

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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

The plight of pupils in lockdown areas



P9

'I remember being in a classroom when a bomb went off'



P20-22

'Grades aren't sweeties to be handed out as compensation'



P24

Secrecy over 'orphan' trust CEO's departure



P4

SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK | @SCHOOLSWEEK

FRIDAY, OCT 23 2020 | EDITION 228

## The Ofqual files

Long-awaited board minutes reveal the inside story of this year's exams fiasco



Pages 6-7

## No evidence for minister's claim that parents 'prefer to pay' for kids' meals

- DfE unable to evidence former children minister's FSM claim
- Zahawi said report showed parents prefer to pay '£1 or £2' for food
- Tory MP slammed for 'misleading' public as meals plea snubbed

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

PAGE 10

INTRODUCING THE NEW

# EDU WEEK JOBS

INSPIRING JOB ROLES IN EDUCATION



# SCHOOLS WEEK

## Meet the news team



**John Dickens**  
EDITOR

@JOHNDICKENSSW  
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



**Laura McInerney**  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

@MISS\_MCIENERNEY  
LAURA.MCIENERNEY@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



**JL Dutaut**  
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

@DUTAUT  
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@LSECT.COM



**Jess Staufenberg**  
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

@STAUFENBERGJ  
JESS.STAUFBENBERG@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



**Freddie Whittaker**  
CHIEF REPORTER

@FCDWHITTAKER  
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



**Samantha Booth**  
SENIOR REPORTER

@SAMANTHAJBOTH  
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



**James Carr**  
SENIOR REPORTER

@JAMESCARR\_93  
JAMES.CARR@LSECT.COM



**Nicky Phillips**  
HEAD DESIGNER

@GELVETICA  
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Shane Mann**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

@SHANERMANN  
SHANE.MANN@LSECT.COM

THE TEAM Designer: Simon Kay | Sales team leader: Bridget Stockdale | Sales executive: Clare Halliday | PA to managing director: Victoria Boyle

## EDU WEEK JOBS



**QUEST TRUST - PRINCIPAL - £70,000-£80,000  
NEGOTIABLE SUBJECT TO EXPERIENCE**

[HTTPS://HTTPSLINK.COM/2H0I](https://httpslink.com/2H0I)



**ACTIVE LEARNING TRUST - ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION -  
UP TO £80KPA**

[HTTPS://HTTPSLINK.COM/9VKG](https://httpslink.com/9VKG)



**LEXDEN SPRINGS SCHOOL - DEPUTY HEAD TEACHER -  
SEN - LPS 21-25**

[HTTPS://HTTPSLINK.COM/BD7O](https://httpslink.com/BD7O)



**HOLLYGIRT SCHOOL - HEADTEACHER - £65,000 - £75,000**

[HTTPS://HTTPSLINK.COM/T9MP](https://httpslink.com/T9MP)



The Russett School

**THE RUSSETT LEARNING TRUST - EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER -  
LEADERSHIP: L27 TO L32**

[HTTPS://HTTPSLINK.COM/ASV9](https://httpslink.com/ASV9)

### Cuts mean those who can't afford it can't teach



Page 25



### Investigation: The rise of home education

Page 5



### Talk is cheap, and children need more of it

Page 23



### When it comes to CPD, shift happens

Page 26

**Disclaimer:**  
Schools Week is owned and published by Lsect Ltd. The views expressed within the publication are those of the authors named, and are not necessarily those of Schools Week, Lsect Ltd or any of its employees. While we try to ensure that the information we provide is correct, mistakes do occur and we cannot guarantee the accuracy of our material. The design of the digital newspaper and of the website is copyright of Lsect Ltd and material from the newspaper should not be reproduced without prior permission.

If you wish to reproduce an article from either the digital paper or the website, both the article's author and Schools Week must be referenced (to not do so, would be an infringement on copyright).

Lsect Ltd is not responsible for the content of any external internet sites linked to. Please address any complaints to the editor. Email [john.dickens@Schoolsweek.co.uk](mailto:john.dickens@Schoolsweek.co.uk) with Error/Concern in the subject line. Please include the page number and story headline, and explain what the problem is.

#### ADVERTISE WITH US

If you are interested in placing a product or job advert in a future edition please click on the 'advertise' link at the top of the page on [schoolsweek.co.uk](http://schoolsweek.co.uk) or contact:

**E: [advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk](mailto:advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk)**  
**T: 020 81234 778 or [click here](#)**

SCHOOLS WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



LEARNING & SKILLS EVENTS,  
CONSULTANCY AND TRAINING LTD  
163-165 GREENWICH HIGH ROAD  
LONDON SE10 8JA  
T: 020 8123 4778  
E: [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)

# 'Orphan' school trust silent on CEO's departure

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

The special academy trust set up by the government to take over "orphan" schools has refused to explain why its chief executive has left the role.

Questions surround the departure of Gareth Mason as chief executive of the Falcon Education Academies Trust.

The trust was set up last year with the support of government to take over schools no one wants (SNOWs) in the north of England.

*Schools Week* understands Mason has not been seen at the trust for at least two weeks. But a spokesperson for Falcon refused to explain why he has left the role.

They would only say: "Our CEO was on secondment to the trust but this has ended, with the trust led by an interim CEO and director of education."

Anne-Marie Holdsworth, Falcon's chief operating officer, has taken the interim CEO position.

Mason being employed via a secondment has not been mentioned before. His appointment to the role doesn't appear to have been announced publicly at the time, but he has held the position since at least December.

It also appears that a webpage entitled Our Team on Falcon's website has recently been taken down.

Falcon said Mason had been on secondment from the Delta Academies Trust, one of the largest in the country, running 50 schools.

A spokesperson for Delta also refused to answer questions about Mason's employment. Instead they said: "Delta is providing senior leadership and school improvement support to Falcon Education Academies Trust during its early development. This support is ongoing and a number of senior colleagues continue to work with Falcon in school improvement and leadership roles."

The disclosure comes as schools minister Nick Gibb was challenged by MPs on the education select committee this week about what he is doing to help



Gareth Mason (second from right) with (from left to right) Stockton South MP Matt Vickers, Falcon chair David Earnshaw and Gavin Williamson at Thornaby Academy in January

"orphan" schools.

*Schools Week* has long highlighted the plight of such schools – which are given academy orders after poor Ofsted ratings, but are still waiting to be taken over.

The most extreme example is the Hanson School, in Bradford, which has been waiting nine years for a sponsor, after being shunned by three academy trusts. It was rated 'inadequate' again earlier this year and has spent six of the past ten years in special measures.

Gibb told MPs there were still "too many" of these schools. He said issues blocking academy sponsorship included deficits and hefty private finance initiatives attached to schools.

But he pointed to the Falcon trust, saying the government had set this up to "take those schools that have not found a home, to sponsor them, to sort out their problems".

He added that academies minister Baroness Berridge was "absolutely determined that we are going to get those schools into sponsors".

When asked why Mason had left the role, the Department for Education issued the same statement as Falcon.

The trust is chaired by David Earnshaw,

who is also chair of trustees at the Outwood Grange Academies Trust, which has 32 schools across the north of England. Another trustee is Kamruddin Kothia, who is chair of the Star Academies Trust.

When announcing the trust was to be set up in September last year, education secretary Gavin Williamson said it would be run by school leaders with a "proven track record of turning around underperforming schools". It would be "expected" to take on the "most challenging schools" by "offering a route into a strong academy trust that allows school improvement to begin immediately".

So far, Falcon has taken on a solitary school, Thornaby Academy, in Stockton-on-Tees, which joined the trust in September.

*Schools Week* can also reveal that the trust has been awarded just over £500,000 to expand as part of the government's trust capacity fund.

The cash is handed out to help trusts expand before March next year.

A spokesperson for Falcon said the cash will "allow us to ensure good progress at the schools we are supporting now and in the future".

# Investigation

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

## Minister intervenes as home education soars

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The government has intervened to urge parents not to take the decision to remove their children from school “lightly” after councils across England reported soaring increases in elective home education (EHE) registrations.

Elective time education is when a child is permanently removed from a school’s roll to be educated at home. It is different from home-schooling, and means parents or carers take sole responsibility for their child’s education, including any associated costs.

Only a small proportion of the nation’s children are home-educated, but registrations have rocketed this term, with some of the country’s largest local authorities reporting increases of more than 200 per cent.

Baroness Berridge, the minister for the school system, this week urged parents considering home education to talk to schools.

“Home education is never a decision that should be entered into lightly. Now, more than ever, it is absolutely vital that any decision to home-educate is made with the child’s best interests at the forefront of everyone’s minds.”

Lincolnshire county council logged 387 EHE registrations in September and October this year, up from 124 in the same period last year, a rise of 212 per cent.

However, a spokesperson said a part of this difference “appears to be driven by people applying later than usual this year”, as the numbers for March to August were “less than half that of last year”.

In Kent, there were 588 new EHE registrations in September this year, up 180 per cent from 210 in the same month last year.

In one case, 56 pupils did not return to one school – Hartsdown Academy in Thanet – at the beginning of September.

Matthew Tate, the school’s head, said the rise was “absolutely due to Covid”, but that after meeting with parents, the school had managed to get all but two of the pupils back.

“When people understand the commitment that they’re taking on ... and the costs of it, the costs of exams and those kinds of things, we quite often can get them to rethink.”

Tate also accused ministers of “dishonesty” over the safety of schools.

“People aren’t stupid. They look at year groups



being sent home, schools part-closing, all those kinds of things, whilst at the same time [the government is] saying it’s completely safe and it’s not spreading in schools.”

Craig Chapman, Kent County Council’s interim head of fair access, said some parents had chosen to educate their children at home “as a temporary measure because they have concerns relating to Covid-19 and are not yet ready to return their child/children to school”.

In Essex, the number of children being electively home-educated rose 1,588 at the end of September last year to 1,903 at the same point this year.

A spokesperson said that while there had been a “gradual rise” in the number of pupils being electively home-educated in recent years, the increase this September was “greater than usual”.

“We cannot state that the additional increase is due to coronavirus, but we acknowledge that, for some families, this may have been one of the considerations that led them to de-register their child.”

Derbyshire also reported a 90 per cent rise in registrations this term compared with last year – from 78 to 148, while in Hertfordshire registrations rose by 76 per cent and in Hampshire 51 per cent.

In Leeds, the city council received 78 elective home education registrations in the first three weeks of September, up from 32 in the same period last year.

Councillor Jonathan Pryor, the city’s executive member for learning, skills and employment, said the council had tried to be “as communicative as possible” with parents, but said some had been “spooked” by mixed messages from government.

“The level of uncertainty will be contributing to the problem, because it does filter through, and the end result is parents choosing to take their children out of schools,” he said.

We approached the 20 councils with the highest number of schools, and found others that had published data on the problem recently.

The findings come after an Ofsted pilot study of 130 schools revealed that one third had “unusually high numbers” of pupils being taken off-roll.

In an interview with *The Guardian*, Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector, warned that misinformation on social media was a contributing factor.

Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the ASCL leadership union, said the increases were “of great concern”.

“We would urge parents against removing their children from school unless they are fully confident that they are able to deliver the depth and breadth of learning that their children require.”



Julie McCulloch

# The Ofqual Files

## Williamson met Ofqual twice just before results day

**JOHN DICKENS & JAMES CARR**

@SCHOOLSWEEK

**EXCLUSIVE**

Gavin Williamson met the exams regulator Ofqual to “talk about results” twice in the two days before the controversial A-level announcement this summer.

The findings, revealed by *Schools Week* earlier this week, shoot down the education secretary’s suggestion that he was unaware of problems with this summer’s A-level results until after they were published.

The disclosure came on the same day Ofqual published its board minutes from this year, revealing the inside story of the exams fiasco (see next page for key findings).

Following the fall-out over A-level results, in which 40 per cent of teacher grades were downgraded by Ofqual’s algorithm, Williamson sought to distance himself from blame.

As reported by *The Guardian* he previously told journalists: “Over the weekend [after results day] it became apparent to me, with evidence that Ofqual ... and external experts had provided, that there were real concerns about what ... [grades] a large number of students were getting ... and whether that was a proper and fair reflection of their efforts.”

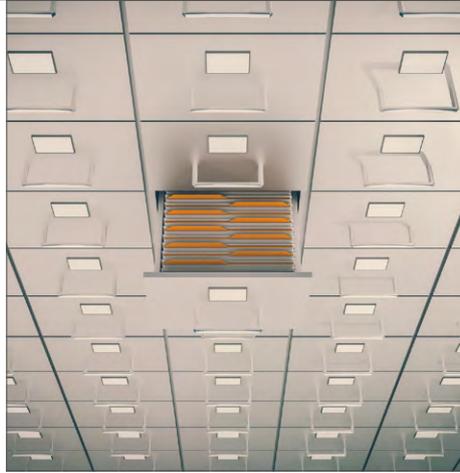
But a Freedom of Information request from *Schools Week* revealed Williamson met Ofqual officials on Tuesday, August 11, and again on Wednesday, August 12, before results day on Thursday, August 13.

The board minutes released by Ofqual show that during the meeting on August 11 Williamson raised options to “address declining public confidence in calculated grades and the events in Scotland”.

They included that centre assessment grades (CAGs) could be issued, or that mock exam results could be awarded in place of the calculated grade if the mock was higher.

The discussion of options is also somewhat surprising given Williamson’s claim that he was unaware of problems, and his comments in a letter two days later that stated he was “confident that the approach which Ofqual has designed means that the vast majority of students will get the grades they deserve this summer”.

Board minutes from an Ofqual meeting on August 11 note the secretary of state preferred



the mock result option, and wanted this to be completed by September 7.

A separate FOI, seen by *Schools Week*, also revealed that key Ofqual staff – including then chief regulator Sally Collier – were only informed about the government announcing the mock appeal route as official policy on that same day.

The board minutes also show the regulator met Williamson on July 9 to share a “high-level preliminary overview of the summer 2020 results to date. This is an unusual step, but judged as appropriate in the exceptional circumstances of summer 2020.”

Between March 18 and August 13 Williamson attended ten meetings with Ofqual about results. Nick Gibb, the schools minister, attended 16.

Department for Education officials attended 154 Ofqual meetings overall, including 55 specific “DfE/Ofqual catch-ups” on the 2020 exams.

The findings are likely to form an important part of any future inquiry into the fiasco, which prompted nationwide outrage.

Among the problems with the algorithm grades were that private schools got the largest increases in top results.

The Ofqual board minutes also show that during July, the regulator was aware of problems with small cohorts that were “particularly subject to volatility” and could cause a “significant change in the shape of a centre’s expected grade distribution”.

A meeting in early August stated the “apparent inconsistencies between CAGs and historical data could be due to either real differences in student performance or to instability related to the size of the available historical data set”.

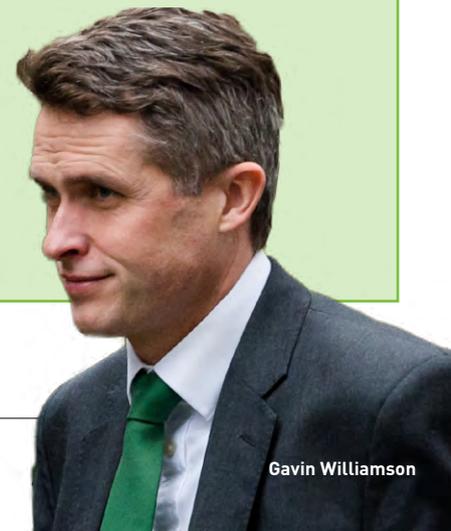
The board was “very concerned about the

prospect of some students, in particular so-called outliers, being awarded unreliable results”. But despite this, the board “accepted reluctantly that there was no valid and defensible way to deal with this pre-results, and that it would therefore have to be addressed via the appeals route”.

This problem was made redundant when the government announced on Monday, August 17, that pupils would be awarded their CAGs.

### THE EXAMS FIASCO: KEY DATES

- **Tues, Aug 11:**  
Williamson announces ill-fated ‘triple lock’ policy after results fall-out in Scotland
- **Weds, Aug 12:**  
Williamson met with Ofqual for the second time in two days to talk about results
- **Thurs, Aug 13:**  
A-level pupils pick up their results
- **Mon, Aug 17:**  
Williamson announced pupils would be awarded their centre-assessed grades
- **Tues, Aug 18:**  
The education secretary claims he only knew of problems with results over the weekend
- **Tues, Aug 25:**  
Ofqual chief regulator Sally Collier resigns



Gavin Williamson

# The Ofqual Files

## More U-turns, surprise announcements and boardroom tensions...

... Ofqual's board minutes reveal the inside story of how the exams fiasco unfolded. Here's what you need to know.

JOHN DICKENS & FREDDIE WHITTAKER  
@SCHOOLSWEEK

### 1 'Triple lock' was announced without Ofqual sign-off

Minutes of an emergency meeting held on the evening of August 11 show the government announced its "triple lock" plan before Ofqual's board had agreed to it.

In fact, the plan was widely reported while the meeting to discuss it was still in session.

According to the minutes, the board "took a short break" while Sally Collier, the chief regulator, spoke to Gavin Williamson, the education secretary. He wanted the issue "resolved quickly".

Until this point, Ofqual believed its dual back-up plans for pupils with unfair grades (to appeal or resit) would be enough to deal with any fall-out. However, the "triple lock" policy, as Williamson called it, threw this plan into disarray.

### 2 Mocks plan 'compromised standardisation process' ...

As the press release was read out on the evening of August 11, board members noted "the difficult situation this now caused".

The wording "suggested a diluted and compromised standardisation process, even given the opportunity for Ofqual to define what would constitute a valid mock", the minutes state.

As well as concerns over the consistency of mocks, the plan would "further disadvantage" private candidates, Ofqual said.

Collier told her board that the executive team had "tried to fulfil Ofqual's role in accordance with its objectives whilst being cognisant of the outcomes that the DfE was targeting".

But this was a "fundamental shift" and Collier "could not, as the independent regulator, accede to a request that contradicted what Ofqual had been established to do".

### 3 ... But regulator risked credibility hit over refusing the policy

The board minutes show what a tricky position this put Ofqual in, and question just how independent it is from ministers.

At a meeting on August 14, Collier "highlighted the risk of collapse of public confidence in the examination system, and to [the] credibility of Ofqual as the regulator of that system were Ofqual not to implement this policy, given it had already been announced".

The board believed that Williamson's policy "was likely to result in less valid outcomes overall, with unfairness at individual and centre level". But this had to be balanced "against the obvious public confidence considerations".

The board then resolved to implement the direction to allow an appeal "on the basis of a student having a valid mock or non-exam assessment result which was higher than their calculated grade (CAG)".

Furthermore, for a successful appeal, the grade awarded should not exceed the CAG.

### 4 Williamson U-turned after opposing mock CAGs cap

A meeting had to be held on the evening of Saturday, August 15, as Williamson wanted Ofqual to reconsider the CAG cap. Ofqual had published guidance earlier that day stating this was its policy, but later took it down.

Incredulously, during a meeting the following day, the board was told that the education secretary now believed the mock appeal route should go ahead with a CAG cap as it was more favourable than the alternative – awarding pupils their CAG.

The minutes read: "The board noted that the situation had continued to change, and there were increasing and material risks in the implementation of the 'mock appeals' approach. It was concerned that delivery of a mock appeals process was in serious doubt at this late stage."

The board heard the mock appeal route

"risked stretching exam boards beyond achievable limits" and highlighted a "notable and irretrievable falling away of public confidence in the standardisation approach".

### 5 Ofqual chief rebelled over mocks plan

Collier was vocal in her support to push back against the proposed mock appeal route and instead use CAGs from quite early on.

During an emergency board meeting on Saturday, August 15, she disagreed with the board's decision to withdraw its guidance on using a CAG cap under the mock appeal route.

And during a meeting the following day, she also called for the board to go ahead with using CAGs and to tell Williamson this was its call.

But the board instead resolved to reissue the mocks appeal guidance and then meet again to discuss whether pupils should just be awarded their CAGs. Collier voted against this.

### 6 Plans for Collier's resignation were discussed in advance

A meeting on August 23 had a single agenda item: to discuss "contingency arrangements in the event that Ofqual is without the chief regulator at short notice".

"The board noted that should the chief regulator resign, then the board would need to act swiftly to prevent the loss of senior skilled staff, to strengthen the organisation's capabilities and to rebuild Ofqual's reputation."

The rest of the discussion was redacted. Collier did not attend, although her

successor Glenys Stacey did.

Collier resigned two days later.



Sally Collier

# We support RSHE

Our RSHE qualifications ensure that you're compliant with new government regulations and reward your learners with valuable recognition of their achievement.



Qualification bundles | Short courses  
Flexible units | Resources

Find out more about RSHE qualifications from CACHE.

Visit [cache.org.uk/rshe](https://cache.org.uk/rshe) Email [RSHE@cache.org.uk](mailto:RSHE@cache.org.uk)

# Investigation

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

## We fear next summer's exams, say lockdown heads

**JAMES CARR**

**@JAMESCARR\_93**

School leaders in lockdown areas say their pupils should not be penalised in exams, with year 10s at one Liverpool school already spending four weeks of this term self-isolating at home.

Department for Education statistics show about 89 per cent of pupils in state-funded schools across England attended last week.

However, levels differ greatly for those regions worst hit by Covid-19. Of the 11 local authorities with secondary attendance at 75 per cent or lower, five are in tier 3, four are in tier 2 (with talks of upgrading imminent) and two are in tier 1.

The attendance figures only came to light after a parliamentary question from MP Margaret Greenwood. Liverpool, Calderdale and Knowsley, all of which are in the 'very high' tier reported attendance rates of 67, 64 and 61 per cent respectively. While Kingston upon Thames, which recorded 68 per cent, is currently in tier 2.

School leaders in such areas fear their pupils will now be disadvantaged in next summer's exams. They say constant Covid disruptions have created a more "diminished" learning experience in their schools compared with less affected areas.

Jamie Jardine, the executive principal at The Prescot School in Liverpool, said 69 per cent of his 847 pupils had missed school in the first seven weeks of term.

The school, which is part of The Heath Family Trust, has twice had to send its year 10 bubble



home to self-isolate, leaving the pupils to learn remotely for four of the seven weeks of term.

One year 10 pupil has spent 24 of the possible 34 school days self-isolating because of his year group isolation and contact with family members who could have the virus.

Fifteen pupils have missed school at least three times, with the length of absence dependent on the availability of testing.

Earlier this month the government announced that most GCSEs and A-levels would be pushed back three weeks next year to give pupils more time to prepare.

"They're trying to level a playing field that can't be levelled because in our community we are living under Covid every single day," Jardine said.

The extension did "absolutely nothing" to help his pupils.

He also highlighted the "massive social impact" of Covid in tier 3. A significant number of his staff and pupils had family members who were either seriously ill or who had died.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said on Tuesday that the issue that "really worries" him was the "unevenness" in the experience of students who had missed education after schools reopened fully in September.

While Gibb said the government was working with Ofqual and exam boards, it was "not an easy issue to address. It is something that worries me a lot".

Mike Kilbride, the chief executive of the BePART Educational Trust and principal of Birkenhead Sixth Form College, said that the "consistent interruption" his pupils faced could place them at a disadvantage.

He said that while he was proud of his remote-learning offer, it was about 90 per cent of the quality of the teaching in normal circumstances. "That experience has been diminished and in the highly competitive nature of exams that could be the difference.

"Teaching isn't about delivering information, it's about looking into the eyes of every student in your classroom and seeing the extent to which they are understanding what you are saying to them and adjusting what you do."

He said the summer exams should "have some degree of optionality". If nothing was done, pupils would not get the "high grades they deserve".

Latest statistics from the DfE show that about half of all state-funded secondary schools have pupils self-isolating because of a potential contact with a case of coronavirus inside school.

Four to 5 per cent of pupils, about 409,000, did not attend school for Covid-related reasons last week - with 0.1 per cent having a confirmed case.

### DfE stats still tell only part of the story

While the government's latest attendance statistics provide the most comprehensive guide to school disruption yet, they still fail to show the whole picture.

The data does not reveal the percentage of schools reporting pupils staying at home because of potential Covid contact outside the classroom, despite collecting the relevant data.

The estimated 4 to 5 per cent in state-funded schools who did not attend

included pupils who said they had had potential Covid contact outside school.

However, the 21 per cent of all state-funded schools with pupils isolating only refer to those with a "potential contact with a case of coronavirus inside the school".

The DfE's daily attendance survey asks schools to input pupils remaining at home because of potential contact outside the setting, but these have not been included

within its statistics.

Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said it would "encourage the DfE" to clarify why this had happened. "It is important to have a complete picture of the disruption experienced by schools."

The department said it continually reviewed the data it published alongside the quality of the data it collected.

News

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

# DfE says no evidence to support minister's FSM claim

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

A government minister stands accused of misleading the public after he falsely claimed that research showed parents "actually prefer to pay a modest sum" of "£1 or £2", instead of receiving free school meals.

Nadhim Zahawi told BBC Radio Four that "research" from a holiday food and activities club pilot scheme had shown "that families didn't just want the meals, although they valued the meals, they didn't like the labelling of them being free, they actually prefer to pay a modest amount, £1 or £2".

However, when asked to provide the research referred to by the former children's minister, who also repeated the claim on Times Radio, the Department for Education said it was not aware of any that backed up his comments. They said Zahawi may have been speaking anecdotally.

Tulip Siddiq, the shadow children's minister, said it was "pretty desperate to see ministers making misleading claims in order to justify voting against feeding hungry children in a pandemic".

"This incompetent government is completely out of touch with families struggling to make ends meet or concerned about their jobs."

Earlier this week, the government voted down a motion in parliament aimed at extending the government's free school meals voucher scheme to cover all school holidays between now and Easter.

The government's school food and activities pilot was first launched in 2018 and was repeated in 2019 and again this year, with pupils in certain areas offered free meals and activities over the summer break.

To date, the only published evaluation of the scheme is an ad hoc notice released in November 2018, which provided information about the



Nadhim Zahawi

numbers attending the clubs that year.

The multi-millionaire Zahawi, who made his money as an oil executive, specifically referred to "research" from the government pilot.

When approached to provide evidence to support Zahawi's claims, the DfE initially pointed *Schools Week* to a report by the Food Foundation last year.

The report, *The Children's Future Food Inquiry*, did address "stigma" attached to free school meals, and described the name "free school meals" as "problematic in and of itself".

But the report made no mention of parents preferring to pay a small amount for meals.

Zahawi's private office and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, where he currently serves as a minister, were approached for comment, but neither had responded at the time of going to press.

The free school meals motion was tabled by Labour on Wednesday as part of a campaign spearheaded by footballer Marcus Rashford. The Manchester United and England striker was instrumental in persuading the government to U-turn and provide vouchers over the summer break.

Campaigners say the impact of coronavirus means

the poorest families still need support in the holidays, but ministers claim the situation has changed since the summer, and that the best way to support families is through the benefits system.

All five education ministers who serve in the Commons voted against the Labour motion, along with most other Conservatives. However, Robert Halfon, the chair of the education committee, was one of five Tories who voted with Labour and other opposition groups.

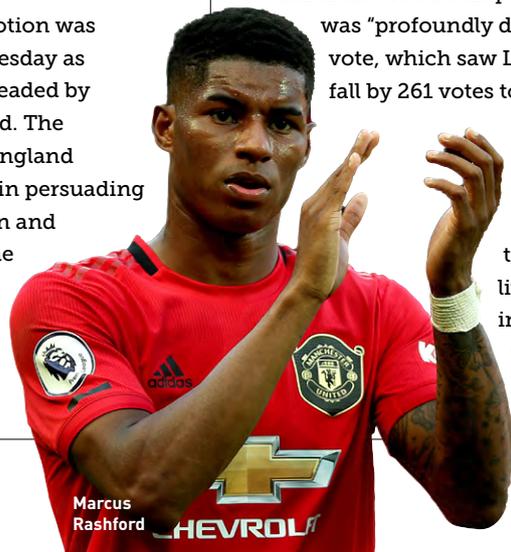
"During the unprecedented and unpredictable period at the start of the pandemic, it was right that extra measures were taken to provide free school meals during the holidays, but we are in a different position now that we have welcomed all pupils back to school," education secretary Gavin Williamson told the Commons on Wednesday.

But Barbara Crowther, coordinator of the Children's Food Campaign, said she was "profoundly dismayed" by the vote, which saw Labour's motion fall by 261 votes to 322.

"We had hoped parliament would unite, as this is not the time for children living in food insecurity to be used as political footballs."



Tulip Siddiq



Marcus Rashford

CHEVROLET

News

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

# Gibb refuses to commit to £350m NTP promise

**JOHN DICKENS**  
@JOHNDICKENSSW

Schools minister Nick Gibb (pictured) has refused to commit to honouring his government's promise to provide £350 million worth of tutoring catch-up this year.

*Schools Week* revealed last week how £140 million of the government's promised £350 million investment in the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) has not been allocated.

The government earlier promised that the cash, alongside the £650 million to provide catch-up activities, would be spent this year.

Gibb told the education select committee hearing on Tuesday that he could only say more after the spending review.

When challenged by Robert Halfon, the committee chair, the minister conceded there were "various pots" of funding and some were "being discussed as part of the spending review".

*Schools Week* revealed last week that



officials are considering rolling over some of the cash into funding the NTP next year.

Simon Burgess, a professor of economics at the University of Bristol, who has written a report into learning losses during lockdown, said that "catching-up quickly is key".

"We know that 'skills build on skills', so the longer it is left to catch-up, the bigger the gap grows between the skills the kids have and where they should be. Closing that gap will get harder and harder to the point where maybe we can't do it.

"We have to avoid that outcome. We absolutely must not abandon these kids to permanently lower skills and permanently reduced life chances."

But Stuart Lock, the chief executive of Advantage Schools, said "trying to deliver

this" might take away from rather than add to capacity in schools.

"This is one of the issues with ringfencing something as an intervention while not knowing the detail of the problem from school to school.

"If this turns into 'we must spend it on x and we must make schools ensure it is spent on x because it was announced', in some schools my bet is this makes provision worse."

The £350 million NTP will provide subsidised tuition for disadvantaged pupils as part of a government £1 billion catch-up package.

But *Schools Week* has established just £211 million of the NTP cash has been allocated, including about £106 million for the two strands of the programme for schools. The bulk, £76 million, will fund Tuition Partners, an approved set of companies that will offer the subsidised tuition. Another £30 million will fund 1,000 academic mentors based in schools to provide "intensive and frequent support" for pupils most in need.

JOHN DICKENS | @JOHNDICKENSSW

## Trust boards told to 'nurture' new leaders

The academies minister has urged trust boards to "nurture" members who could step up to replace chairs.

Speaking at a governance conference on Tuesday, Baroness Berridge (pictured) said succession planning was "essential to ensuring continuity of leadership".

A government-commissioned report published earlier this month found "succession planning was not commonly happening, with individuals generally being asked to fill the role following a resignation, rather than volunteering".

Berridge said this needed to change. People should not be "coerced" into the role because there was a vacancy.

"There's a difference between coercing and nurturing. As current chairs, I look to you to help nurture board members who may be interested in stepping up."

Figures provided by the National Governance Association (NGA) suggest about 5,000 new school and trust chairs are needed each year.

The School and Trust Governance

Investigative Report found that while trusts found the role of chair "difficult to fill", there were few vacancies. Just 1 per cent of multi-academy trusts that took part in the study had a vacancy for a chair.

However, "most" of the respondents did not have any formal succession planning in place. "For most of these interviewees, it was an area of concern, particularly if they did not have a natural successor in place for the chair."

The report said succession planning was "essential to ensure changes in leadership do not impede the governing body's effectiveness".

Many board members said workload put them off becoming a chair.

Berridge told governors most chairs would be "very active, and those witnessing this feel not able to provide the same level of

commitment.

"But chairing doesn't have to be done in the same ways as the previous postholder. This is the message that needs to go out into the sector."

She also warned that boards should "not be cut from the same cloth. It doesn't help boards with their business and isn't always conducive to effective challenge.

"Diversity is critical to maintain this effective challenge and ensure boards better reflect the communities they serve."

Just 3.5 per cent of governors are black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME). There was "still a lot of work to be done", Berridge said.

Emma Knights, the chief executive of the NGA, called for a national campaign to recruit governors. The highly skilled leadership roles [of chair] required "nurturing and investment", she said.



# Durand wants £3m to hand back buildings

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The operators of commercial facilities run from the site of the former Durand Academy in south London want about £3 million in compensation to return them to public hands – and believe they will win a legal challenge to get it.

The Durand Education Trust (DET), which still owns a leisure centre and accommodation on the site in Lambeth, will take the Department for Education to court next month to demand money “over and above” the net book value of the assets it holds.

Schools Week understands that Lambeth Council will have to foot the bill if the legal challenge succeeds.

It marks the latest development in an ongoing saga in which the school reopened in 2018 as Van Gogh Primary under the sponsorship of the Dunraven Educational Trust.

The latest accounts for the Durand trust show that assets of more than £10 million were transferred to Dunraven when the school changed hands.

Durand’s trustees have argued they should not have to transfer the remaining land and buildings “without consideration”, and say in the trust’s latest accounts that they are “confident of a successful outcome” in their legal challenge.

“The trustees have challenged the right of the secretary of state to take over these assets without providing reasonable compensation.” The case is expected to be heard next month.

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said there was a lack of due diligence from the government when the school became an academy in 2010.

“This was always going to be the endless result of a hopeless drive to academise without thinking about the assets handed out to sponsors,” she said.

“The loser has been the taxpayer and the public, who have seen their assets sequestered away and now we’re seeing the endgame: a charity is demanding money to hand back assets that were given to it for free.”

The accounts also claim the trust is in “advanced negotiations” with Lambeth to lease the properties back once they are transferred to allow it to trade “for a term of at least 18 months”.

It is understood that under the arrangement,



Van Gogh Primary School

London Horizons, DET’s trading arm, will run the leisure and accommodation facilities until a competitive tender process is launched for a new provider.

However, the documents also reveal that trustees anticipate that the coronavirus pandemic will have had a “hugely negative impact” on profits.

Lambeth council confirmed that it had been “working to reach agreement, in line with the Department for Education’s directions, and hope to conclude transfer and leasing arrangements in the near future”.

The DfE said all parties “continue to work towards the transfer of the commercial land”.

Lambeth transferred the school’s land and buildings to the Durand Academy Trust when the school academised in 2010. The academy then transferred the assets – worth about £15 million, according to the National Audit Office – to DET.

Using the London Horizons subsidiary, DET then ran the leisure and accommodation facilities, with profits invested back into the school. However, Sir Greg Martin, the headteacher, was paid a sizeable annual management fee, taking his combined salary to more than £400,000.

The government ordered the school’s rebrokerage in 2016 after it refused to cut ties with Martin. He stood down as head in 2015,

but soon after became the school’s chair of governors.

The latest accounts show that the DET finished the 2017-18 year with fixed assets of £16,415,046. In 2018-19, the group transferred £10,536,638 of assets – the school buildings and land at Hackford Road and Mostyn Gardens – to the Dunraven trust.

The group then finished the year with assets of £3,304,022, which is understood to relate to the school’s satellite boarding site in West Sussex, which had not been sold. That left £2,574,386 unaccounted-for.

This was explained in the trust’s 2018-19 accounts, which state that the remaining Hackford Road properties were excluded from the financial statements to take account of the direction of the education secretary, which did not include provision for any compensation.

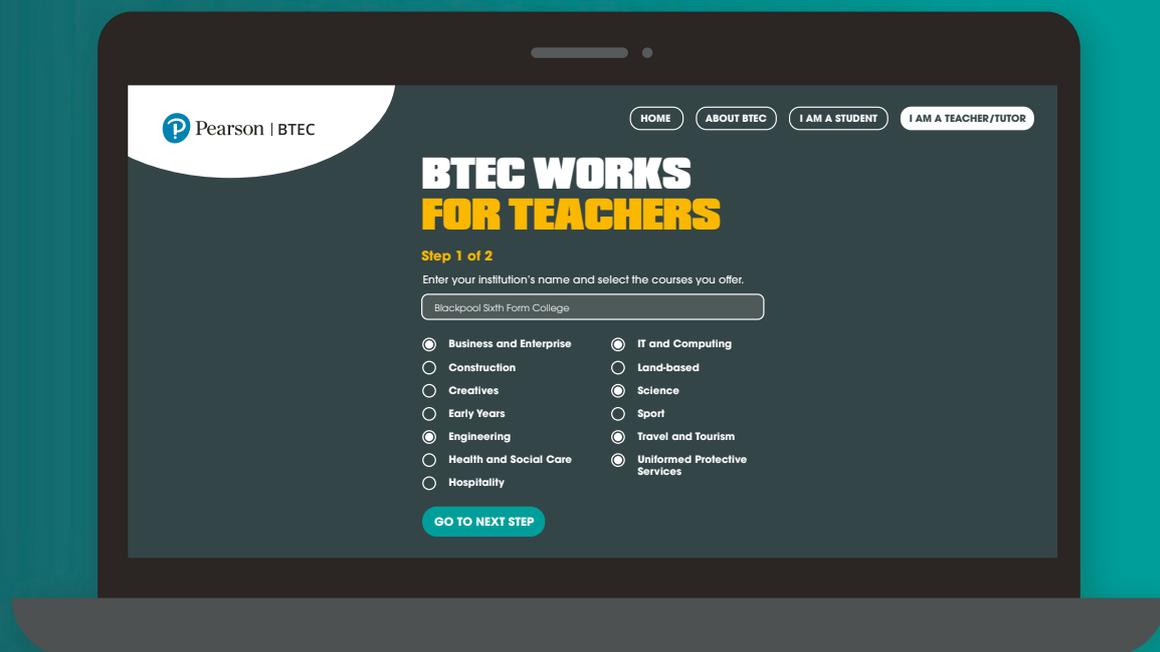
But the trust has vowed to fight for compensation “commensurate with and inclusive of the enhanced value, over and above the original net book value, that is properly attributable to them”.

David Boyle, the chief executive of the Dunraven trust, said he “remains grateful for the ongoing support from the DfE and ESFA working with Lambeth to bring this matter to a long-awaited conclusion for the benefit of the children of Van Gogh primary”.

# OPTIONS EVENINGS COMING UP?

## LET US HELP

Our new BTEC options tool lets you customise handouts at options events for the BTEC courses YOU offer.



Showcase your BTEC courses at  
**BTECWORKS.COM**

# Mandarin scheme set for expansion despite teacher recruitment struggles

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

EXCLUSIVE

A £10 million programme to improve children's fluency in Mandarin is set to be extended.

The government-funded Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) was launched in 2016 to get "at least 5,000 young people on track towards fluency in Mandarin Chinese by 2020" and train "at least 100 new qualified Chinese teachers by the end of the programme".

When the programme, run by University College London's Institute of Education (IOE) and the British Council, started there were 1,000 pupils across England learning Mandarin.

The IOE said the 5,000-pupil target had been exceeded by the last academic year. The contract has been extended to this year, with about 7,000 pupils now taking part in 75 schools nationally.

But in contrast, 69 teachers have achieved qualified status on the UCL IOE Chinese Language PGCE – 31 shy of the target.

An IOE spokesperson said by summer next year, 83 IOE PGCE graduates will have finished their courses, adding that "in collaboration with other providers a grand total of more than 100 newly qualified teachers of Chinese will have been trained since 2016".

A spokesperson for the Association for Language Learning praised the MEP for its success, but said it wanted "to see the funding of such projects extended to other languages to allow everyone access to learning a language".

Last year *The Guardian* reported that UK schools were turning to foreign governments to fund language classes. The Italian government footed the bill



**Mandarin  
Excellence  
Programme**

for a scheme that allowed 16,500 primary schools to receive at least an hour of Italian each week.

The Department for Education has published a prior information notice on the MEP, which says it aims to "re-procure this programme to continue from April 2021, subject to internal approval".

The new scheme would have a minimum recruitment of 1,800 year 7 pupils each year between September 2021 and September 2023.

This is an increase to the current annual target of 1,250 – which the scheme has surpassed.

Katharine Carruthers, the strategic director for the MEP at UCL IOE, said she was "delighted" with the MEP's progress. "The first cadre of students who began learning Chinese through MEP will be sitting GCSEs in summer 2021."

A DfE spokesperson said it was "pleased with the success of the programme", adding: "Mandarin Chinese is the most spoken language in the world, so this programme plays a crucial role in teaching pupils the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in an increasingly global economy."

Under the MEP pupils study Mandarin eight hours each week, half taught and half self-study, with progress measured through reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

An independent evaluation on the report will give fuller breakdowns of pupil progress and recruitment figures. A date for publication has not been confirmed, with the DfE saying it would be released "in due course".

This is not the only government programme inspired by Chinese education.

Last year a report found the government's flagship exchange programme, which sent teachers to China to learn about "maths mastery", did not improve pupil outcomes.

The exchange included a one-week visit to Shanghai followed by a two-week visit by Chinese teachers to England.

# Fundraiser launched as Derby schools devastated in arson attacks

**SAMANTHA BOOTH**  
**@SAMANTHAJBOTH**

A school has launched a heart-felt plea for donations to replace thousands of pounds worth of new books that were destroyed in a devastating arson attack.

Ravensdale Infant School was one of two schools in Derby deliberately set alight within 48 hours earlier this month, prompting fresh calls for sprinklers to be installed in new schools.

Hundreds of pupils both there and at St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy in Darley Abbey were forced into remote learning again. The pupils will attend other local schools in their bubbles after half-term.

But Ravensdale, in Mickleover, is facing a huge loss, with "everything" in the infant school either being burnt or damaged by smoke and water.

This includes about 1,500 new books costing £7,000 that were bought during the summer term. About 3,500 books in total were lost in the blaze.

Before the summer, the school overhauled its library with new books to match children's reading levels.

The school has now launched a fundraising drive – which has had over £13,000 of donations so far – to replace books and equipment.

Sarah Armes, community liaison coordinator at the school, said everyone is "very distressed" but "we are keeping each others' spirits as high as we can".

"The staff are in touch with some of the children, and parents are always popping in to see us at our base. Staff are really pulling together and have a real team effort."

The school's library was also due to begin a £1,500 refurbishment in half-term to create a "fantastic new space for all children to be able to access and develop further their love of reading".

Insurance assessors are still assessing the



damage on site. It is hoped it will be rebuilt for April 2022.

The blazes led to fire chiefs demanding mandatory sprinklers in new and refurbished schools. It also exposed the Department for Education's failure to meet



its 2019 deadline to respond to a call for evidence that school fire safety rules are "fit for purpose".

Derbyshire police said there are ongoing investigations into both fires, which are being treated as arson. Officers are probing whether or not there is a link between the two blazes.

**To donate to Ravensdale's fundraiser, visit <https://www.gofundme.com/help-replace-books-for-ravensdales-infant-school>**  
**Two thousand special blue ribbons will also be on sale at local businesses to help support the school.**

News

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

# Mental health plan bypasses excluded pupils

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

A new government initiative to support pupils' mental health seems to be overlooking many excluded children.

Research by the Anna Freud Centre and the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) shows that more than four in ten mental health "trailblazer" areas are not working with alternative provision schools, meaning some of the most vulnerable children could miss out.

The 82 trailblazers were the first to develop new mental health support teams, which work between schools and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), offering support and treatment in schools.

The new teams were announced in 2018 as part of the government's response to its own green paper on children and young people's mental health.

In the response, the government said it was "committed to ensuring" the new teams



reached "those most in need of support", and said it "especially" wanted them to work with vulnerable children with "more limited contact with mainstream schools".

"This might include alternative provision or special school pupils in contact with the criminal justice system," the paper said.

However, freedom of information responses from 65 of the areas found that just 37 are working with

alternative provision (AP) schools and one has plans to, while 27 are not working with AP schools at all. Even in areas where they are, most are only working with a single AP institution.

The research was done by the IntegratED programme, of which the Anna Freud Centre and CSJ are partners. The programme works to reduce preventable exclusions and improve the quality of education for children excluded from school.

"Given that the rate of pupils with identified social, emotional and mental health needs is 33 times higher in AP schools than mainstream schools, and the needs are more acute, we would like to see all mental health trailblazer areas developing a bespoke offer for children excluded from school," said Cath Murray (pictured), programme lead at the CSJ.

The Department of Health and Social Care was approached for comment.



## Teacher training courses JANUARY 2021



With over 1,000 teachers and school leaders studying with us, the University of Buckingham's School of Education is one of the country's leading providers of teacher training and professional development. We offer high quality, work-based programmes starting in **January 2021** including:

- **PGCE** - a 37-week school-based course where trainees work under the guidance of a mentor, with weekly tutorials to review progress and set targets. Created for those teaching in schools but who do not yet have their PGCE qualification.
- **Online MA Education** - led by education experts Professor Rob Coe, Tom Bennett, Doug Lemov, Lucy Crehan, the Teacher Development Trust and more, this online programme allows students to develop expertise through critical evaluation of research and scholarship.

Further information and applications:

[buckingham.ac.uk/school-of-education](http://buckingham.ac.uk/school-of-education)  
[education@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:education@buckingham.ac.uk)



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BUCKINGHAM

# EDITORIAL

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

## Government's position is rash, they should listen to Rashford

Our front page in the week that full school closures were announced led with the headline "In this together".

Is that still the case? The refusal this week of the government to fund meals for pupils in families on the headline over school holidays does seem to challenge that.

The government has provided a huge amount of funding to support people through the crisis. That should be applauded.

And whilst we're finishing this week's edition, the Chancellor is handing out billions of pounds more in order to support businesses and hopefully curb a steep rise in unemployment reflective of the 1980's.

Earlier this year the Government was dragged kicking and screaming into a U-turn, by footballer Marcus Rashford, to provide food vouchers during holidays last school year.

However, the Government seems to have come to a rash decision on the dietary needs of pupils for the upcoming holidays and beyond. "We're in a different position now, with schools back open to all pupils," Downing Street has said. It's unfathomable as to why this should make any difference.

What the government doesn't seem to have understood is that millions of families are also in a different position

now, too, be it those who have lost a job or been forced on to benefits because of the pandemic.

It's also hard to square providing over half a billion to feed everyone over the summer, rich or poor, but then turn down desperate pleas to provide around one-tenth of this for those most in need. We're talking about £20m per week to meals during the holidays.

Of course, supporting the economy is incredibly important. But so is supporting families who have lost out because of the economic fall-out in their hour of need.

Let's not forget: these are the future workers who will be needed to get the economy back on track when the pandemic fades.

It's also likely that those in need will be in the "left behind" areas this government has promised to remember.

The pleas for funding are clearly emotive. And, ignoring the more controversial claims from some Conservative MPs that providing the support will "increase dependency", the government has sound reasons. We are after all borrowing like never before, and these young people in need now, will be those paying off such debt.

But it seems public consensus has shifted. If there are more bail-outs forthcoming, then the government has to prioritise feeding the country's poorest families.

SCHOOLS WEEK



Get in touch.

CONTACT:  
NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK  
OR CALL 0203 4321 392





### Cognitive load theory: a handbook for teachers

#### David Eckley

Some interesting comments. Although I've not read this particular book, I am concerned that there is a serious glut of cognitive science books on the market at the moment by self-promoting authors and tweeters. It's interesting how little my teaching has changed despite reading a wide range of these books in the past year. There are still things to learn though, and I remain open to ideas and well-tested classroom-based research. What I think these authors ignore, though, is that this sort of research is going on constantly in school as an implicit iterative process which we call "teaching". The experience of good teachers all around me has taught me a lot more about how to be good at what I do than any of these much-promoted books, few of which will stand the test of time.

### Wes Streeting appointed shadow schools minister

#### Mike Ion

This is really good news. Wes is a real advocate and will be a superb ambassador for high-quality state education.

### Private schools group branded 'insensitive' over debt collection agency partnership

#### Simon

Schools rely on the payment of fees. Why should a small percentage of non-paying parents jeopardise the futures of others? The fact that the ISA has partnered Frontline Collections should be viewed as a pragmatic and sensible move, rather than focusing on the precarious financial plight of many private schools. This article is totally unbalanced and does not factor in all the equations and relevant viewpoints.

### Leading AP trust to close

#### Robert Gasson

Seamus [Oates, TBAP CEO] has led the way in innovating for the AP sector and its pupils for years. There are a significant number of young people in AP up and down the country who have unknowingly benefited from that innovation and profile. He has been subjected to a number of knocks from a fickle press and the anti-academy brigade, but this has never stopped him from working to ensure his pupils received the best education available.

### REPLY OF THE WEEK Frank Newhofer

## Debate on the postponement of next year's GCSE exams

We should develop the debate on the postponement of next year's GCSE exams as an opportunity for a root and branch evaluation of the purposes of examination at 16. We can be proud of the fact that more than 80 per cent of 16-year-olds remain in education until they are 18. It distorts the quality of the whole secondary education experience to impose unnecessary summative once and for all examination hurdles at 16. What we need is properly formative continuous assessment that builds a comprehensive picture of the achievements and strengths and weaknesses of young people as they move through the education system and that leads them on a constructive pathway to the choices for examination at 18.

We can trust in the professionalism of our teachers to work with young people on building such diagnostic profiles. We should be able to trust in properly qualified and experienced external inspectors to report on the performance of schools and dispense now with the grossly expensive, harmful, surrogate school comparison vehicles which is what terminal examinations at 16 have become.

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

It is a crying shame that TBAP will be dissolved in this way, and is a reflection of the poor funding mechanisms and pressures on local authorities to reduce high-needs budget spend at a time when needs continue to grow.

### £140m of tuition catch-up cash remains unspent

#### Janet Downs

Why not give the money to schools to organise their own catch-up? This would be more tailored to their pupils than outsourcing tuition to third parties.

#### Stuart Lock, @StuartLock

At the moment, trying to deliver this might take away capacity from some schools (ie, to organise) rather than add to that capacity – and schools are delivering a catch-up curriculum. It's a fine balance but I recall consultants in the 1990s/2000s sent to help schools and simply getting in the way and occupying leaders' and teachers' time, rather than resulting in an improvement in the education of pupils. It wouldn't surprise me if some schools are finding their efforts are working and don't want/need distracting.



**Submission deadline:**  
**FRIDAY, 18 DECEMBER**

A celebration of excellence in apprenticeship delivery in the UK.  
Brought to you by FE Week & AELP.

**FIND OUT MORE!**

**[AACAPPRENTICESHIPAWARDS.COM](http://AACAPPRENTICESHIPAWARDS.COM)**

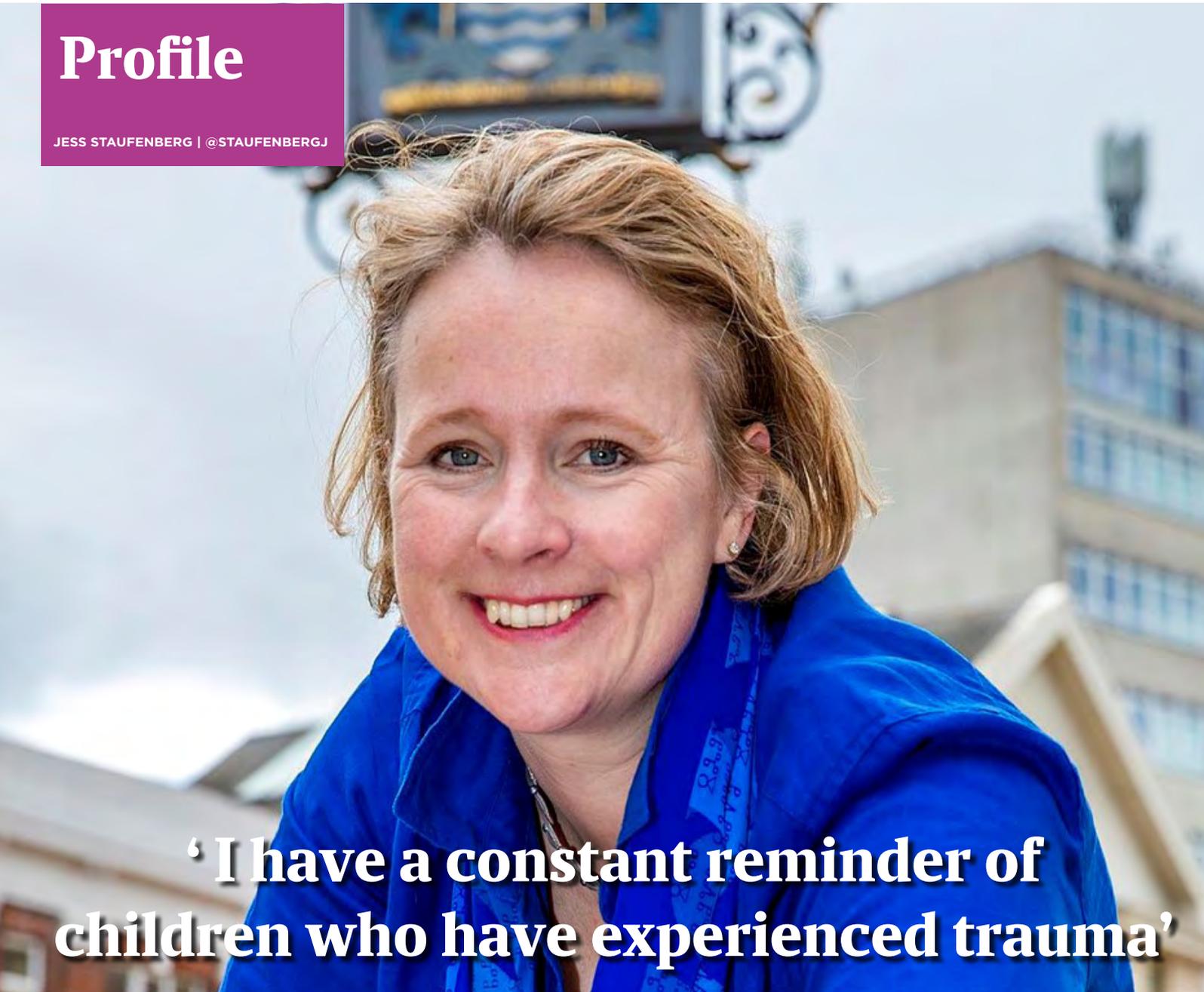
Part of the



ANNUAL  
APPRENTICESHIP  
CONFERENCE  
& EXHIBITION

# Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



## ‘I have a constant reminder of children who have experienced trauma’

**No one has done much with the children’s minister post since Edward Timpson, say heads. Can Vicky Ford, the current incumbent, finally tackle some of education’s trickiest issues?**

The job description for the under-secretary of state for children and families looks rather like someone senior took all the most intractable issues in education and handed them to a junior minister with a sigh of relief.

Listing the bits that relate just to schools, she or he must be on top of special educational needs and high-needs funding, alternative provision, children’s mental health, online safety, preventing bullying, school food (including free school meals), disadvantage and social mobility. The last two alone are a Herculean task.

That’s not to mention the non-school responsibilities: children’s social care covering adoption, care leavers and local authority performance, along with early years (critical,

as we all know), childcare and (an innocent-sounding subject until Covid) “home learning environments”. Oh, and “policy to protect against serious violence”. It is, quite simply, a ridiculous brief.

Since Edward Timpson’s three-year spell ended in 2015, six politicians have held the role or overlapping posts and subsequently left (and, as one headteacher told me, “no one has really attempted to do anything since Timpson”).

Such turbulence stands in stark contrast to Nick Gibb’s immovable presence as schools minister. Maybe the post is being treated as a stepping stone to greater futures, or people keep moving on because of the job’s intimidating brief?

Either way, perhaps Vicky Ford – who took on

the gig in February – can be lucky number seven.

There are murmurs she might be at least trying to understand the to-do list, but to have any hope of doing so effectively she’ll need to bring together multiple actors and departments. Perhaps that’s why Ford keeps emphasising her skills as a consensus-seeker, a habit she says goes back to her childhood.

To my surprise, given her southern English accent, Ford was born in Northern Ireland at the beginning of “the Troubles” in 1967, to what she describes as a “very idyllic childhood”, with pigs, cows and dogs, attending a “fantastic primary school” in the town of Omagh.

“My parents were very involved in trying to bring people together across communities. I

# Profile: Vicky Ford



Ford in her office



A campaign to reduce plastic waste in 2019



A visit to Essex ahead of schools reopening in August 2020

remember being tiny and going on peace marches with my mother,” says Ford. Both her parents were, as doctors, highly educated people, and her father stood for the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, a centrist party dedicated to breaking down the unionist-nationalist divide. But serious tragedy struck when Ford was just ten years old. Her father died after being electrocuted in an accident at home.

“I called the ambulance. I don’t talk about it very much. It’s a constant reminder to me about children who have experienced trauma.”

She was lucky that her mother re-married to a loving stepfather, but other experiences from those days stay with her. “I do remember being in a classroom when a bomb went off, and ducking under the desk.” Ford never saw a firework in childhood until she went to England, with good reason. “Sending off fireworks to me is a sign you’re in a country that is at peace. I get very emotional on Bonfire Night.” Now it makes sense why bringing all sides to the table is an important principle for her.

Along with losing a parent, Ford’s secondary years were quite uprooting. The middle child, she

## “I remember being in a classroom when a bomb went off”

was sent to live with family relatives in England so she could attend the exclusive private St Paul’s Girls’ School in London, with her brother and sister staying with other relatives. “I wouldn’t recommend that.” But something her father had once said stuck with her. He had received a letter from his alma mater, Trinity College Cambridge, announcing the college was now accepting girls. “I remember he said, ‘Vicky, you could go there now,’” Ford recalls. She got a scholarship to Marlborough College, another private boarding school, and from there secured a place for maths at Trinity College, later switching to economics.

Like three previous children’s ministers, Ford went into banking and business after graduating. She worked at J. P. Morgan for 12 years, investing

in large-scale infrastructure projects, including the first mobile phone masts in the UK, re-building projects in Eastern Europe post-1989 and electricity for townships in South Africa post-apartheid. She is evidently proud of the work and what she says prompted her towards politics is not what I expect.

“During 9/11 I was working at the top of Canary Wharf tower and we felt very vulnerable when the Twin Towers came down. I think it was the moment when many of us realised the impact political decisions have on one’s own communities.” Ford says the terrorist attack, and the worried conversations among parents at her children’s nursery, was her “turning point”. She left J. P. Morgan and became chair of a pre-school before getting “hooked” on local politics. She stood as a local councillor in south Cambridgeshire and lost, and then as an MP in Birmingham Northfield in 2005 and again lost. After the 2008 crash, she “went off to become a member of the European parliament, when it was very clear the UK needed people who had a financial background”.

While describing her time as MEP for the East of England (the first woman to hold the

# Profile: Vicky Ford



An early years visit in June

role), Ford's experience in consensus-building becomes clearer. She led reforms to banking laws, "so governments don't need to bail out banks if they fall into trouble" and to gun laws relating to semi-automatic firearms after the 2015 Paris attacks. She eventually chaired the parliament's internal market committee, which among other things covers consumer safety, a passion for Ford following her father's death. When Theresa May called the snap 2017 election, she returned and won Chelmsford, a Conservative safe seat.

Ford speaks more slowly than many politicians and displays a certain conviction. She doesn't have an experienced professional background in children's issues and vulnerable groups, unlike shadow education secretary Kate Green. But she does speak often about the pre-school she chaired, and individual children she remembers – one struggling little boy, for instance, causes her to talk at length about the importance of early years intervention.

But there are big demands on her plate, demanding bold policy answers. Taking special educational needs alone, the situation is fairly dire. It has been six years since the promising Children and Families Act was passed, but the sector and even the government are largely agreed that it has failed to be implemented. Tribunals numbers are through the roof, the education select committee last year described parents wading through a "treacle of bureaucracy" and there is a lack of capacity causing councils to spend millions on sending pupils to the private sector. And yet the government's promised SEND review, launched a year ago, continues to be delayed. Is Ford finally

going to be the minister that gets this to work?

"I'm not going to run ahead of the SEND review – it's an enormously complex subject – but we have to find a way to make the SEND system work better for children and families, while also not having that acceleration in funding requirements."

I take her on to the £10,000 base funding for alternative provision and specialist placements, which has not been reviewed or increased

---

**“We have to find a way to make the SEND system work better”**

---

with inflation, even while the National Funding Formula re-worked local school budgets. "I think it's a much broader question than that. We need to look at AP throughout." Ford points out she secured a one-off "post-16 transition fund" to help those in alternative provision move into education or training. But there are calls for AP to be permanently funded beyond year 11 through specialist sixth forms. Ford sidesteps this. "I want to see how that transition fund is working."

What about free school meals? Schools Week exposed the problems with the Edenred national voucher scheme debacle this summer. Ford says she was "incredibly saddened" by reports some



Holi celebrations in Chelmsford in 2019

supermarkets were refusing vouchers but points out "no one had ever tried to launch a scheme like that so quickly". Under the circumstances, she says she is enormously proud of it. When I ask whether the government will listen to footballer Marcus Rashford's call for free school meals in the holidays, Ford also stands firm. "Right now I need schools to be focusing on school being normal [...] for the dining room to be open when the school is open."

In a way Ford's job is like an impossible task unless it is tackled with serious determination over time. She seems keen to build bridges and, at least while she's in post, to properly understand the brief.

The question is whether she'll stay. Many of these questions, particularly around SEND, are so tricky they need someone to commit years to solving them. Can Ford be that someone?

# Opinion

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



## EMMA HARDY

Shadow minister for FE and universities and chair of the all-party parliamentary group on oracy



## Unlike government, education can talk its way out of a crisis

**Oracy plays a crucial role in supporting children to get back into learning, articulate their worries and build relationships, argues Emma Hardy**

Before Covid struck, I and my colleagues launched a parliamentary inquiry to raise the status of oracy in our education system. At the time, schools minister Nick Gibb was calling for “a debate on how oracy can support the delivery of a knowledge-rich curriculum”. Now, though the evidence regarding the value of oracy remains the same, the education landscape has changed for ever. A light has been shone on the deep-rooted disadvantage in our education system. In fact, the crisis has exacerbated it, and that means improving this generation’s oracy skills is even more urgent.

When we teach children how to speak and provide real opportunities for speech, discussion and debate, children’s attainment and life chances can be improved. Lockdown showed us the need we all have for human interaction and its importance in particular for young people’s social development and wellbeing.

Recent Parent Ping polling found that 64 per cent of parents agree

that school closures reduced opportunities for children to develop their oracy skills. Government has recognised this “Covid language gap” via funding for an early-years catch-up programme, which rightly acknowledges this crucial period in early language

development; but it fails to notice that many school-age children are already behind. Continuing language development is proven to support the most disadvantaged in particular, enabling five months’ additional progress over the course of a year.

It’s not all bad news. Some teachers have commented that their reception cohorts have stronger language skills than in previous years due to increased family time. But not all children are in a language-rich home. Seventy-five per cent of children who persistently experience poverty arrive at school below age-related language expectations, and gaps in language grow rather than diminish as students move through school.

Teachers agree. Teacher Tapp

polling shows that more than two-thirds of state school teachers think developing their students’ confidence and competence in spoken language and listening skills would narrow the attainment gap, rising to 75 per cent of teachers in

teachers to ensure high-quality classroom talk can prevail.

I am convinced that oracy must be explicitly taught and should become a common expectation of all schools. There is a real opportunity for the government to play a stronger role in motivating teachers on oracy and shift the emphasis with regards to its educational value. The New Curriculum for Wales gives oracy equal standing to reading and writing, but in England fluctuating education policy is pushing oracy out of the curriculum to the detriment of more disadvantaged students. We can’t continue with a system where some teachers feel other demands are drowning out opportunities for something as vital as high-quality talk.

And while none of us knows what the future looks like, all signs suggest that skills related to oracy will continue to grow and have sustained value in the competitive global economy. As and when we emerge from this crisis, we have the opportunity to reimagine education and consider whether our system is serving the purpose that it needs to serve and is valuing the right competencies and skills. Oral communication must be one of those.

“Improving this generation’s oracy skills has become even more urgent”

schools with the highest proportion of children on free school meals.

In uncertain times, we must help children develop the tools and capabilities to navigate the uncertainty and maybe even thrive through it. Fifty-five per cent of all teachers think that developing students’ oracy skills improves their mental health and wellbeing. Oracy plays a crucial role in supporting children to get back into learning, articulate their worries and build relationships.

Which is why I’m particularly concerned about the current guidelines on classroom setup which are likely to be in place for some time. If interpreted as “all desks facing forward”, this could lead to decline in classroom talk. It will certainly make it harder for

# Opinion

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

**Next summer's grades will be meaningless unless we create a cohort of qualifications that matches those that went before, writes James Handscombe**

This summer, after committing themselves to avoiding grade inflation and promising centres wouldn't be the final arbiters of results, Ofqual and the politicians ended up delivering a system that was (to put it mildly) nobody's first choice. The fact that students got GCSE results at all is a success of sorts, but strategically the success was only partial. To be sure, GCSE awards were better than the epic cataclysm of A-levels a week earlier, but that still leaves plenty of room for improvement.

We look forward, then, to August 2021. Amid ongoing instability, Ofqual and the politicians are once more faced with the challenge of producing results fairly, transparently and objectively. To do that, two major areas of uncertainty require resolution: how assessment will take place, and what grade distribution should ensue. Both require some reflection on what assessment and qualifications are for, and what fairness looks like.

It is a truism oft remarked upon that you don't fatten a pig by weighing it, but having done a stint on a farm I can provide the startling insight that you do weigh pigs that you're trying to fatten. You weigh them so that you know which are getting fat nicely and which require extra attention. Likewise, assessment should tell us which students have learned and which haven't.

We know that all students have lost some academic learning and that some have lost a lot more than others. What we don't know is



## JAMES HANDSCOMBE

Principal, Harris Westminster Sixth Form

### Avoiding tough choices on exams won't help anyone

which individuals have been most affected, nor how large the difference is. If we are to do something about that (as we surely should) then we need assessments that give us this

to reset expectations, revert to 2019 or find an arbitrary point in between? Why not make these grades comparable on the basis of knowledge learned with previous

**“Grades are not sweets to be handed out as compensation**

information, not ones doctored to give the data we want. We should therefore have exams as close to the usual format as possible. We can then compare nationally and award grades according to a suitable distribution and, importantly, then target extra help to those who have lost out.

What distribution should we then use? Should we allow 2020's grades

years? That would mean accepting a whole cohort of students with low grades. The question and its attendant dilemmas are a direct result of this summer's failure to moderate grade inflation. To answer it we need to reflect honestly on the purpose of the grades.

Immediately, the next-stage educators would like to know how



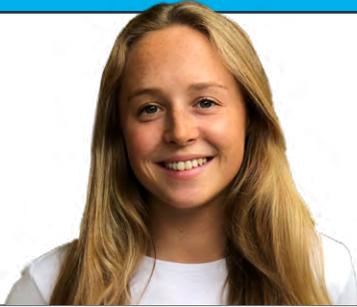
much has been learned – that a grade 6 this year represents the same readiness to learn new content as a grade 6 in 2019. Despite leading a sixth form, I wouldn't argue for this for two reasons: the first is that we can work out our own support and intervention. (We don't have much choice, in fact – the students have to go somewhere and we need the money they bring.) The second is that a lot of the 'readiness' is the academic ability to use knowledge, something that is more likely to be constant across a cohort than accumulation of facts.

It is this ability to learn, focus and think within academic domains that employers will later be using grades as a proxy for, which is why we should revert to the 2019 distribution. The 2021 cohort have all lost out on education and will simply not know as much as non-Covid-afflicted year groups. This doesn't make them less clever. We should try to make sure they catch up on lost knowledge, but to claim through awarded grades that they are academically superior to previous groups is obvious nonsense that will invite critics to devalue their qualifications.

Grades are not sweets to be handed out as compensation to children who have had a hard time – they are measurements that mean something. Or at least they should be. But unless we look this challenge squarely in the face and create a cohort of qualifications that matches those that went before, then 2021 grades will be meaningless. And that would, at best, be another partial success.

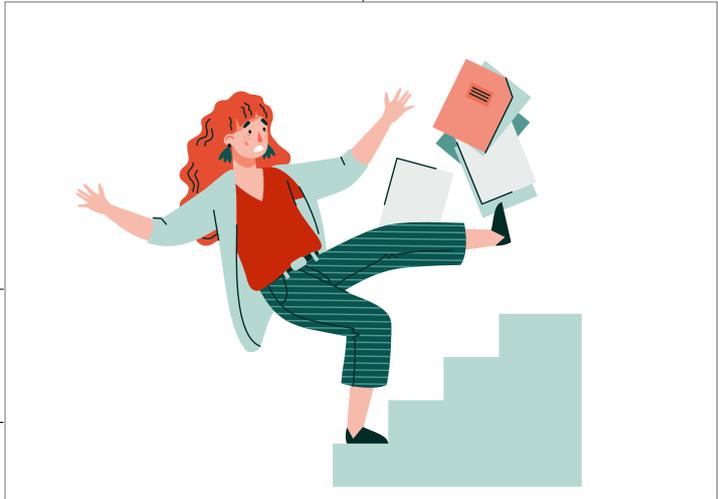
# Opinion

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



## AMELIA HEPBURN

Classics student and aspiring teacher, University of Oxford



### Those who can't afford it can't teach

**Removing the bursaries for teacher training will severely reduce social mobility by excluding less well-off aspiring teachers, writes Amelia Hepburn**

There are countless examples of people like me who have all the hope and knowledge to be a part of the teaching profession but lack the means to get in, and countless examples of those who, like me, inspired by committed teachers, have rethought their potential and fought tooth and nail for their own education. This week, the government made clear how much it values us.

As reported in these pages, financial support for teacher training has been cut, seeing essential bursaries stripped from those who need them most. The government's claims to have made the change on account of "both recruitment to date and the future need for teachers in each subject" suggests the bursaries were only ever a financial incentive. Yet determined aspiring teachers don't need a financial incentive. They need financial support. The effect of this policy will be to push out those from the state sector, leaving the door open only to those least in

need of the financial aid bursaries provide. So much for social mobility.

I hoped to teach classics. To qualify for that PGCE, I became one of only 28.6 per cent of Oxford classics students who are state-educated. Undergraduate debts are commonly over £50,000, and then there are the costs of the PGCE: accommodation, food,

books and travel. While funding for the classics PGCE still covers tuition fees, the bursary dropped by £16,000. Worse than that, it happened the day applications opened for next year's PGCE. My peers and I were faced with the sudden realisation that our dreams had simply evaporated. Our choice: either accrue further debt or abandon teaching altogether. And before you ask, even if working to support ourselves was sustainable, universities such as Oxford and Cambridge prohibit it, precisely because it isn't.

This news has been a devastating blow. I was state school-educated and spent a year in the middle of my degree teaching in a state

primary. I know the system and I know what it can do. I am a product of that system and all I wanted was to be a part of it. My school offered Latin lessons once a fortnight and introduced me to the subject I have loved ever since. I was determined to study it at university; I attended

**“ We don't need a financial incentive - we need financial support ”**

summer schools on bursaries for three consecutive summers, taught myself ancient Greek at lunchtimes and independently took the examination alongside my A-levels. All the while, I worked part-time from the age of 15 to support myself financially. I was offered a place to read classics at Cambridge but missed my grades on results day, silently affected by financial and familial pressures beyond my control.

Undeterred, I worked harder. I took the year out to earn and apply again, this time to Oxford. Having gained my place, the same old pressures reappeared. The family finances plummeted resulting in a house move, the third in just a

few years. I desperately sought out support from any avenue: the university's hardship fund, charitable trusts, scholarships. I worked every summer in catering, tutoring and any paid internship I could find. Two weeks ago, I spent a week observing lessons and school life at my old secondary school, eagerly preparing for a future in teaching. Days ago, I thought I'd made it. Today, once again, everything has changed.

If the government continues on this path, they may benefit in the short term from the recession-led spike in applications for teaching, but quality and diversity will be significantly reduced. Furthermore, the increasing financial burden weighing upon young teachers will only exacerbate the burn-out rate, which is already staggeringly high. Like every other teacher who sticks with it, I am prepared to work long and hard for limited pay. I'm no retention statistic in waiting.

But then it looks like I'm not a teacher in waiting any more either. I'm just left asking myself how ministers expect anything to change if they don't invest in the kinds of teachers they need to make that change?

# Opinion

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

**There are four crucial lessons to take from the challenging transition caused by Covid, says Tom Rees**

The last time we worked face to face with teachers and school leaders was March 13. We spent the day with 70 future heads starting their NPQH against the backdrop of an advancing global pandemic. Coffee breaks were filled with anxious exchanges about news updates, and with each passing hour came a growing realisation that life as we knew it was about to change

Seven months later, the impact of coronavirus has brought speculation about the future of our education system and calls for reform on several fronts. One of those is renewed debate about the place of technology in schools. This time it's not driven by arguments for innovation or jobs for the future, but a shift born of necessity.

At Ambition Institute, our professional development programmes had already become increasingly virtual over the past few years. Around two-thirds of our participants' learning takes place through video calls, and at the start of 2020 we had planned for over 10,000 hours of online coaching or academic tutoring for our 9,000+ teachers and school leaders.

But we'd also planned 800 face-to-face training events between March and August. Quickly redesigning events like our large-scale, multi-day residential gave our teams an extraordinary and nerve-racking challenge. Our flagship programme



TOM REES

Executive director, School Leadership, Ambition Institute

## Shift happens. Lessons from online professional development

normally hosts 500+ heads of department for five days in lecture theatres, classrooms and evening meals. It went ahead in August as planned, but instead utilised all the powers of video conferencing to bring people together and keep them safe.

self-isolating or looking after ill or isolating dependents, means developing a CPD curriculum that is flexible.

2. The role of asynchronous content: we all realise the value of careful

“ Learning online can be more effective and more convenient

Despite restrictions, we've seen how learning online can be more effective as well as more convenient for busy people. But as Driver Youth Trust's Nicola Podd argued in these pages, there is a risk that our current circumstance sees CPD curtailed when we actually need more of it. To ensure this happens, here are four lessons we learned from a challenging transition.

1. Equality of access: one of online learning's more obvious benefits is that it offers easier access. But Covid's restrictions apply to time as well as space. Making sure that all participants can access programme content, whether they are shielding,

sequencing, but flexibility means weaving together a blend of live (or 'synchronous') activities alongside a range of other, 'asynchronous' content that doesn't happen at the same time or in the same place but keeps everyone engaged, allows for crucial screen breaks and makes time for conversation. Directed reading, custom-built online modules and reflection tasks are particularly successful.

3. Little and often: using what we know about the science of learning and memory, we've redeveloped our programmes to 'chunk' content into more manageable activities that can

be revisited, applied and built on. Where possible, we have spaced out what have been previously quite intense peaks of learning into shorter, more regular activities, because a reduction in direct contact time within any single day is necessary when working online.

4. Opportunities to network: the social benefits of learning have always been valued by teachers and school leaders. Sharing ideas over coffee and cake at break-time or in the conference centre bar isn't entirely replicable online of course, but structured collaboration and planned social opportunities still give learners some of the benefits of informal, peer-to-peer networking. Four out of five of this year's 'expert middle leaders' said that they'd found opportunities to network with their cohort throughout the week.

As long as there are restrictions on movement and social distancing, giving teachers and school leaders opportunities to keep getting better from their school or home must be a sector-wide priority. But this is more than a coping strategy or holding position. The benefits are such that, even when that glorious day arrives when we can come together in groups again, we are unlikely to spring back exactly to the way things used to be.

After all, shift does happen.

# Reviews

## BOOK REVIEW



### The Complete Learner's Toolkit

**Author:** Jackie Beere

**Publisher:** Independent Thinking Press

**Reviewer:** Terry Freedman, education writer and former head of computing

The subtitle of this book indicates the scale of its ambition: "Metacognition and mindset – equipping the modern learner with the thinking, social and self-regulation skills to succeed at school and in life".

A shorter description might be: to give the learner the skills and the confidence to succeed.

The author lists several skills identified by the World Economic Forum as being crucial for success now and in the future. These include critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility. Resilience, growth mindset and metacognition also come within the book's ambit.

It's not very far into the book that readers are encouraged to "identify how the skills are woven into the rest of the curriculum and explore how they can be featured [...] in everyday lessons". At this early juncture in proceedings, my inner cynic reared his head.

As far as I am aware, every cross-curricular initiative, at least in secondary education, has failed: ICT, maths, English, economic literacy... they all wind up with non-specialist teachers attempting to teach those subjects or skills. It is, at the risk of understatement, a big ask.

But then, in many ways, so is the book. Given the current situation, resilience and creativity in particular may be desperately needed, but managing to get through the curriculum without falling too far behind is already major success. How far will teachers be able and willing to attempt to put Beere's ideas into practice in this context?

For that reason, the book works

better as a compendium of ideas and techniques than as set lessons. That's a pity because many of the lesson plans are quite interesting. It isn't that the suggested face-to-face activities are not doable online – they are – but time and teachers' own resilience and creativity are already stretched to breaking point.

An appealing aspect of the book is that it presents theories in bite-sized portions and shows how they can be applied or demonstrated in the context of a practical activity. Suggestions are based on both academic research and, to some extent, business practice, and they are great in theory. The Five Whys approach and 8-Way Thinking would probably work for any subject, and I would have no hesitation in incorporating them into the occasional lesson.

Yet on the whole they seem to hark back to a kind of teaching the profession has increasingly moved away from: 8-Way Thinking is nothing more than "multiple intelligences" rebadged, and in many instances Beere's "thumbnail sketches" do little justice to complex theories and practices.

Growth mindset makes an appearance.

The theory's originator, Carol Dweck has said on many occasions that it has not been properly understood by many people, especially in education – yet Beere covers it

in just three pages. Mindfulness – that old chestnut – is another case in point. An ancient discipline taught by trained instructors is here polished off in a couple of paragraphs.

Which raises another problem. Some of the ideas suggested in these pages could land teachers in difficult situations. One exercise involves having students compliment each other and make eye contact while doing so. If a student finds it too emotionally overwhelming, would the average teacher be confident in dealing with the repercussions?

One notable divergence from previous incarnations of this kind of tome of progressive education is its incorporation of cognitive load theory – the idea that we have limited working memory and teachers should be careful not to overload their students. Beere's suggestions for improving students' memory are quite good, but one is left wondering whether the effect of many of the other classroom activities isn't precisely that – overloading working memory.

On the whole, the book works quite well as a repository of ideas for an individual teacher or department looking to spice up the odd lesson. But to implement the ideas and the underlying philosophy of teaching that underpin them requires a whole-school approach, the time to make mistakes and a safe environment to pick up the pieces. It's an unlikely context for the foreseeable future and, in many ways, it feels like education has moved on for good.



# Reviews



To mark Black History Month, Penny Rabiger chooses five podcasts to inform your assemblies and lessons

@Penny\_Ten

## Witness History

@BBCSounds

This podcast series is compiled by the BBC World Service and features interviews with people who were actually there at key moments in Black and civil rights history. It has some incredible testimonies from great moments in Black British history to choose from, but the one I have selected is about the Bristol bus boycott, which outlines how Black British activists fought for employment rights in the 1960s. Their struggle resulted in some of the first legislation against racial discrimination in this country, and it's inspiring to hear first-hand accounts from people such as Paul Stephenson and Roy Hackett about their part in the protest.

## Noire Histor

@noirehistor

This is a series that features Black history facts, literature and motivational stories celebrating "Black pride, excellence and power all 366 days of the year". You'll hear in-depth stories about the history of important Black figures such as poet Phillis



Wheatley, journalist Claudia Jones and surgeon Dr Daniel Hale Williams, along with book reviews and insight from guest speakers. The episode I have chosen is a profile of Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian novelist who has written about interactions between Africans and colonialists and who sets himself apart from more commonly heard narratives by telling the story from the perspective of Africans rather than the view of the colonisers. An important listen for anyone teaching GCSE English and modern prose.

## In search of Black history with Bonnie Greer

@BonnieGreer

This is an Audible Original podcast so is only free to members of Audible, but it's well worth taking up a free trial to have a listen. Bonnie Greer brings you face to face with the people in history you perhaps never knew existed and whose stories tell us a different tale about who we all are in this country. This eight-part series exposes the fascinating lives of people of African heritage and challenges the accepted wisdom of the history of Western civilisation, showing how commonly accepted historical narrative has hidden and distorted important viewpoints over centuries. I started at the beginning with episode one: Bones Do Not Lie. This

episode sees Greer in conversation with history professor Olivette Otele, showing that although history is often the story of those who dominated and 'won', a clearer relationship with a wider range of voices from the past can uncover more of the truths about the present.

## We need to talk about the British Empire

@afuahirsch

Afua Hirsch conducts six intimate conversations with a new generation of writers and historians with the direct aim of breaking through old clichés and unpicking the true legacy of our complicated and difficult inheritance. The episode I have chosen is with writer Benjamin Zephaniah, who talks from his perspective as a self-proclaimed multiculturalist and challenges the idea that we can fix what Britain will look like in the future, when it has always been a country of migrants. Zephaniah also famously turned down an OBE, explaining that this assumed honour didn't resonate with his values and that the legacy of the empire is not one to be carried with pride in this way.

## Displaying Black British history: the Krios of Sierra Leone

@HistoryWO

How might museum exhibitions convey the complex dynamics of Black British history? In the episode of the History Workshop podcast I have selected, co-curators Melissa Bennett from the Museum of London and historical researcher for The Krios Dot Com, Iyamide Thomas, discuss their work on a display at the Museum of London Docklands that tells the story of Sierra Leone's Krio people. In the process, they have a broader conversation about Black British history in museums and the importance of community-engaged museum practice. Super-useful if you're guiding your students through museum exhibits with a critical eye.

# Research

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

## What are the consequences of Covid for school leaders and teachers?

Caroline Sharp, research director, NFER

In May and July 2020, NFER conducted surveys of school leaders and teachers in a representative sample of 2,200 mainstream primary and secondary schools in England. Six lessons emerged that every policymaker and practitioner should be aware of. Struggling teachers and school leaders may also find comfort in the fact that they are far from alone.

### 1. National lockdown held back pupils' learning

In July, teachers had covered about 66 per cent of the usual curriculum and nearly all teachers (98 per cent) estimated that their pupils were behind normal expectations for curriculum learning, by three months, on average. Three factors were strongly associated with pupils falling behind: lower levels of parental engagement, schools that did not provide training in remote-learning support, and teachers who felt unable to teach at their usual standard.

### 2. Existing inequalities were made worse

Covid-19 has had a particularly negative effect on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers in the most deprived schools were over three times more likely to report that their pupils were four months or more behind in their curriculum-related learning, compared to teachers in the least deprived schools (53 per cent compared to 15 per cent). Disadvantaged pupils were significantly less likely than those from more advantaged backgrounds to be engaged in remote learning or to attend school when invited back in the summer term, and significantly more likely to need intensive catch-up support.

### 3. Some distance-learning strategies worked better than others

Schools using a virtual-learning



environment (VLE) to inform pupils about learning activities – rather than the school website – and those delivering learning content to pupils through online conversations or activities that involve consolidating previous learning had higher pupil engagement during lockdown.

### 4. Covid-19 has hit school budgets

Among the 78 per cent of senior leaders who had concerns about the manageability of opening their schools in September, many said they needed additional staffing and resources, including teachers, TAs, support staff, cleaning staff, additional cleaning and protective equipment and IT. On average, these additional costs amounted to around £720,600 for secondary schools (about 12 per cent of their annual budget in 2020/21) and £280,100 for primary schools (about 19 per cent of their annual budget). Not surprisingly, the top priority for senior leaders and teachers in helping to manage the impact of Covid-19 was for government to provide more funding.

### 5. Covid-19 is affecting teaching and learning

In July, 74 per cent of teachers said they were unable to teach to their normal standard due to the restrictions of social distancing. The continuing need to reduce social mixing means

that pupils are sitting in front-facing rows and there are fewer opportunities for small-group work or movement around the school. Being unable to get close to pupils hampers teachers' ability to give formative feedback. One teacher described the frustration of "not being able to get close enough to each child in order for them to receive specific tailored learning, support, guidance and challenge". Such restrictions could lead to more didactic teaching with less differentiation or variety. This issue could benefit from some rapid research to identify practical solutions, so school leaders are able to support teachers in reducing the barriers to effective pedagogy.

### 6. Catch-up will be a long-term process

School leaders' top three priorities for September were to: support pupils' emotional health and well-being; re-engage pupils with learning; and settle them into school (63 per cent). Overall, teachers estimated that almost half (44 per cent) of their pupils were in need of intensive catch-up support. Given the extent of the challenges schools are facing and the time it will take to identify which pupils are in greatest need of support, it is unrealistic to expect catch-up to be a quick fix. Therefore catch-up should be seen as part of the ongoing process of learning recovery over an extended period, rather than as a quick-turnaround solution.



# WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

### TUESDAY

We all know that Nick Gibb is a fan of rigorous assessment, so it was good to see him put through his paces by the education committee today.

Highlights included the schools minister getting it totally wrong when asked what level of the contain framework schools are subject to (he said all schools are subject to tier 1, but the DfE later clarified it was only those in high and very high risk areas); and typical Gibb-style non-answers on plans for exams.

Still, his testimony proved far more insightful than any of the performances put in by his boss Gavin Williamson, so I suppose there was something of a silver lining...

\*\*\*

Congratulations to Ofsted's schools pre-inspection data and insight team, which has been awarded the Champion Award for Excellence in Official Statistics for its "inspection data summary report: data-driven insight for inspectors" by the Royal Statistical Society.

Funnily enough, the DfE didn't win anything, which is surprising, given its mastery of statistics. Maybe their award got lost in the post. Never mind, they'll probably just make one up anyway.

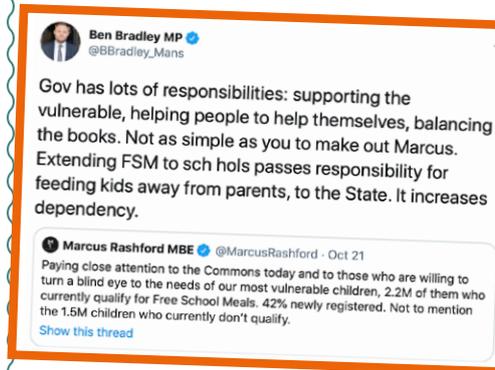
### WEDNESDAY

Tory MPs were in fine voice this week, bleating on about why the government shouldn't provide free school meal vouchers during the

October half-term, which is definitely a good look in the middle of a pandemic and recession.

Ben Bradley, MP for Mansfield and self-appointed champion of white working-class boys everywhere, was on his usual fine form, tweeting that extending free school meals to school holidays "increases dependency".

The debate is clearly polarised, but it's surely a bit of a reach to state categorically that dependency on food is a bad thing.



"Tin-eared ideological nonsense," one prominent headteacher replied.

As expected, Labour's motion in the commons fell after 321 Tory MPs and one independent voted it down.

But we doubt the irony of a government willing to shell out hundreds of millions to give people £10 off food in their local restaurants but not willing to shell out £20 million to feed starving kids was lost on many.

\*\*\*

Ben Bradley wasn't the only MP ridiculed for his intervention on free school meals this week.

David Simmonds said during the

debate that he found it "striking" that the "anxiety and difficulties" described by Marcus Rashford "took place entirely under a Labour government".

However, as many were keen to point out, Rashford was only 11 when the Coalition government came to power in 2010. We'd hope that as a former chair of the LGA's children and young people's board, Simmonds might be aware that children don't leave school at 11, even during the seemingly appalling Labour government years.

\*\*\*

But it's not just Tory MPs speaking out of turn. Former shadow education secretary Angela Rayner was forced to apologise after calling a Conservative MP "scum" in the House of Commons.

The Labour deputy leader made the comment in response to a contribution from Chris Clarkson during a debate on Covid restrictions.

Who was it that said they wanted a kinder, gentler politics?!

### THURSDAY

Private Eye reports this week that £85,000 from the government's culture recovery fund went to Nevill Holt Opera, a venture of one David Ross, who will be well-known to Schools Week readers by now.

The Carphone Warehouse tycoon and founder of the David Ross Education Trust is reported to be worth £700 million, but was still handed cash to prop up his opera, which is based on Ross's own country estate.

Nice work if you can get it...



## University Collegiate School Learning Innovation Opportunity

**QUEST is seeking a Principal who has passion, determination and enthusiasm to lead our expert team at the UCS in Bolton.**

**This once in a lifetime opportunity is for a leader who wants to shape the future of our new University Collegiate School as it grows and transforms the lives of our students.**

### Join US to Unlock your Potential.

#### Do you have:

- High expectations and share our Spirit of Purpose
- Successful Leadership experience
- Commitment, dedication and drive to succeed
- Digital expertise to deliver our cutting-edge vision
- A desire to support and secure achievement for all, staff and students alike

#### Are you:

- Values-led, research-informed and impact-focussed
- Inspirational
- Motivational
- Forward thinking & curious

If you want to make a difference and transform lives, you'll fit right in. We seek those that have a determination for success, a thirst for continued learning and a drive to be relentlessly ambitious for the students and communities they serve.

**If you are interested in joining our family, we'd love to hear from you!**

**Please contact Tonianne Hewitt at [t.hewitt@QUESTTrust.org.uk](mailto:t.hewitt@QUESTTrust.org.uk) or call 01942 834000 / 07881363436 for further information.**

## The Active Learning Trust

### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ALT wishes to appoint a second Assistant Director of Education to this interesting and challenging new post working with our schools across Cambridgeshire & Suffolk.

The Trust has 21 Schools across the primary secondary and special phases. As part of the central team you will have a successful record of leadership at school/MAT or LA level and will work Trust-wide as the key professional adviser on standards, curriculum, and improvement with our family of Headteachers. They will look to you, and rely on you to mentor their activities and approaches, as well as to encourage, challenge, support & guide them in delivering constant and evidence-based improvement.

Salary package expected to be up to £80k pa.

To discuss the role informally contact our Director of Education  
David Hilton. [david.hilton@activelearningtrust.org](mailto:david.hilton@activelearningtrust.org)

To apply – complete an application form available via  
([www.activelearningtrust.org](http://www.activelearningtrust.org)) or directly from  
[jan.steel@activelearningtrust.org](mailto:jan.steel@activelearningtrust.org)

Closing date 5 November 2020.  
Likely interview 12 November 2020.

## Lexden Springs School

### Deputy Head Teacher SLD/PMLD Special School

Are you committed and passionate about therapeutic SEND Education? Are you an outstanding teacher who is willing to go above and beyond to deliver the very best opportunities and outcomes for all pupils?

We are looking for an experienced school leader with extensive experience in a SEND school environment to join our strong successful established team. This is a real opportunity to make a difference for the children that we teach. This is a role which combines strategic development with operational delivery daily.

At Lexden Springs School, Positive Behaviour Support and Person-Centred Approaches are of paramount importance and you will contribute to the continued strategic and operational development of this.

As a member of the SLT you will play a critical role in the translation of its vision into clear objectives that promote and sustain measurable school development; ensuring that the school continuously improves and is aspirational for our students.

**For more info email [hr@lexdensprings.essex.sch.uk](mailto:hr@lexdensprings.essex.sch.uk)**



**Hollygirt**  
SCHOOL

*Peridot*



## HEADTEACHER

### About the role

Hollygirt School has been striving to maintain its unique position within the Nottingham independent sector and the relatively new Trustee Board are keen to build on the significant achievements to date, and develop a strategy to increase capacity and income for future years. The Headteacher will work with the Board of Trustees and the Senior Leadership Team to provide leadership, vision, and direction for the school. The new Headteacher will be the key driver in further improving the offer and making it the "school of choice" for Nottinghamshire families.

The Headteacher will be responsible for the day-to-day management of all school operations encouraging a culture that balances the promotion of excellence, equality and high expectations for all with a commitment to structured pastoral support. The Headteacher will lead the SLT in delivering a curriculum aimed at continuous improvement for all pupils, including those with SEND. At Hollygirt, we celebrate the achievements and progress of all. The Headteacher will work with the Bursar to manage resources effectively and efficiently and look for opportunities to increase revenue streams to improve teaching and learning and to provide a safe and harmonious school environment.

### Who we are looking for

We are seeking a candidate with successful experience of leading and managing improvement strategies and successful change programmes. This is a great opportunity to use your skills in strategic planning, and to develop and implement initiatives to increase numbers on roll and revenue streams. The school is looking for DfE recognised qualified teacher status and experience of leadership in an educational setting. The candidate will demonstrate a proven track record of either raising attainment or sustaining good or outstanding achievement and progress in a whole school environment. In keeping with the school's strong ethos, you must understand the needs of all pupils aged 3-16 to facilitate an inclusive school approach.

You will be expected to have high order analytical and problem-solving skills and the ability to make informed judgements. In consultation with the SLT, you will be required to make and present strategic recommendations to the board. A key part of the role will be marketing the school and promoting all the benefits that we have to offer – you will be representing the school to all stakeholders, prospective parents, the local community, press and the independent school sector. Therefore, the successful individual will be a natural and a compelling communicator who is able to present confidently and professionally in a variety of media to a range of audiences.

**For more information and to apply, please visit the job page on Peridot Partners' website: <https://bit.ly/3d2YJTR>**

**To arrange a confidential chat, please contact our lead consultants at Peridot Partners:**

**Sally Lawson-Ritchie | [sally@peridotpartners.co.uk](mailto:sally@peridotpartners.co.uk) | 07904 158737**

**Drew Richardson-Walsh | [drew@peridotpartners.co.uk](mailto:drew@peridotpartners.co.uk) | 07739 364033**

**Closing date: 12pm, Monday 23rd November 2020 | Salary: £65,000 - £75,000**

*Hollygirt School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment and undergo appropriate checks.*



The Russett School

## Executive Head Teacher (Cheshire)

**Leadership: L27 to L32**

**Contract Type: Full Time**

**Contract Term: Permanent**

An exciting opportunity has arisen at the Russett Learning Trust for the post of Executive Head Teacher. The Trustees of the Russett Learning Trust and Governors of the Russett School are looking to recruit a dedicated, inspiring and exceptional person with drive and commitment to lead and develop the Russett School and support the Board with the growth of the Russett Learning Trust.

We are seeking a candidate with experience of successful strategic headship/leadership in the mainstream primary/special school sector and/or as part of a Multi Academy Trust or Single Academy Trust.

The Russett Learning Trust was established in September 2015 and the Russett School is a special academy providing outstanding education for pupils and young people from ages 2 to 19 years with Severe Learning Difficulties, Speech and Language Difficulties and Complex Needs.

Working at the Russett School offers the opportunity to work with a highly trained and committed staff team who are dedicated to the delivery of outstanding learning to all our students.

The fundamental vision of The Russett Learning Trust is to be a centre of excellence in providing outstanding training, education and care. If you share this vision you will be well placed to join us and make a difference.

The Russett Learning Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of its pupils and expects all those working at the Trust to share this commitment. Clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service is required prior to appointment.

To apply please complete a Russett Learning Trust's application form together with a covering letter explaining why you are suitable for this position.

Potential candidates will have an opportunity to tour the academy on **Wednesday 14th October** or **Monday 19th October**. To arrange your visit please contact [jhughes@russett.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:jhughes@russett.cheshire.sch.uk) or call **01606 853005**.

Applications are returnable to [jhughes@russett.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:jhughes@russett.cheshire.sch.uk) .

**Closing Date: Friday 6th November 2020 at noon.**

**Shortlisting: Tuesday 10th November 2020**

**Interviews: Wednesday 25th and Thursday 26th November 2020**

**Start Date: 1st September 2021**