much, you can lose your job. The CEO and chair can be a powerful partnership. Finance directors need to be included in what I call "the C-suite" — they need to be where all decisions are made, not just financial decisions. So it's about having the skills, but also the mechanisms in place so they can do their jobs. I don't know how much boards are taking that on."

The lack of such expertise is clearly impacting

school leaders. De Souza, who met me when I arrived, whispered delightedly: "I've been trying to get her for years." It shows trust bosses keenly feel the paucity of people as good as Metcalfe.

When I ask Metcalfe about the future supply chain of business managers, she takes me back to her roots. "It's mostly women in administrative roles. We need to signpost this as a career!"

So, pay attention to your school secretaries. Another Metcalfe might be among them —and we need them!

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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LYNSEY BURRIDGE

Chair, National Association of Virtual School Heads

Character education is just another hurdle to jump



Lyra Belacqua, His Dark Materials, BBC One

The development of the Department for Education's work on "character" doesn't always fit with the experiences of the most vulnerable children, says Lynsey Burridge

Our heroes in popular culture are often children in care. Harry Potter, Batman and wall grew up outside their birth families and epitomise what we might imagine "character" to look like. Yet, while character education should be an opportunity to recognise looked-after children's strengths — and level the playing field for them — it could become an extra barrier.

Only 10 per cent of looked-after children achieved a good pass in English and maths GCSE in 2019 compared with 43 per cent of all children. Only 6 per cent go on to higher education compared with about 50 per cent of the general population. One in four care leavers become homeless after they turn 18, with 14 per cent sleeping rough.

Lemn Sissay, the poet and care-experienced chancellor of the University of Manchester, says looked-after children are superheroes.

Considering that most will have overcome childhood trauma we can't

begin to imagine, it is hard to disagree.

These young people are certainly not short of "character". In fact, they could be said to be some of the most resilient children in society. Yet, while it's important that we continue to nurture positive representations of looked-after children, we need to make sure we don't accidentally fail to value their qualities or the severity of the challenges they face.

Every local authority has a virtual school head who oversees the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children. We are their "corporate parent", a fairly cold term that reflects that the state shares parental responsibility. It encourages us to want for these children what we expect for our own.

Things like extra-curricular

opportunities. The government's character education guidance talks about encouraging children to attend out-of-school activities. These are often what virtual schools promote via the child's personal education plan and fund using their pupil premium grant.

However, there are additional barriers for looked-after children. Ironically, these barriers are the very reasons these activities should be encouraged, but engagement and success are long-term investments, and measuring "character" by them poses a huge risk.

The guidance also talks about the importance of a sense of identity and belonging in developing "character" and we know that this is particularly important for children living away from their families.

Yet a recent report tells us a third of current or former looked-after children had an unexplained school exit. They are five times more likely to be subject to fixed-term exclusion, which puts pressure on foster placements, as well as threatening

Lemn Sissay about a pupil I was supporting who had applied to study medicine, but had not achieved the A-level grades required by Manchester. This child had lived in six different homes in year 11 alone.

I asked him to consider the journey to university as a marathon. Most of the other children in the race had the best personal trainers, nutritional experts and cheer leaders. My child had little support and people kept putting hurdles in her way.

She kept going, she reached the finish line that only a small proportion of looked-after children reach. Surely, the evidence of her "character" was overwhelming.

That young person did get into Manchester and is now starting a postgraduate medical course.

The superhero trope can be damaging. If it leaves us thinking that failure is due to a shortcoming of character, or assuming that facing equal challenges makes things fair, then it stops us asking important questions such as how our most vulnerable young people are supported to move towards the lives they deserve.

On the evidence so far, character education is just another hurdle to jump.

“ These young people are damaging some of the most resilient

a child's sense of belonging and self-worth. Perpetuating a system that incentivises exclusions while maintaining a commitment to fostering identity and belonging can be a cruel irony for our children.

A few years ago, I wrote a letter to

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Educators love to talk about role models, but that seldom extends to employing neuro-diverse staff, says Thomas Keaney. To make education truly inclusive, this has to change

Our own experience of education inevitably colours our judgment of “what works”. Having a diverse range of perspectives within the system seems to me a vital part of the drive for real inclusion, and not just for the benefit of neuro-diverse children. That’s why my ambition is for 50 per cent of our former students to be employed at one of our schools. After all, they continually prove they have the skills.

According to the National Autistic Society, just 16 per cent of autistic adults in the UK are in full-time paid employment. There is no separate breakdown for those working in education, but that headline figure suggests it must be tiny. Yet we run a successful alumni peer mentorship programme and, since 2018, have successfully employed a small group of former students.

Roles have been designed that play to our alumni’s strengths, rather than assigning them to predefined jobs that don’t. Each has an experienced mentor to support their development and, crucially, each is invited to present to the whole staff team from a strength-based perspective about their neuro-diversity, while also being clear about what their triggers are.

There is no doubt our current cohort has benefited from these practices. Last week some of them stood in front of a packed audience in the imposing setting of the House of Commons to tell us in striking terms



THOMAS KEANEY

Founder and CEO, TCES group of independent day schools

Schools won’t be inclusive until their efforts also apply to staff

what inclusion meant to them. Having been permanently excluded multiple times before

never permanently excluded one of our 3,000 pupils, we felt that hearing how our approach impacted

“ I want half of our former students working in school ”

reaching our schools, all have complex and co-morbid social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs or autistic spectrum conditions (ASC). Sharing their personal narratives of isolation, rejection and overwhelming loneliness, they spoke of how they had found friendships, forgiveness and a future.

During the parliamentary event, we shared research from Goldsmiths University. Having

on students in their own words would offer powerful insights for education as a whole. And it does. Students repeatedly came back to two themes: being given regular opportunities to practise their empathy and being encouraged to have high expectations of what they could achieve.

They spoke of belonging, and the sense of security that came from knowing that staff, including staff like them, would never give up.



They reflected on the care taken to understand them for who they were; being encouraged to think about what they could contribute rather than what they were lacking.

Witnessing these young people, so full of hope and purpose, I was also struck by a question: “What next?” When these young people become parents and start their future careers, will school continue to be a place where they feel comfortable and valued, as mums and dads, as teachers, mentors, and senior leaders? Or will their neurodiversity once again be categorised as difficult and lacking.

It makes me angry that the answer to that final question might well be yes. All of us have a duty to think honestly and ambitiously about inclusion. It’s not good enough to equate it simply with how we treat students and go no further.

“ Inclusion is about more than how we treat students ”

The glow of last week’s celebration event is still with me. But until we have scores of parents, teachers, governors, teaching assistants and senior leaders with SEMH and ASC, with stories to share of how schools transformed their lives, understood their challenges and never gave up on them, there is a huge amount of inclusion work for all schools to do.

We’ve embarked on that journey and we are never looking back.

Research

The NFER will regularly review the evidence on a school-related theme. Contact it on Twitter @TheNFER if you have a topic you would like her to cover

PISA 2018: What we have learned about children's life satisfaction

Dr Angela Donkin, chief social scientist, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

The OECD's PISA 2018 results for England were published this week by the Department for Education and NFER. While the study reports that 93 per cent of English 15-year-olds are happy some or all of the time compared with 91 per cent of their OECD counterparts, I've needed to deliver really concerning figures regarding the wellbeing of our children.

The finding for children in England is mirrored across all nations in the UK. One in five 15-year-olds in the UK reported being always worried, with 66 per cent worried some or all of the time. Only 53 per cent reported feeling satisfied with their life, compared with 67 per cent on average for our OECD counterparts. And out of 71 countries who completed the wellbeing questions, children across the UK as a whole were 68th in terms of their satisfaction with life. Girls were 17 percentage points less likely to report feeling satisfied with life than boys.

Why are our teenagers feeling like this and what should be done about it?

There is always a frantic push to get all the PISA headline figures out on the same day across the world, but, for the first time, the 2018 PISA data gives us a wealth of additional information that can help to understand the picture. In time.

The life satisfaction of 15-year-olds has declined in the UK at a faster rate than anywhere else, a 13 percentage point drop since 2015. It will be important to identify changes that might explain this through further work, but we can already anticipate some potential factors driving it.

For instance, we know that



those who are disadvantaged are more likely to suffer poor mental health. We also know that the numbers of children in poverty are rising.

To gain greater insight, we should also look at the pressures children feel they are under, from social media, harder exams, their own competitive mindset and fear of failure. Other issues include Brexit uncertainty and climate change.

Is the education system part of the problem? I can't categorically say no, but when the influence of frequency of testing was looked into with the PISA 2015 data, it was found that children in England are not tested more frequently than the OECD average. In addition, analysis of 2015 PISA data found that frequency of testing was not related to students' levels of school-related anxiety.

Even without the additional answers we need to understand what these numbers tell us, we can be pretty confident the issue should not be put solely at the education sector's door.

We do know that there are

things we can think about changing now. Only 57 per cent in England agreed that they had meaning or purpose in life. With curriculum the new buzzword, do we ensure all children are given the opportunity to explore the big questions of meaning and purpose? Does our curriculum have the breadth to support the development of diverse and valued skills? And can we do more to reduce the pressures adults put on children, be they socioeconomic or from competitive schools and parents?

Finally, we need to support those who are suffering. The Department of Health and DfE are working to ensure there is a designated senior mental health lead in all schools.

So while education is neither all of the problem nor all of the solution, there is plenty we can start to do now to ensure PISA 2021 reflects better on our care for our children.

NFER was contracted to carry out PISA 2018 in England on behalf of the Department for Education. However, this article has been produced solely by NFER and does not necessarily reflect the department's view



Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



The Incredible Teenage Brain

By Bettina Hohnen, Jane Gilmour and Tara Murphy

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Reviewed by Katherine Kantolinna, teacher and head of year 7, Wyvern St Edmund's Learning Campus, Wiltshire

The Incredible Teenage Brain promises to tell you everything you need to know to “unlock your teen’s potential”. As someone with considerable professional and personal experience of teenagers (and their brains), the sheer size of this 17-chapter book was off-putting. Its audience is unclear too.

The authors’ style is upbeat and positive – somewhat gratefully at times – aiming to redress the “Kevin the Teenager” cliché in similar books. The book makes no apologies for its scientific slant and, at the beginning of each chapter, goes into excessive detail about the brain’s workings.

But the examples are disappointingly basic. Whether this is evidence that the authors are out of touch with real-life teenagers, their families and teachers or whether this is a question of US-UK cultural divergence is unclear.

In one, a teenager makes a mistake doing the laundry. That anyone would respond in the way the book suggests, worrying that “my child is a failure, will never succeed in life” is shocking. The blindingly obvious and correct answer – that young people learn by making mistakes – hardly seems to warrant a book, let alone one this big.

In another, adults are given the amazing revelation that they can encourage young people to answer questions by smiling at them. Imagine. The teaching profession will be rocked to its core!

But the full horror of *The Incredible Teenage Brain* is in its formatting as a practical parenting book. Exercises

at the end of each chapter encourage readers to reflect on its concepts and examples by making notes on events in their own family. The very idea of such notes falling into the hands of a teenager is frightening, and what effect that experience could have on a teenager’s development is simply too great to consider. Indeed, it seems neither authors nor publisher has bothered trying.

For the average parent, then, most of the book’s advice could be given out in a couple of pages for each chapter without the A-level neuroscience. Parents want tips and tricks, not academic journals. But neither will they look for TV-magazine-style tips and tricks as basic as this in such a large tome.

Some areas were realistic, but few were useful.

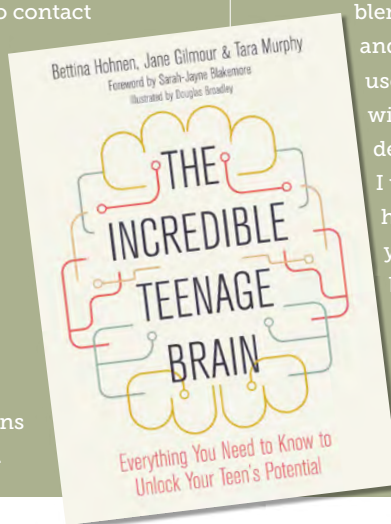
One chapter describes teenagers replacing loving parental relationships with strong bonds with their new friendship circle. This is very real and very common. Mothers of year 10 girls are especially likely to contact school trying to work out what they have done wrong. The book’s reassurance might calm many, but so might a chat with other parents – a far likelier source of advice than detailed explanations of the neuroscientific reasons for the phenomenon.

Although it has been edited for the UK market, *The Incredible Teenage Brain* still reads like an American book, and it’s not just the tone. Young people worrying about their Japanese homework is a rare and unlikely occurrence this side of the pond, for example, and this makes the whole book seem implausible.

There is a section on the dreaded growth mindset and outliers theories. Both of these have been considerably re-examined for their usefulness in education in the UK, but the book makes no mention of that. Whether that’s because these theories still wield influence Stateside, or because the authors are unaware of these developments, it doesn’t inspire much confidence in the text.

This is a book that doesn’t know who it’s for. Those likely to benefit from its advice are unlikely to get anywhere near it for its ponderous size. Those likely to read it are unlikely to benefit from its lack of realistic application.

In all, *The Incredible Teenage Brain* is as confusing as teenagers themselves – a blend of detailed neuroscience and truisms too basic to be useful. Any teacher or parent with the stamina to read it deserves commendation, and I will gladly accept yours, but hopefully I will have saved you the bother. You would be better off spending the time celebrating your teens than investing in this. By the time you have finished, they will have quietly unlocked their own potential.



Reviews



Our reviewer of the week is **James Pope**, Director of Whole Education and founder of InspirEDucate

@popejames

Prioritising wellbeing: putting yourself first

@gdmorewood

At a recent Heads Up event organised by my organisation InspirEDucate, the wonderful Hannah Wilson, writer of many a blog review for *Schools Week*, asked another simple, yet devastating, question: "Since when did wellbeing become an educational strategy?" It's a sad reality, but it has – and it speaks volumes about the education system in which we toil.

Accepting that, it is vital that we think about how we can look after ourselves and each other. Gareth Morewood does exactly that. Raising the obvious issue that effectiveness will be impeded if teachers are labouring with work-related stress, he provides techniques that will enable them to "put themselves first". These include exploring reflective practice, establishing a personal stress and well-being framework, and identifying personal flow activities. With useful links to further reading and research, Morewood provides a useful starting point for teachers looking to develop a set of sustainable practices that will help them in their personal and professional lives.

TOP BLOGS of the week

Breaking the barriers

@ASTsupportAAli

It can be so difficult, in the whirlwind of teaching a full timetable, to be properly reflective about the way we create an environment to promote learning for all students. In this post, Amjad Ali explores "SEND-friendly teaching". As he says, most teachers' lived experience of the job will have shown that some SEND students struggle with many aspects of the classroom environment.

These struggles reflect their own particular needs, but, Ali believes, they can be grouped into four areas. Pay attention to these and some effective inclusive practices will become habitual. Ali offers simple, well-reasoned hints and tips, which are all linked to his own writings on the subject, as well as relevant further reading and research materials. Anyone looking – or looking again – at how to have a positive impact on the classroom experience and learning of all their students should start here.

Early schooling and the lifetime risk of increasing antisocial behaviour/conduct problems

@iQuirky_Teacher

In a thought-provoking read for early years staff and school leaders alike, The Quirky Teacher explores the thinking and research she has undertaken while developing a research proposal about conduct problems and anti-social behaviour in pre-school and early years. "Peer rejection," she says, is established very early on because some children lack the social skills necessary to engage effectively in social play with their classmates.

Conventional thinking and research leads us to tackle the issue through teaching social skills, intervention with parents, and pairing "social children" with "antisocial children" to promote peer learning. Quirky challenges this. In short, her thrust is that curriculum is vital in building a currency of knowledge that enables all children to engage positively in social interactions. Simple, yet devastating for the status quo.

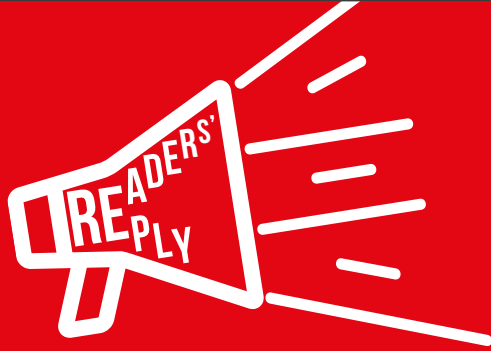
The twelve wellbeing days of December – day 1

@AnniPoole

In what is a timely read at the end of the long autumn term, Anni Poole talks about feeling overwhelmed, how this can impact negatively on our roles and how to relieve the tension it causes. She explores how the feeling establishes itself and how you can recognise it for what it is, before going on to provide a simple and effective technique for moving forward.

She warns against the temptation to simply "push through". This is a challenge for teachers because, not only do we have the propensity to push through our workload, as she points out, it is all too easy to do it with our self-care too. The upcoming holidays shouldn't be about recovery, but growth.

CLICK ON REVIEWS TO VIEW BLOGS +



Boris Johnson pledges no-notice inspections

Darren Walkerdine, @DWalkerdine

Why? What is the point? This is the problem with education – constant instability!

Mike Ireland, @MikeIreland100

For the public this will sound like a great idea. Probably doesn't matter too much with teachers where most don't vote Tory anyway and unlikely to change their minds.

Academy trust spends £12,000 on therapy dogs to tackle pupil anxiety

Tara Deevoy, @execHT1

How is this possible? We have three dogs that visit our schools – not a penny is spent. This is a wonderful resource for some children and highly effective, but £12 000 worth of effectiveness? I'm sure even our amazing canine team couldn't show value for money on that scale!

Cath Knight, @Missysmusician81

What a brilliant initiative that is focused on the REALLY important part of education – the well-being of young people. Every school should have this. I've encountered well-being dogs in a few schools now and the impact is incredible.

Questions over declaration of trust's £20,000 flat for CEO

Nina Joanne Calder, Facebook

How can that ever be described as the best value for money?! You get a job, you commute, you pay petrol or train fares – like the rest of us.

Schools WILL get share of £100bn capital – Williamson

Martin Matthews, @mm684

On the basis he will still be secretary of state and the Treasury agrees. Neither is certain.

School mascot Brian the Lion has out-of-this-world experience

Janet Downs

It appears the school has literally risen from the ashes. A wonderful story.

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Helly Douglas, @HellyDouglas

Boris Johnson pledges no-notice inspections

No-notice inspections are so ridiculous. Oh, hello Ofsted. What? You want to sit down with loads of our staff to discuss the curriculum? And you need all our data? And you need to meet with all the SLT? Well if only you'd called yesterday, we could have everything ready and waiting.



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

Catholic diocese defends 20 per cent non-faith admissions at new VA school

Bernice

It's not the first Catholic voluntary-aided school to do this. St Richard Reynolds primary in Twickenham, southwest London, has 10 per cent open admissions.

In both cases it was probably a condition imposed by the local authority for it to give its support for establishing the school.

Pupils 'at risk' as special school staff left to 'fill gaps' in medical care

Judith Smith

This issue has been driven by money – in some ways easier to address. But in reality many of us have been taking on more and more complex care for our young people for several years.

A lack of understanding and visibility of our population has meant that the quiet minority get overlooked; to face these issues demands attitudinal change.

Ministers, clinical commissioning groups, etc, pay lip service to the idea that SEND is high on the agenda and that the voice of the young person is vital.

However, to truly address these issues they will need to spend time acknowledging their presence and, by doing so, their right to have their needs met in safety by well-trained, well-supported staff.

We need to secure honest acknowledgement of our young people and translate this into action, legislation and secure futures. We cannot allow this situation to continue under the pretext that funding is an issue. This is an excuse for not addressing equality in its purest sense – that of risk to life.

WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

FRIDAY

The Conservative research department today published another interesting dossier, this time on Labour's education proposals.

But for some reason, the party didn't feel the need to send its analysis to education journalists.

Could it be that it doesn't want claims such as "millions of pupils now in good or outstanding academies would lose their school place" to be checked by specialists?

Fact check: Labour's policy is to stop new academies from opening, NOT close existing ones.

TUESDAY

Poor Mark LeHain. Having been parachuted into Newcastle North as its Conservative candidate, the former Parents and Teachers for Excellence director/New Schools Network chief/government press officer has discovered the public can be almost as rude as members of eduTwitter.

In one example shared on Twitter, a comment on his Facebook page told the Tory teacher to "piss of wankspangle" (sic).

Not cool. And neither is the grammar. ***

Attendees of the OECD's PISA launch event in Paris got more than they bargained for when Sir Anthony Seldon broke out into some physical theatre.

Announcing the need to turn the education system on its head, the 66-year-old former headmaster of Wellington College-turned Bucks University vice-chancellor promptly did a headstand, exposing his very bright blue socks.

But the acrobatics were not the most controversial part of his appearance; that was when he branded all education ministers "fundamentally stupid".



The National Education Union was quick to warn that this week's rising PISA results only provide a "snapshot" of the performance of education systems. It added the "league table" rankings should be "treated with enormous caution".

Absolutely!

So it was a surprise when Dr Mary Bousted took to The TES on the same day to laud Estonia for doing "remarkably well" – suggesting our system could learn a thing or two from its lack of interference from an inspectorate. D'oh!

WEDNESDAY

Sleeping off PISA.

THURSDAY

Supporters of Michael Gove hailed the former education secretary's reforms when PISA results showed an improvement in maths performance.

But the euphoria didn't last. Today a report by the Sutton Trust found his new GCSEs are widening the attainment gap.

Not so many congratulatory tweets about that one.

Angela Rayner was back in her constituency this week to lob out a couple more schools' promises before the election (bizarrely, not included in the party's manifesto published a few weeks ago).

Anyway, it's more of the same – ambitious pledges that, when we ask to see some working-out, we find none has been done.

This time Labour has proposed to extend the class size cap of 30 pupils to secondary schools. It will also hire 20,000 more teachers to help with the extra classes that will be needed.

But the party doesn't know how many extra classes will be created, nor how much it will cost to build them.

It's a good job Labour has a magic money tree, otherwise these potentially spiralling costs will cause a bit of a headache if the party gets into government.

PRINCIPAL

FOR IPSWICH ACADEMY

Leadership pay spine:
L25 – L31 (National)

£74,103 – 85,826 p.a.



Due to the promotion of the current principal to a CEO post, the Directors of Paradigm Trust are looking to appoint a principal to Ipswich Academy. With standards secure and rising, pupil numbers increasing rapidly, and an Ofsted 'good' judgment achieved, the school is poised to continue its journey towards excellence. Paradigm is well placed to support the next principal of Ipswich Academy and, given this, the post would suit either an experienced or first-time head teacher.

Paradigm is an educational trust with a very simple ethos: to develop and sustain great schools where we can make the biggest difference to pupils.

If you would like to have an informal conversation with Paradigm's CEO about the school/post this can be arranged by contacting Julie Anderson, Executive Assistant, on julie.anderson@paradigmtrust.org

To download a recruitment pack please visit the careers page of our website by visiting <http://paradigmtrust.org/careers/vacancies-2/>

Application deadline: Monday 9 December, noon
Interviews: w/c 16 December
Start: September 2020 (potential for hand over period before that)

As a Trust, we are outcomes-driven and flexible working options can be accommodated.

All applicants must have due regard for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and for following the child protection procedures adopted by the Trust. If successful, you will also be required to complete an enhanced DBS check before starting. An enhanced DBS check that is satisfactory to us will be a condition of employment.



Brindishe Schools
together we're more



SENIOR SCHOOLS BUSINESS MANAGER

A great opportunity for an exceptional and experienced School Business Manager wanting their next challenge. This person will manage and maintain all business aspects across our Federation of 3 schools. We are looking for someone that is able to manage the schools' financial resource management (HCSS), administration management (Arbor), human resource management in each school and across the Federation, and support the information systems and premises functions. This person is key in maintaining the high standards in place whilst supporting the Executive Head of the Federation in her duty to ensure that each Brindishe School meets its educational aims.

Naturally this person will have highly effective interpersonal and communication skills, exceptional organisation and problem solving skills, with

an ability to work under pressure and prioritise accordingly. Good working knowledge of MS Office package and ideally HCSS Finance and Arbor MIS.

Brindishe Green, Brindishe Manor and Brindishe Lee are all forward thinking, lively and ambitious Ofsted-rated outstanding primary schools. We work as a close partnership of 3 highly successful local authority primary schools known as the Brindishe Schools.

We are looking for someone that can contribute to the overall ethos/work/aims of the schools, Establish constructive relationships and communicate with other agencies/professionals, Attend and participate in regular meetings, Participate in training and other learning activities and performance development as required and

recognise own strengths and areas of expertise and use these to advise and support others.

As this is maternity cover it is a great opportunity for someone who wants grow and develop their experiences and stretch their skills in an environment that has well established ways of working. Starting in January 2020 and finishing in May 2021 will mean there is a full term of handover before the maternity leave starts and a hand over period at the end of the contract.

Completed application forms please to be emailed to our Executive Head Rachel Waite onwaite@brindisheschools.org by **midday 9th December** followed by a hard signed copy sent to **Brindishe Green School, Beacon Road, London SE13 6EH.**



BEDE ACADEMY

ASSISTANT VICE PRINCIPAL

Bede Academy is seeking to appoint a well-qualified Assistant Vice Principal with energy, integrity and commitment to the Academy's vision and Christian ethos to lead the provision for our SEND students as well as leading curriculum support for groups of students (particularly at KS3) who are at risk of underperforming.

The Assistant Vice Principal will have responsibility of training staff and quality assure in class/support, to deliver quality first teaching that meets the needs of students with SEND learning needs. You will need to be a qualified teacher who preferably holds the National SENDCo Award.

The role includes:

- Leading and managing the provision for special educational needs and disabilities within the Academy
- Liaising with classroom support staff, class teachers and senior leaders
- Liaising with and developing relationships with external agencies and parents
- Having the ability to inspire and motivate colleagues and students to promote co-operation, collaboration and teamwork.

BEDEACADEMY.ORG.UK

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Start date: September 2020 (earlier if possible)
Location: Quinton, Birmingham
NOR: 777
Age range: 3-16

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You will be joining the leading inclusive educational trust in the country - one where you have more opportunities to forge your own path, where your work is truly valued and where you will receive the recognition and rewards to motivate you to build on your achievements.

Find out more by calling Tanya Bentham, Head of Talent on 07990 538911 or email: recruitment@academiesenterprisetrust.org

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