



'Don't tell us what you want to scrap, tell us what you want to build'

Labour's education team launches its own reset, page 6

Schools head for 'tipping point' as teacher absence rate doubles

- Over 35k state school teachers isolating after rise since half-term
- Leaders say absence 'tipping point' forcing closure of classrooms
- Trusts quizzed on Covid protocols in DfE 'urgent commission'



SCHOOLS WEEK

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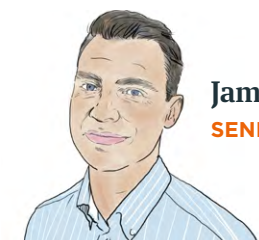
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Meet the head without a second to waste



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Former RSC caught up in DfE probe

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No home tutoring and one subject limit hold back NTP, say heads

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

INVESTIGATES

The National Tutoring Programme is reviewing its stipulation that online sessions cannot be delivered to pupils at home after heads said they just don't have the space amid the pandemic.

This is only one of the emerging issues that has left headteachers questioning just how much impact the government's flagship tutoring programme can deliver.

Leaders have hit out that they can only enter each pupil for tutoring in one subject, and that the tutor-to-pupil ratio is capped at 1:3 by most providers.

Schools are now enquiring about whether non-subsidised tutoring of larger groups might provide better value for money.

Meanwhile a Schools Week investigation has found several of the organisations set to receive the largest payouts from the tutor scheme actually have no significant experience in providing tutoring in England (see story below).

Jonathan Mountstevens, deputy head of Beaumont School in St Albans, said he was



"gobsmacked" when he was told pupils had to be in school to receive the tutoring, even if it was all online.

He said the rule created a "huge issue with space" and problems with staff cover.

Julie McCulloch, director of policy at the ASCL leadership union, said the rule "obviously limits the usefulness of the programme, particularly as tutoring will typically need to take place outside the normal school day, and in light of the fact that pupils are intermittently having to self-isolate".

A spokesperson for the NTP said it "recognises that in exceptional circumstances, for example for pupils shielding or at home for extended periods, it may be beneficial to deliver tutoring to pupils at home.

"The NTP team are currently working with a number of approved tuition partners to ensure

the necessary systems are in place to allow at home tuition to take place when needed."

Schools also cried foul over the rule restricting tutoring to one subject per pupil.

Caroline Spalding, assistant headteacher at The Bemrose School in Derby, said this "limits schools in targeting support to those in greatest need.

"Cynically, it could be argued that the future strapline 'X million pupils have benefitted from the scheme' has been prioritised over having the greatest possible impact to close the achievement gap."

The NTP said the one-subject rule was to "ensure that tutoring reaches the highest number of disadvantaged pupils over this year".

The programme has also been criticised after it emerged almost all of its providers will only subsidise tuition with a tutor-pupil ratio of 1:3 or less, despite many of the providers offering larger group sessions to full-paying customers.

For example, Vanessa Leach from tuition partner Tute told leaders on Twitter that her firm usually charges £1,800 for sessions with 12 pupils, working out at £150 a pupil. Under the NTP, schools would pay £300 for three pupils, equivalent to £100 each.

WELL PAID, BUT NOT WELL PREPARED ...

The NTP has not revealed how much funding each of the 32 partners awarded contracts under the £76 million Tuition Partners strand of the programme will get.

However, Schools Week analysis* showed of the ten firms likely to get the largest subsidises, four have no significant experience of providing tutoring to school pupils in England. A fifth, Randstad, claimed it had experience in this area but would not say whether this was experience of direct provision of services rather than recruitment.

Under the scheme, providers receive 75 per cent of their funding from the NTP, while schools will have to pay the remaining 25 per cent of tutoring costs, with the help of a £650 million Covid catch-up premium grant.

Education giant Pearson looks set to be the biggest beneficiary. It could net at least £5.7 million

if it provides 1:3 tutoring to the 25,670 pupils it has pledged to help, despite having no experience in the English tutoring market.

A spokesperson said the firm felt it had "the capability" to "help children get back on their feet".

Schools Partnership Tutors, set up by the Unity Schools Partnership, also has no background in tutoring. It could get £3 million in funding if it provides 1:3 tutoring sessions for the 20,000 pupils it has pledged to reach.

Unity CEO Tim Coulson said his organisation was "determined to do our best, as quickly as possible and in a very challenging environment".

FFT Education Ltd, which has said it can support up to 14,440 pupils, will get £2.3 million if all of those pupils participate on a 1:4 basis. The organisation said it had been delivering tutoring in the UK with partner Success for All, but only since

January.

An NTP spokesperson said funding to tuition partners would be "paid in milestones and is dependent on the number of schools and pupils" they support, so it would be "inaccurate" to use the figures arrived upon in *Schools Week's* analysis

"It's not necessary to be a tutoring organisation to provide good tuition," they added.

**Our analysis took publicly available data on the target number of pupils and cost-per-session for each provider and estimated the amount they would receive in subsidies from the NTP. We based our calculations on the highest possible ratio and lowest possible price tag. The figures are therefore likely to be higher for providers with a mix of online and in-person learning, and for those providing tutoring to smaller groups.*

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Ofsted

Time to plan for Ofsted's (gradual?) return

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

The education secretary has made the case for routine Ofsted inspections to restart in the new year, although the watchdog's full reintroduction could be "gradual".

Gavin Williamson said this week that Ofsted would play a "vital role as we work through the pandemic", adding: "As we move on into 2021 we must start planning for a time when they can restart."

But he said it was important the inspections start "at the right time and in the right way", telling the Schools and Academies Show on Wednesday that he would make a full announcement within the next few weeks to allow time "for all concerned" to prepare before the end of the autumn term.

Inspections have been suspended since March, although inspectors have made "visits" this term, mostly to 'inadequate' schools.

Schools Week revealed earlier this month how Ofsted had proposed introducing monitoring-style inspections – without grades – to start in January. But the decision is ultimately down to ministers.

Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector, speaking at the same event, said discussions focused on how inspections could restart "sensitively and sensibly and in a gradual way".

The inspectorate was thinking "very hard about the context schools are working in", alongside the "very different context across the country... That really matters to us."

Williamson said the watchdog must be reintroduced "safely and sensitively" and pledged to ensure that "inspections results are fair, particularly in terms of comparisons that are made between school over time".

He championed the importance of Ofsted as "the last line of defence against poor standards".

But Wes Streeting, the shadow schools minister, said no one "in their right mind" thought it was desirable or practical to resume routine inspections in January.

"What do we expect inspectors to find? How do we expect schools to release teacher to make it happen? It's the wrong focus, the wrong



priority."

In what seems like an attempt to placate worried schools, Spielman said the restart would not have "catch-up timetables – an inspection frenzy to try and get back to the cycle of inspections that we were on before March.

"Clearly that would not be feasible, and we don't have the staff to do it – that would put unreasonable pressure on the system."

Schools Week reported last month that about 4,000 inspections may have been missed by January.

Ofsted also now has additional powers to routinely inspect 'outstanding' schools when normal business is resumed. However, the government has given the watchdog until 2027 to complete inspecting the near 3,500 top-rated schools.

Spielman also claimed the "overwhelming" feedback from Ofsted's "visits" this term showed they had made "something supportive and constructive for schools".

Since the pandemic started, Ofsted had "really looked to see how we can be intelligent, proportionate and constructive".

The watchdog would "absolutely not be going out looking to find fault with people about how they've handled their approach to the pandemic", she said. "[That's] really important – we're not going to be retrospectively judging people on what they did last summer."

But she said that a lot of people were rightly worried that any suspension of routine inspections should not be too prolonged.

However, headteachers don't seem to be on board.

Gwyneth Gibson, the head of Lea Manor High School in Luton, said restarting inspections was a "double-edged sword" for schools such as hers. Lea Manor was rated 'requires improvement' three weeks after she took over, and she believes it would improve if inspected.

But the "most important thing right now ... is that we get our pupils in some way ready for their next steps for their future learning.

"We're not able to do this with the pressure of Ofsted hanging over us. And we don't know what we're going to be measured against. It just seems a bit ridiculous and unnecessary."

Karen Giles, the head of Barham primary in Wembley, north London, said it would be "absolutely inappropriate" for Ofsted to be visiting schools in the middle of a pandemic, either virtually or in person.

Her daily focus was to take one day at a time ... "to be able to steady the ship". She said many people were under a lot of pressure at work and at home. "I am just trying to mitigate any of the concerns that parents have."

Streeting said a solution was for Ofsted to focus solely on key areas such as the quality of catch-up provision, home learning and safeguarding.

Ofsted

Labour 'got it wrong' on scrapping Ofsted

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Labour got it wrong on scrapping Ofsted, the shadow schools minister has said, in the clearest signal yet that the party has moved on from policies under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.

Wes Streeting told the Schools and Academies Show on Thursday that instead of calling for Ofsted's demise, educationists should tell Labour "how to make it better".

It comes after Kate Green, the shadow education secretary, told *Schools Week* last month that she would review the proposals to scrap Ofsted and tests in primary schools.

The party is also looking again at its national education service policy, after Rebecca Long-Bailey, a Corbyn ally and former shadow education secretary, admitted earlier this year that a lack of an "overarching message" on education cost Labour at last year's election.

The party announced last September that if elected, it would ditch Ofsted and replace it with a series of local authority health checks. A new inspectorate would be sent in if serious problems were found.

Although teaching unions welcomed the proposal at the time, Streeting said the policy went down badly with families.

"I think what Labour got wrong, if I can be frank ... was that the public heard the scrap Ofsted bit," he said.

"They didn't hear the 'we want to replace it with something better' bit. And, as a result, I can tell you that one cut through pretty quickly to parents and grandparents who were saying 'why are you going soft on standards?'"

"That's not where I'm prepared to be and where I think the Labour party should be. But the fundamental point here is don't tell us what you want to scrap, tell us what you want to build."



Wes Streeting

Streeting also said that his sense from talking to teachers was that Ofsted had "improved in a number of respects in recent years".

"Certainly things like thematic reviews I think people consider to be broadly useful."

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said Streeting's criticism was "right".

The NEU had been supportive of Labour's plan to replace the watchdog, but Bousted said the policy was not communicated properly.

"All people heard was abolish Ofsted, but the proposal was never to not have an independent regulator. It was to have a different sort of independent regulator."

"The fact Wes Streeting has said Ofsted needs reform, that is to be welcomed." What was needed was Labour's thinking on the sort of reforms.

She questioned Streeting's assertion that

Ofsted had improved.

"If Labour is committing to a fundamental look at not whether we have an inspectorate, but what kind of inspectorate we have and what work it does, then the NEU is really up for that."

Despite saying Ofsted played an "important role", Streeting said the watchdog was "trying to achieve too much. It may be that we should be looking at different elements of the inspection."

He questioned whether safeguarding inspection should be "lumped in" with high-stakes visits. "Whether or not there should be a single high-stakes visit is a reasonable question."

"But ultimately if you didn't have Ofsted you would need to reinvent it. And so simply hoping we can scrap Ofsted and all the problems people have with external inspections regime goes away, I'm not sure that's right."



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Teacher absence spike forces 'tipping point' closures

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

Schools are being forced to shut their doors as the numbers of teachers forced into isolation pushes them past the "tipping point".

A survey by Teacher Tapp has found the number of teachers reporting they are isolating due to Covid jumped to eight per cent this week – around double that reported before half-term.

More than 7,000 teachers took part in the survey. When extrapolated across the country, up to 36,300 of England's 450,000 teachers could be away from the classroom. Yorkshire and the north east are worst hit.

The finding comes as the government launched an "urgent commission" to quiz academy trusts over their Covid protocols.

Department for Education attendance statistics show the number of pupils isolating doubled within a week to over 550,000, with almost two-thirds of secondary schools reporting cases.

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the National Education Union (NEU), said schools are "having to deal with the reality of rapidly increasing disruption as coronavirus infection spreads through the school population".

The rise in teacher absences is leading to closures.

Ursuline College in Westgate-on-Sea, which is part of the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership, closed on Tuesday after 22 confirmed Covid cases among staff and pupils over the past fortnight. It meant by Monday, 633 children and 25 staff were absent.

Heather Leatt, director of school improvement at the trust, said the issues had been "relentless" for teachers. "It had reached a tipping point and our absolute priority is to keep the pupils safe and the staff safe", she said.

The rate of weekly Covid cases in the Kent district of Thanet, in which Ursuline College is sited, was recorded as 507.3 per 100,000 people – almost double the national average of 263.3 in the week leading to November 14.

Around 15 schools within Kent have had to



shut completely or send bubbles home since new lockdown measures were introduced.

But this week Matt Dunkley, corporate director for education and young people's services for Kent County Council, wrote to the region's headteachers requesting bubbles are not sent home "needlessly".

The DfE statistics show over 99 per cent of schools have been open since the beginning of term. However, there are concerns should the number of teachers isolating continue to rise, schools will have no choice but to close.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said that "when nearly two-thirds of secondaries are sending home pupils we have a chaotic rota system by default... The government has to recognise reality. The current situation is unsustainable."

He said the "trigger point" for when schools close "would vary according to the size of the school, the number of staff affected, and whether it is practical to fill gaps with supply staff at short notice."

One in four children in Hull, the country's worst-hit area, are absent from school – representing around 12,000 pupils. Over half of the city's 97 schools were partially closed on Monday, with 53 schools sending home full-year groups or bubbles.

Hull Learning Partnership, which accounts for the majority of the city's schools, has asked health secretary Matt Hancock to allow its schools to close for all but vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Elsewhere a teacher from an East Sussex secondary school told *Schools Week* it had planned to implement a rota system for its year 8, 9 and 10 cohorts.

But a positive test for a staff member meant they were all "knocked out" of the equation and created a situation where "there was no way we had enough adults for the pupils". It had to send home three year groups.

The DfE previously released weekly data on staff absences but has ceased to do so since the full return of schools in September.

On Wednesday and Thursday, chief executives at trusts across the country received questionnaires from their regional schools commissioners' office requesting information on Covid protocols – with responses requested by the end of Thursday.

The letters, seen by *Schools Week*, state that since the number of pupils self-isolating has "increased significantly since half-term, there is an urgent need to better understand the experience of schools trying to manage instances of positive Covid-19 cases in their schools". One email was headed "urgent commission: info for SoS [secretary of state]".

One school leader who received the email said: "Why on earth have we been given just a couple of hours to turn around these answers? Some trusts have scores of schools and thousands of pupils. It's just bizarre."

The email asked what additional support their schools may require to "reduce the number of isolating pupils".

Department hiring spree for Covid response

BILLY CAMDEN

@BILLYCAMDEN

EXCLUSIVE

A huge recruitment drive has been launched at the Department for Education to aid its response to Covid-19, with 100 jobs up for grabs.

Job adverts for the 12-month contracts contain limited detail but state that people are being sought to work in "priority roles" that have been impacted by the pandemic and will be deployed "where business needs are greatest".

The DfE refused to shed more light on what the positions will entail or the areas that will be covered, but it appears they will be looking to poach existing civil servants from other government departments and agencies for a loan spell.

Job adverts for the roles include the line: "Existing civil servants (with manager approval) would have the option of transferring to DfE on loan."

When Covid first struck, a "small" number of staff from the DfE's agencies were seconded to the department, including



from Ofsted, to keep inspectors busy after the watchdog's inspection regime was suspended in March.

An *FE Week* investigation in May found that 20 inspectors had been deployed to the DfE to support their social care, early years and further education departments.

All those civil servants who temporarily transferred to the DfE and aided its initial Covid-19 response have since returned to their previous areas of work.

But it wouldn't be a total surprise to see more inspectors loaned out to the DfE. Speaking at the Schools and Academies Show on Wednesday, Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman ruled out an "inspection

frenzy" when normal business for the watchdog is resumed (currently set for the beginning of the new year), suggesting the reintroduction of full inspections could be "gradual" and thus will not require as many staff.

Candidates to the DfE's Covid response team are asked to apply for a range of levels.

Twenty-five will be hired as higher executive officers, who earn a salary of £29,363 and typically work across various policy areas, making "significant contributions toward decision-making", while 39 will be employed as senior executive officers, who are paid £36,498 and often manage teams.

An additional 31 individuals will be taken on as "grade 7" employees who are "responsible for setting priorities, agreeing targets, allocating responsibilities to their team" and are "accountable for outcomes in their policy area". They receive £49,861 a year.

Lastly, five people will be hired in "grade 6" positions which typically lead "several complex work streams" and are paid £61,014.

EXCLUSIVE

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

DfE looking into 'partisan' tweets - but still won't comment

The Department for Education is looking into whether tweets by one of its non-executive board members have breached impartiality rules.

But the government is still yet to comment officially, more than a week after it was told about the accusation.

Schools Week reported last week that Nick Timothy, a former chief of staff to Theresa May and close ally of Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, had been accused of breaching impartiality rules with partisan tweets that often criticised opposition parties.

Colin Talbot, emeritus professor of government at the University of Manchester and a research associate at the University of Cambridge, said Timothy's tweets "clearly" breached the rules.

"It's clear where his political loyalties lie from that sort of tweet, and that creates a problem."

The official code of conduct for board members of public bodies says that all postholders "should be, and be seen to be, politically impartial".

But Timothy, an outspoken newspaper columnist who failed in a bid to become a Conservative MP, has posted dozens of tweets in recent months that have either criticised other political parties or made his own political views clear.

In one instance he claimed that "much of the Labour party is rotten" and in another he referred to "sneering Remainers". Another tweet accused the Scottish National Party of having an "awful record".

The department has not answered repeated requests for comment, but it is understood it has still to decide if the tweets do indeed breach the rules.

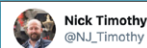
Since our investigation, Timothy has continued to criticise Labour MPs Diane Abbott and Jess Phillips, and the left-wing commentator Owen Jones.

Timothy's appointment was ratified in March and announced in April.

Most departmental non-executive directors are appointed via a competitive process, but *Schools Week* revealed last month that Timothy's was rushed through without competition at the behest of Williamson.

Nick Timothy
@NJT_Timothy

If unionists spent as much time making the case for the union, and scrutinising the SNP's awful record, as they do observing that unionists are failing to defend the union, the union might be in better nick.

Nick Timothy
@NJT_Timothy

That Brexit isn't the Little England project sneering Remainers like to claim?

Mikey Smith
@mikeysmith · Aug 25

Also, I think it perhaps says something about Brexit Britain that the best person we can find to bang the drum for it is an Australian.

[Show this thread](#)

Nick Timothy
@NJT_Timothy

Wonder how this would be going if the Democrats hadn't embraced BLM, denied and justified rioting, and toyed with defunding the police. The cultural left is a killer for social democrats.

Fresh food may be off after Brexit, guidance warns

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

Schools have been told to consider buying food with a longer shelf life to “minimise the effect” of any supply chain disruption after Brexit.

In updated guidance this week, the government said the new UK Border Operating Model will apply to all goods entering the UK from 11pm on December 31.

It said it was “important for all schools, FE colleges and local authorities to prepare for potential changes to food supplies so they can minimise the effect on pupils and young people in their care”.

This included contacting suppliers to check whether they would need to change meals, ingredients and school menus and that their secondary suppliers “are prepared”, something schools were warned about last year.

The latest guidance added while the food standards allowed changes to meals, schools would still have to meet nutritional requirements, provide free meals to some pupils and manage special dietary needs.

But in what appears to be an updated section, the government has told schools that they might need to “consider whether changes are



necessary”, including “ordering longer shelf-life products during this period, such as frozen foods or foods that can be safely stored at room temperature”.

Other changes included “varying the timing and number of deliveries to allow for transport delays” and “being as flexible as possible on delivery times during the day”.

It was reported last month the government had plans for up to ten inland sites to cope with congestion and border checks post-Brexit.

But the industry groups have warned that some ports will find it “impossible” to carry out

checks on fresh food. Time is also ticking on the government and the European Union agreeing a deal to avoid a no-deal Brexit.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, told *The Guardian* “Let’s be frank: there’s almost nothing that any school can meaningfully do to mitigate the effects of Brexit, as they have no control over what will happen after January 1.

“It is entirely wrong for the government to offload responsibility for a successful Brexit outcome on to schools and other public services.”

JOHN DICKENS | @JOHNDICKENSSW

Four hours' work a day? DfE to update remote learning expectations

Self-isolating pupils should have four hours of work a day with teachers checking-in daily with every child, *Schools Week* understands new government guidance will say.

The government is working on updating its remote learning guidance following calls for clarity. The new advice is expected to set clearer expectations around the provision schools offer during the pandemic.

The government last month introduced a legal duty on schools to provide “immediate access to remote education” for pupils off school because of coronavirus.

Schools Week understands the revised guidance will set expectations that three hours of work be set each day for primary pupils; four for secondary.

The government will also expect teachers to check-in daily with every child off school because of the pandemic. The current



guidance states that schools should “ideally” provide pupils “daily contact with teachers”.

It is not known when the updated guidance, which will have to be signed off by ministers, will be published.

The changes come as new attendance figures show that schools are dealing with huge disruption.

Nearly two-thirds of secondary schools

last week reported pupils off because of coronavirus – almost double the number reported in the week before.

In Hull, a particularly hard-hit area, one in four children is absent from school, *The Guardian* reported.

Some schools are also struggling to stay open, with staff absences forcing closures. The government has also been accused of not providing enough laptops for disadvantaged pupils – before it decided to slash allocations.

It has been under pressure to set out its expectations on home learning, amid concerns that not all schools are doing enough.

The government has also said Ofsted will look at remote learning when inspections restart – with a need to set out specific expectations of what is required.

Former RSC on board of trust given ESFA warning

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

INVESTIGATES

An academy trust rapped over a contract its chief executive awarded to an online mental health company where she also served as a director lists a former regional schools commissioner on its board.

An Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) investigation found weak procurement controls and "a lack of probity in spending public funds" at Washwood Heath Multi Academy Trust (WHMAT).

The ESFA investigated in January this year after receiving a series of allegations between July 2018 and July 2019.

The Birmingham trust, which runs seven schools, was also issued with a financial notice to improve that warns its funding could be terminated if changes are not made.

Christine Quinn, who retired as regional schools commissioner for the West Midlands in 2018, joined the trust as a member in June last year.

Investigators raised concerns over Bev Mabey's involvement with Mindful Healthcare Ltd – a private company that offers online therapy sessions and where her daughter works as a delivery practitioner.

The investigation said the trust had entered into a contractual



relationship with Mindful Healthcare, but had not carried out a procurement and no discussion of the appointment had been made at board level.

Mabey declared she was a director, but was never listed as such at Companies House. The ESFA states she was listed as an adviser on the firm's website when services were procured, but this has since been removed.

Dr Neil Jarrett, Mindful's chief executive, told *Schools Week* it never had a "contract or commercial relationship" with the trust. .. Mabey did serve as a board adviser for schools, but was never paid.

He explained the company had worked with Mabey and the trust to deliver "pioneering online therapy" for five pupils between Easter and summer 2019 as part of the pilot.

While the company had invested about £300,000 developing and delivering the pilot, he said no money changed hands between the company and the trust.

Jarrett said the trust's pupils and families benefited from accessing the support, while

Mindful benefited by testing its system worked properly.

Following the pilot Mabey appeared in promotional content sent out to other schools and spoke on the company's behalf at live events. It has contracts with seven other academy trusts.

Jarrett said Mabey did this work unpaid because she "recognises the dire need to change the way mental support is provided for young people".

He called the ESFA's report libellous and added: "It's potentially very damaging for us at a very difficult time. Covid killed our entire market and we are just starting to recover and don't need this publicity."

Mabey's daughter had worked for Mindful for a short time, but had gone through a recruitment process and her employment had been based on her merits, he said.

Elsewhere, investigators found a conflict of interest had occurred as Mabey authorised her son's £550 mileage expenses claim over 19 months. David Mabey works as the trust's estate manager.

Chair of trustees Peter Anstey also stood down from his post earlier this month. He did not respond to a request for comment.

A trust spokesperson said it had been "working closely with the ESFA" to address the issues raised and is "significantly on the journey to demonstrating not just compliance but best practice".



Christine Quinn

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR_93

Trust may lose school just four years after taking it on

An academy trust could be stripped of a school just four years after taking it on - and ten months after a pupil was stabbed.

The Department for Education has issued the Griffin Schools Trust with a termination warning notice for Stantonbury International School in Milton Keynes.

The school was placed into special measures following an Ofsted inspection in January.

The inspection took place a week after a 15-year-old pupil was allegedly stabbed in the back by a fellow pupil during a fire drill.

Ofsted noted that many pupils did not feel safe, lessons were frequently disrupted and "sometimes disruption escalates into dangerous behaviour".

The school joined the trust in 2016 after it received a 'requires improvement' rating the previous year.

The termination warning notice, sent by Dame Kate Dethridge, the regional schools commissioner for North-West London and South Central England, said the trust had failed to account for the poor outcomes of the academy or demonstrated how

"leadership at trust level will be improved. I have serious concerns about the capacity of the trust to provide and monitor the high-quality intervention needed..."


A spokesperson for the trust said it was "disappointed" but added: "Whilst ideally recovery is a one-way process, it is not always the case. Circumstances and contexts change, but the long-term rebuilding of the fundamentals carries on relentlessly and that is the case with Stantonbury, which is a far stronger school than much of the January 2020 Ofsted report suggests."

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GO TO NEXT STEP

Union accused of breaking rules over 'political' election ad

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

The country's largest education union has been accused of flouting rules over a "political" Facebook advert critical of Conservative party policy that it paid for in the run-up to last year's general election.

Figures published by the Electoral Commission earlier this month showed the National Education Union spent £505,000 campaigning in the 2019 election. It was the largest spend by any non-party campaigner, narrowly ahead of Momentum.

The union said the spend came from general funds, as the campaign's "main purpose" was to inform voters about each party's education policies, not persuade people to vote for a particular party. The campaign was titled "Value education, vote education".

However, a Schools Week analysis of invoices published by the EC show the union paid Facebook to promote an NEU post that stated the Conservative Party's proposals on Ofsted were "more of the same... This is a sure-fire way of driving more teachers from the profession".

It said proposals from Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Green Party, who had pledged to scrap Ofsted, will "maintain standards, with detailed, useful, relevant information for parents and schools".

A government document on trade union political funds states that a union wishing to "spend money on party political activities must set up a separate political fund for financing any such expenditure".

One example of such spend is described as the "production, publication or distribution of any literature, document, film, sound recording or advertisement the main purpose of which is to persuade people to vote or not to vote for a political party or candidate".

Robert Dougans, partner at Preiskel & Co law firm, said as the advert "specifically criticises Conservative Party policy, and comparatively praises opposition party policies, in the context of a general election campaign, it is entirely reasonable to construe this as political campaigning with the intention of influencing votes".

"As such, it would be subject to the Trade Union & Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 clauses on expenditure of money on political objects. It is unlawful for trade unions to spend such monies from their general fund."



National Education Union

November 29, 2019 · 🌐

Conservative proposals on Ofsted are more of the same, when Ofsted is no good for pupils, parents or teachers. This is a sure-fire way of driving more teachers from the profession. Schools should be held to account, but what we need is a radical new approach.

Labour, Lib Dem and Green proposals will maintain standards with detailed, useful, relevant information for parents and schools. Before you vote, do your homework. #ValueEducation

bit.ly/2rdEq2u



Spend on the post, totalling just under £1,300, appears in five invoices. One invoice shows the post had nearly 79,000 impressions.

The NEU invoices submitted to the EC had the word "members" handwritten next to some expenditure, including the post referenced above. NEU said this was because the post was only promoted to its own members so it did not meet the "public test" to be declared as regulated spending.

A spokesperson added the union "refutes the accusation" that the post in question should have been declared as spending from a political fund.

"The Facebook advert used as an example by Schools Week does not direct people to vote or not vote for any particular party, therefore it was not subject to the provisions set out in the Trade Union & Labour Relation (Consolidation) Act 1992 regarding the use of political funds.

"Further this advert was promoted only to our own members and any visibility to the wider public would only be if the member chose to share it onward; the advert did not request that members should share it onward."

However, Conservative MP David Morris said the "paid advert is clearly party political, suggesting teachers should not vote for the Conservative Party.

"The law is clear, such advertising must be paid for out of a union's political fund, not their general

fund. I have written to the Certification Officer requesting an investigation into this matter."

A spokesperson for the Certification Office, which regulates unions, said it wasn't able to comment on the matter.

Annual accounts for the NEU, which cover an eight-month period up to August last year, show the political fund balance had a £6,594 deficit.

Just 3,999 of the union's 436,000 members (one per cent) contribute to the fund. Subscribing members contribute one per cent of their fee. The latest accounts show members contributed subscription income of £7,126 to the fund.

In 2016, the Conservative government brought in new laws requiring union members to opt in, rather than opt out, from paying towards their union's political fund.

It was reported last year that Unite union, one of the Labour party's biggest donors, had a fall of over 100,000 members paying into its political fund since the move.

The NEU's accounts state its political fund was established to "allow the union to undertake campaigning of a political nature".

"Expenditure in connection with political activities must be charged against this fund," it adds.

The EC invoices show the NEU spent around £450,000 on "manifesto or referendum material". Another £40,000 was spent on market research.

Faith schools waive church attendance

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

Faith schools are amending requirements for prospective pupils to have attended places of worship in the wake of Covid-19 disruption.

Last week, the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) approved a modification put forward by the governing body of Lowdham Church of England primary, in Nottinghamshire, to remove the need for pupils to have attended church for the 12 months before their application.

Instead arrangements will only apply to "the period when the church or alternative premises have been available for public worship".

It is a move that seems to have been repeated at schools across the country, but critics warn it is "absurd and unfair to use that criterion to assess children's suitability for school admission in the first place".

The OSA determination explains that under normal circumstances "where the school is oversubscribed, priority may be given on the basis of faith" and that the school's arrangements "take account of attendance in places of worship".

The Lowdham school's oversubscription criteria specified a prospective pupil would need to have attended church at least once a month for the previous year to qualify as a "regular worshipper". They also needed a reference from a member of the clergy.

However the OSA said it was "beyond question"



that Covid-19 represented a major change in circumstances and therefore agreed to amend the measurement to only apply "to the period when the church or alternative premises have been available for public worship".

Places of worship were closed in March during the first lockdown.

Under the new lockdown restrictions, which came into force this month, places of worship can open in certain circumstance such as individual prayer, filming an act of worship, or childcare and

Government guidance has acknowledged such spaces play a key role in bringing communities together, but warns "their communal nature also makes them places that are vulnerable to the spread of coronavirus".

Penny Harvey, the schools admissions adviser

at the London Diocesan Board for Schools (LDBS), said many schools had amended their admission rules, including a number of the 163 schools under her board's umbrella.

It was agreed schools could go through the diocese to contact the OSA to "vary their admission policies in light of the pandemic".

As with Lowdham school, attendance had not been removed from policies, but caveated to reflect the impact of Covid.

Huw Thomas, the director of education at the Diocese of Sheffield, confirmed that most of its 39 schools had also amended their criteria.

It follows guidance published by the Department for Education for faith schools in July that "some admission authorities may need to seek a variation to their admission arrangements to ensure parents are clear on what they need to do to meet the relevant criteria".

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said it would not expect Covid to greatly affect admissions codes, "but it would seem prudent and sensible to make minor adjustments" in light of the pandemic.

However, Alastair Lichten, the head of education at the National Secular Society, said the requirement should be removed altogether as the closures had "made it even more complicated and unworkable to base admissions policies on attendance at places of worship".

JOHN DICKENS | @JOHNDICKENSSW

Coronavirus forces school to abandon partial selection

A south London school has had to permanently ditch its partial selection of pupils after the admissions watchdog agreed the pandemic "inhibits the ability to test applicants".

St Saviour's and St Olave's, a voluntary-aided school for girls, asked the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) if it could drop its 18 "ability places" for 2021 admissions.

The school's governing body said Covid-19 made it impossible to "ensure the integrity and fairness" of a general ability test this autumn, but said it would like to reintroduce selection for 2022.

However, the OSA pointed out the admissions code stated that "partially selective schools must not exceed the lowest proportion of

selection that has been used since the 1997-98 school year".

Phil Whiffing, the schools adjudicator, said this rule would "prohibit the reintroduction of partial selection in any future year".

The school, which did not respond for a request for comment, said it "understands" the move would "likely to become permanent under current legislation".

Government guidance advised selective schools to delay testing this year, but did set out how to request a variation to their admission arrangements.

The Department for Education, speaking on behalf of the OSA, would not say if other partially selective schools have gone down this

route. There is no official list, but it is believed there are between 35 to 40 partially selective schools across the country.

In his judgment, Whiffing said it was "beyond question that the Covid-19 pandemic represents a major change of circumstances that inhibits the ability to test applicants... in the safe and fair way which the governing board would want".

A DfE spokesperson said: "Admission authorities are responsible for determining their schools' admission arrangements. St Saviour's and St Olave's admissions authority was made aware of the implications of the variation it had requested before the adjudicator decided the case."

Heads need new support package to stem 'post-Covid exodus'

HÉLÈNE MULHOLLAND

@LNMULHOLLAND

Early career teacher support reforms should be rolled out to include school leaders to prevent a "post-Covid exodus", a school improvement commission has said.

The National Association of Head Teachers report comes as a survey of its members found 47 per cent are now less likely to remain in school leadership because of the pandemic.

The union calls on government to extend its commitment to fund support for newly qualified teachers to all teachers and leaders by 2025.

Nick Brook, NAHT's deputy general secretary, said the pandemic has "compounded" the dissatisfaction with the state of education, adding it is "deeply concerning" that many school leaders are considering leaving prematurely.

The NAHT's School Improvement Commission report says that high-quality continuous professional development (CPD) can help teachers thrive and boost retention. Figures included in the report show that three in ten school leaders quit within three years of their first headship. Yet NAHT survey figures show that the majority of school leaders (66 per cent) were cutting back on CPD budgets.

The expertise of teachers and school leaders will achieve more in sustained school improvements, according to the report, than by simply focusing on being "Ofsted-ready".

The report recommends that new head teachers should benefit from "fully funded" structured support, similar to that received by newly qualified teachers. This would be based on mentoring and coaching alongside leadership development and training.

More experienced heads should benefit from a universal entitlement to high-quality CPD, alongside teachers. Recommendations also include a new bursary to encourage a "much wider group of middle and school leaders" to do national professional qualifications (NPQ), and a designated CPD lead in each school.

Among its 13 recommendations – which have not been costed – the report says that a "package of support and incentives" is needed to encourage leaders to take up posts in the most deprived communities.

It makes the case for greater collaboration between schools at a local networking level, and action by government and local services on the causes of educational under-performance, such



as unemployment, poverty and housing. The report also urges the Department for Education to make longer term investment in opportunity areas.

Brook added: "When we emerge from the pandemic, there can be no sense of merely flicking a switch and returning to the way things were, with all the same fault-lines as before."

He added: "We need to seize the opportunity presented to make changes to the parts of the education system that simply aren't working as well as they should."

"The best response to the damage inflicted by Covid on learning is to ensure that every pupil is taught by an expert teacher, someone who is continually improving their skills and is properly supported."

The report also raises the idea of a CPD quality mark to help schools identify high-quality training providers – an area it says is being looked at by the Wellcome Trust.

Leora Cruddas, chief executive the Confederation of School Trusts, said the "goal for every pupil in the country to be taught by an expert teacher" is welcomed. But added: "The report could have gone further in describing the evidence related to building the mental models of expertise in teachers and the structures that enable this to happen."

Wes Streeting, Labour's shadow minister for schools, said "we will only get the best out of our pupils if we get the best out of our teachers, support staff and school leaders which requires good-quality training and professional development".

The DfE said it is already "improving support and professional development for teachers at all stages of their career". That includes "tailored support for new headteachers who are at their least experienced and at most risk of leaving the profession" via a new NPQ in headship, from September 2021.

The proposals:

- Every school should designate a senior leader as professional development lead
- Government to extend CPD support for new teachers to all teachers by 2025
- Fully-funded support package for all new headteachers
- Bursary fund to incentivise participation in NPQs
- More research into impact of local partnerships on school improvement
- Government to create "compelling proposition" to recruit national leaders of education
- Long-term commitment from ministers to the opportunity areas programme
- Enhanced support for leaders in most deprived communities, including mentoring
- Ofsted focused on provider diagnostic insight for struggling schools

DfE denies it withholds laptops on form-filling grounds

HÉLÈNE MULHOLLAND

@LNMULHOLLAND

Headteachers claim they have had difficulty accessing laptops for self-isolating pupils because they didn't fill in an optional attendance form.

Schools have a legal duty to provide remote education to pupils who are forced to stay at home, and the government has promised additional laptops to assist.

But accessing the laptops is proving an uphill battle for some heads, despite rising absences, with leaders reporting being rebuffed on the grounds that they had not filled out the Department for Education's "educational setting status" form, which is optional for schools.

According to the DfE's latest attendance figures, the proportion of schools reporting one or more pupils self-isolating due to contact with a Covid case rose to 29 per cent last week, up from 16 per cent the week before.

Chris Dyson, head of Parklands primary school, Leeds, applied for additional laptops last week after being forced to "pop a bubble" of 20 children.

But he said he was told he wouldn't receive his allocation "because the DfE has not been informed your school has closed a bubble".

"It's absolutely nonsense because you have to ring up the DfE to burst a bubble and the local Public Health England team," said Dyson, who says he was also told by his local council he was "highly unlikely" to receive the laptops unless he'd had to close half his school.

When he chased again on Wednesday, an official at Leeds City Council informed Dyson the DfE had run out.

The council confirmed to *Schools Week* that it was told demand had outstripped supply – a claim denied by the DfE.

Leeds council also said it understood that the process was "dependent" on schools completing the form, and that some heads had reported "administrative difficulties" in accessing laptops.

After tweeting about the situation, Dyson filled out the attendance form on Wednesday this week and received an email



from the DfE the following day to inform him that he could apply for the laptops.

But heads who filled out the form have also reported problems.

Andrew Dickinson, head of Uplands Manor primary school in Smethwick, West Midlands, has had to shut five bubbles since the start of October, which has seen over 500 pupils sent home to isolate.

He completed the form, but weeks later, and despite repeated chasing, he has still not received a single laptop from his allocation, which was slashed from 118 to just 24 devices.

A lot of other heads are "in similar boats", he said.

"The fact that it's taking months to materialise suggests to me that the laptops are either not coming or they can't deliver on what they promised."

The DfE told *Schools Week* it contacts schools that state in their form submission that they have sent pupils home. Those schools that choose not to fill in the form will still receive support from when they get in touch, the department said.

The DfE also denied the claim that laptops are only distributed if more than half a school is sent home, and denied it had run out of laptops.

"In the context of significant global demand, we have updated our allocation process to more accurately align orders with the number of students that schools typically have self-isolating, ensuring as many children as possible benefit from receiving a device this term," a spokesperson said.

The department was unable to provide an update on the 105,508 devices delivered between September and October, but said over half a million would be delivered by Christmas.

Concerns remain that the revised laptop allocation – slashed in October by around 80 per cent, to the dismay of schools – will see many children from deprived backgrounds unable to access online learning.

"Ideally, the laptops need to be available before the children are sent home, and not after," said a spokesperson for the NAHT school leadership union.

Wes Streeting, Labour's shadow schools minister, told the Schools and Academies Show yesterday that the situation for pupils needing laptops needed "sorting out", adding that the DfE would not allow its civil servants to work at home "without the right kit".

EDITORIAL

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Rising teacher absence needs attention

Gavin Williamson was keen to talk about the importance of returning to routine Ofsted inspections and holding exams next year when he spoke earlier this week.

But the testimony from headteachers this week and the results of a worrying Teacher Tapp poll show the education secretary just isn't living in the real world.

If the poll data is extrapolated out to the whole country, up to 36,300 of England's 450,000 teachers could well be away from the classroom at the moment, a staggering statistic.

Yet the government seems to be carrying on as if everything is fine, dangling the threat of inspection over leaders' heads and still not confirming exactly how exams will work in 2021.

Surely we are now reaching a tipping point? If the number of staff off school continues to rise, more and more pupils will need to be sent home, and more and more learning will be disrupted.

It's time for Williamson to stop hiding and come up with a real strategy.

Labour reset shows it means business

If the schools community was in any doubt that Labour's approach to education policy had changed following Sir Keir Starmer's ascent to the leadership, that doubt will have disintegrated this week.

Wes Streeting, just a month into his role as shadow schools minister, made it abundantly clear during his appearance at this week's Schools and Academies Show that there's been a reset in the shadow education team.

"Don't tell us what you want to scrap, tell us what you want to build," he said.

His insistence that Ofsted needs reform not abolition echoes the words of his boss Kate Green, who told this newspaper in October that she was reviewing Labour's previous policy on the matter, and indeed its policy on almost everything.

Scrapping Ofsted flopped as a policy with parents. This shift is a smart one, and shows the party is serious about winning an election.

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Does class size matter? Rethinking the debate

Stacey Banks, @SBanks44

Equally, don't assume that smaller classes are easier. The spread in ability can make it incredibly hard to teach and there is little support because "you only have xy kids!".

Rapid Covid tests a 'game-changer' for schools

Mark Drury

Potentially good news. Guess there will be a lot of SLT who have to become expert at this too, just like we've had to master track-and-trace. It sounds easy when you have the Army in to help.

Academy loses fight to restrict in-year pupil admissions

John Keever, @JohnK73

Looks like this academy was trying to restrict places at the school for "difficult" pupils. That is why local planning and decision making are needed.

Tougher guidelines, but trustees need better data on executive pay

Chris Whitmore, @TSP_Chris

Excellent piece: the complexities of the multiplicity of national, regional and sub-regional labour markets involved, not to mention differentiations for professional and/or executive/leadership skills, makes it a minefield indeed.

Timothy's tweets raise questions over departmental impartiality

Smith Institute, @Smith_Institute

Perhaps the politicisation of public appointments – and attacks on senior civil servants – will stop now Cummings has gone.

Exams 2021: Wales now has a clear direction. What about us?

David Preece, @DoctorPreece

Absolutely agree with this – we need clarity, and we need the first focus to be on this. I can't understand why time has been taken to comment, report and interview about UCAS/UUK admissions *proposals* and reports for 2023 at the earliest, but we still don't know exams!

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Ian Stock

Does class size matter? Rethinking the debate

Or to put it more succinctly: good teaching rests primarily on good relationships and these are harder to build where numbers are larger. But of course, the technocrats would miss something like that.



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

Order life-long food to minimise Brexit disruption, DfE tells schools

Mark Watson

2020 just keeps on delivering doesn't it?

Cards on the table, I personally supported Remain, and honestly can't understand how we as a country thought that Leave was the right option. I thought it was a reckless decision at the time, and now it looks even more insane.

But we did vote Leave, and that was the country's choice, so we have to honour it. We can't look to blame the government for Brexit – it was the people's decision. On the basis it's happening, the government have to make the best out of whatever situation they find, and it seems to me they're simply saying "be prepared" because things might get rocky. They're not trying to "offload responsibility for a successful Brexit outcome on to schools and other public services" and it's disappointing (but not surprising) to hear such patent nonsense spouted by a union leader.

Restricting exams to core subjects 'under consideration'

Carl Smith

This just goes to show how out of touch Ofsted are. Schools would spend 90 per cent of their time on the core because of the high-stakes accountability system. The profession has a far better proposal for exams in all subjects, back-up papers, mass testing in schools and more choice within papers.

Xavier Bowers, @xavierbowers

This statement is no good to anybody at the moment! It just shows what an absolute shambles we are in as far as education is concerned. There is no leadership, no co-ordination and little appreciation of the daily grind of teachers on the fro

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Profile

JL DUTAUT | @DUTAUT



‘We will never waste a second. We are life givers here’

A headteacher for only three years, NASEN award-winner Matt Rooney isn’t wasting any time in making an impact, finds JL Dutaut

Matt Rooney, principal, St Giles School

As NAHT research revealed in these pages confirms, leading a school through this pandemic is, to put it mildly, a tough gig. To lead one where many students are clinically vulnerable and care needs make social distancing near-impossible can only be tougher. To do that with a school that just three years ago was put under an interim executive board (IEB) begins to sound implausible. And to come through it having earned a nomination from your team for a

national award – and win it – sounds like the stuff of fairytales.

Enter Matt Rooney, head of St Giles School in Retford, Nottinghamshire – a county where the incidence of coronavirus has been consistently high. Mass testing is being rolled out in the area, and it was the constituency’s MP, Lee Anderson, whose contact with Boris Johnson forced the prime minister back into self-isolation this week.

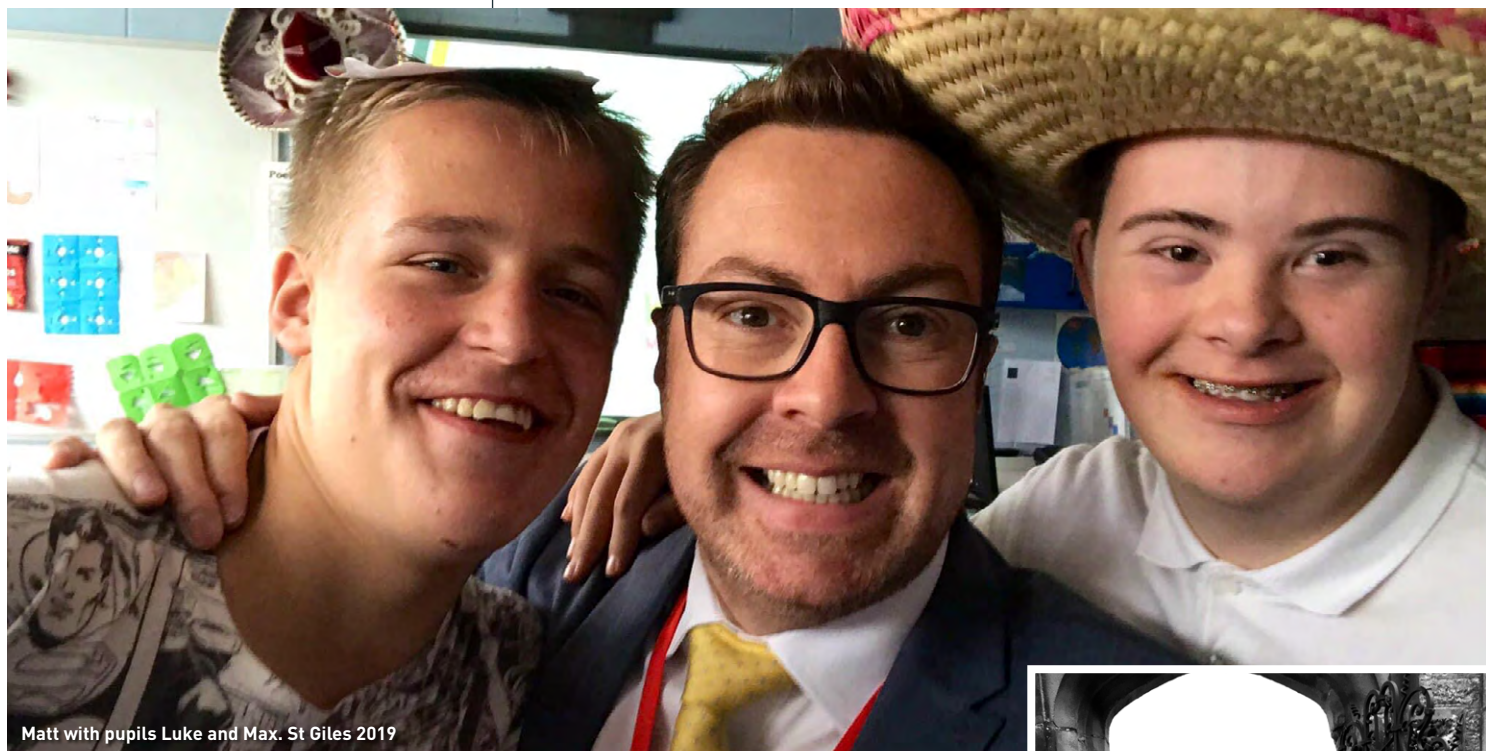
St Giles is a small stand-alone school – the very kind that is widely agreed to have struggled most throughout this crisis. But in spite of all the

challenges this all-through specialist school has faced, Rooney has just been awarded “SEND leader of the year” by the charity NASEN – the National Association for Special Educational Needs.

“How does it feel?” I ask. His smile belies a raft of emotions, but he answers coolly. “You can always trust your family and friends to keep you grounded. As my brother said to me, ‘They were probably short on nominations because they were all too busy doing their jobs.’”

It is of course not true, and Rooney is the first to compliment the sector for its response to the

Profile: Matthew Rooney



Matt with pupils Luke and Max. St Giles 2019



Matt's children, Poppy 8 and Martha 5, at Rainbows Hospice for Children and Young People 2019

"I was seeing the importance of life and the value of relationships and care first-hand"

school leaders. "The lack of clarity from the centre meant that everybody was running around trying to do their own thing in absolute darkness." But he and his team anticipated lockdown and began to plan for it early. "We pulled all of our staff together and we said, 'Have a day to just plan what you think our school operation needs to look like to keep things going.'"

So far, so normal. But it's what he did next that perhaps marks out his leadership through the crisis. "I took the leaders off and said, 'At some point, we will go into lockdown. But we'll come out of lockdown. So what we're going to do is we're going to spend the day planning how to get out, because going in is going to be a walk in the park.'"

In this way, by looking through and beyond the immediate crisis, he and his team were able – as much as possible – to neutralise the element of surprise and to focus on "the middle bit", "what the journey will look like for our students". He laughs



Matt with wife, Camellia 2017

at his own optimism about the ease with which lockdown would come to pass, but the strategy of keeping an eye on the exit has clearly paid off. After all, staff, parents, students and partners including the local authority were contacted about his nomination, and all supported it.

That strategy it turns out, though perhaps alien to many, came naturally to Rooney. In many ways, his life has been marked by unexpected events and protecting his charges from such shocks, it seems, is his strategy for helping them navigate their aftermath.

His mother, who spent her career in catering, passed away unexpectedly at the age of 54. He called her in hospital to announce he'd been made head of the Nottinghamshire Scouts (for whom he still volunteers) and expecting to see her the next

pandemic. "I can't imagine a school where a leader has not worked pretty much 24/7 since February, because it has just been relentless," he says. But it goes to show that the Oak National Academy curriculum lead for SEND – yes, he's been doing that too! – isn't the kind of person to let an accolade go to his head. In fact, he tells me news of the award came through during an SLT meeting and describes redirecting attention straight back to the next item on the agenda – the Christmas play.

But humility aside, NASEN's literature on the awards says of his leadership through the pandemic that it "has enabled families a sense of normality". Given the past months' incessant refrain of "the new normal", this intrigues me most. A sense of normality? How?

He opens with a criticism echoed by so many

Profile: Matthew Rooney



Matt, as head of the Nottinghamshire Scouts, at Nottingham Pride. 2018



Matt introducing HM The Queen to Scout Gallantry Award Recipients at Windsor Castle 2012

day. Sharing that happy event with her was the last time he would speak to her. His dad passed away at the age of 60 from a late-diagnosed cancer, and Rooney cared for him in a hospice for a month. "These weren't childhood experiences," he hastens to tell me, but it's not clear they were any easier for it.

Already engaged with special needs education, the hospice setting opened his eyes to a phenomenon that is familiar to many of his staff. "I'd never worked closely with a child, like lots of my colleagues have done here, who had passed away. I was seeing the importance of life and the value of relationships and care first-hand."

He talks of carrying his frail father home because he wanted to watch the rugby. "That was a pivotal thing for me. We have a commitment here that from the moment that child gets into school, we will never waste a second. We are life givers here. Yes, school will have to fundamentally do some education stuff. But it will also have to create some bloody amazing memories and opportunities."

Even his career in special needs education, to all intents and purposes, was unexpected. His family loved to go to the theatre but, by his own admission, he could neither sing nor dance nor do accents. It didn't stop his mother enrolling him in an extra-curricular drama club. "There was this really odd-looking group sat in the corner," he recounts. "They were the techies. So I kind of hedged my bets and decided through embarrassment and uselessness that that could be really interesting!"

It started a lifelong passion, perhaps aided by



Last family photograph before parents died (mum - Back 2 from left. Dad third from left) 2010

"It was a school that had crumbled. It had imploded on itself"

the fact that being the teachers' go-to sound-and-lighting man at school meant he could jump the dinner queue. He calls himself a techie geek to this day. In fact, the Christmas play they were discussing at that fateful meeting has metamorphosed into a "Christmas cinema spectacular" – another seamless adaptation to the coronavirus disruption!

And it was through this engagement with theatre that his involvement began. He joined an integrated theatre company – one in which members with and without disabilities play an equal part. "It was led by David Stewart, who is one of the most inspiring people I've ever met. He was the headteacher of a special school, and I just had my eyes opened to working with people with special needs. It was just incredible. I loved it."

Unsure about what to do with his life, Rooney approached Stewart who told him about the lack of role models in the sector at the time, and the rest is history. Since then, Rooney has held the role of multi-agency learning disability specialist with NHS Nottinghamshire, then spent a decade



Matt's first school photograph (nursery) 1986

with Nottinghamshire council in various SEND roles. He only stepped into a school role per se just under three years ago when he joined the St Giles IEB.

From a secondment for a couple of days a week, the headteacher's resignation brought matters to a head and Rooney stepped into the breach. He hasn't looked back, and St Giles has only looked forward since. In January this year, Ofsted judged the school to be 'good'.

But it's when he describes the state of it three years ago that the sheer magnitude of what Rooney has pulled off here makes the NASEN award – for all its cachet – seems somewhat inadequate. "It was a school that had crumbled. The governance was weak, the leadership wasn't there and the parents had lost confidence. The teachers had worked with their recognised trade union to bring the school to a closure for six days of strike action. It was on the front page of the local newspaper. It had imploded on itself."

All that while maintaining a sense of normality through a pandemic.

Not a second wasted indeed.

Opinion

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



DR HEATHER
MCCLUE

Director of learning for key stage 5,
David Ross Education Trust

Tackling racism in education starts with teacher training

The Insitute for Race Relations' recent paper shows we can't let up on the fight against racism in education, writes Dr Heather McClue

The summer's Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of the death of George Floyd in the United States' police custody created a unique moment in my 30 years' experience, when calls to decolonise the curriculum moved from the periphery of educational discourse to its centre. The Black community continues to fight for justice for its children in the face of a widening achievement gap and increasing school exclusion rates, but this term seems to have played host to a concerted pushback against this progressive wave.

New (non-statutory) guidance on sex and relationships education warned of "promoting divisive or victim narratives that are harmful to British society". A "campaign for common sense" echoed and amplified warnings from exchequer secretary and equalities minister Kemi Badenoch about the risk of breaking the law by teaching critical race theory - "an ideology that sees my blackness as victimhood and their whiteness as oppression", as she put it to parliament. Writing

later, she argued anti-racism was "creating a prison for Black people".

It was therefore with great interest that I read the report by Jessica Perera, published amid this pushback and to much less fanfare, that crystallises the plight of many Black male youths in the English education system. "From the 1980s onwards," she writes, "the State has

engaged in an ideological onslaught on the black radical tradition and its vision of a democratic, anti-racist and culturally inclusive education." Indeed.

The report discusses the implications of the academisation programme and the growth of alternative educational provision, or what she calls "the PRU-to-prison pipeline". When the academies programme was expanded from 2010, a rise in the exclusion rate was actually anticipated as schools were given more autonomy. Alternative education provision has, predictably then, developed at a similar rate to academisation, and the pupil referral unit has become a first step on the trajectory to criminalising



young people - disproportionately Black ones - following exclusion from mainstream school.

Perera limits her analysis to the plight of working-class Black youth, but Black under-achievement is classless. Black youths continue to academically under-achieve in the English school system at an alarming rate. Part of the problem, she argues, is that Black students are largely viewed as a homogeneous group by a predominantly white teaching profession. However

on teachers to "have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these". As outlined in Perera's report, to avoid unconsciously criminalising or stigmatising Black students, teachers can and should inform themselves about the lives of the Black students they teach, the communities they are from and ultimately the issues they face daily.

But just as there is no homogeneous group of Black students, there is no single correct way to meet that standard. Beyond blind compliance then, teachers and students alike need safe spaces to discuss issues of race in education and wider society and co-construct local strategies to transform their institutions. Edge Hill University's Institute for Social Responsibility provides helpful research and tools to support this approach.

Starting these conversations may not be easy, but it is necessary. Among many excellent starting points, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" stands out. As its author, Peggy McIntosh writes: "To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions."

Until teachers confront the unseen dimensions of race in English education, we are not so much "creating a prison for Black people" as perpetuating the free-flowing pipeline to it.

“Starting these conversations may not be easy, but it is necessary”

uncomfortable, these arguments are not new. They echo those raised by Bernard Coard, whose seminal work turns 50 next year. The issues remain disconcertingly similar.

Numerous calls for the mandatory inclusion of Black history will go some way to addressing the current knowledge deficit and inequality that exists in the curriculum and education system. However, Black history alone - especially not in the form of a standalone Black History Month - will not eradicate racism from the educational landscape. To make real inroads, decolonisation must start with initial teacher education (ITE) and continuous professional development (CPD).

The teachers' standards call

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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As the NAHT's commission on school improvement reports, Nick Brook sets out the case for a bold new vision for the future

Since the NAHT's new commission first met to discuss the question "how can we better support schools to improve?", the world of education has changed in ways we could scarcely have imagined. Schools have redesigned themselves, some many times over, and with no end in sight they are simply focused right now on keeping classes open and education going, one day at a time.

Given these circumstances, some may well question why we would choose this moment to publish a major report on the future of school improvement. Having spoken to many school leaders over recent months I am absolutely convinced that there is in fact no better time to talk about a positive vision for the future.

First, the crisis has presented an opportunity for change. Education reform is like trying to change the wheels on a car while it hurtles along the road. This year, the car has ground to a halt. There will be few opportunities like this in our lifetime to fix the car and start off in a new direction.

Second, the crisis has shown in no uncertain terms why change is necessary. It has focused attention on the role of schools in society. It has demonstrated the value of place-based leadership and the place of values-based leadership. It has reaffirmed the importance of supporting students' wellbeing as well as their academic progress and highlighted that schools are not islands and cannot be treated or measured as such.



NICK BROOK

Deputy general secretary, NAHT

Schools need a positive vision for the post-Covid era

Third, the crisis has laid bare a system that is ill-equipped to support its schools and school leaders. Ever-changing guidance from a department that has consistently been two steps behind the profession and unable or unwilling to listen has only made school leaders' work harder and left

show courage, determination and optimism for their teams, staff and communities, but in recent months I have become increasingly concerned by the number of colleagues saying they are intending to leave the profession once they've guided their schools through the pandemic.

"The crisis has shown why change is necessary"

many despairing.

But most importantly, the crisis has made the need for action urgent. I cannot think of a time when school leaders have been under quite so much pressure. They have had to

Worse, the lack of direction has led some to question how on earth they can maintain this even that long.

In a survey conducted by NAHT last month, almost half of respondents said they intended to leave school

leadership sooner than planned as a consequence of the crisis. But this overriding sense of exhaustion goes much deeper than the demands of responding to the pandemic; it has compounded dissatisfaction with what was present before the crisis hit. The direction they were facing as school leaders was not necessarily where their moral compass was pointing. Going back to the old normal, with all its old faultlines, is as unpalatable to them as this new normal is to all of us.

To get out of this quagmire, school professionals need hope, and that hope must be based on belief that a better education system is not only possible, but coming. Government must give those who are wavering a compelling reason to stay, and the way things were is not it. School leaders need to know there is a better future ahead – whether that is in terms of how they are supported, how they are held to account or how the government treats them.

So this is precisely the moment to be thinking about the future of education, and it is absolutely right that the profession steps forward to frame that debate. This week's publication of the NAHT School Improvement Commission's findings does precisely that. The report sets out a long-term vision for school improvement based on valuing and investing in teachers and leaders, genuine, deep collaboration between schools and proper support for those serving the most disadvantaged communities.

Once again, the profession is two steps ahead of the department. They've shown a better education system is possible. Now the question is: when is it coming?



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Accusations of anti-patriotism and threats of legal actions have worrying implications for teachers of history, writes Jonathan Mountstevens

When is it wrong to carry out historical research? According to the Common Sense Group of Conservative MPs, it is when it reveals material that questions the heroic status of "Britain's greatest sons", such as Winston Churchill. This is one of the charges laid in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, criticising a recent National Trust report into its properties' connections with colonialism and slavery.

Nobody appears to be claiming the report is incorrect in its findings, only objecting to its failure to promote a patriotic view of Britain's past. Indeed, speaking on the BBC, Conservative MP Ben Bradley condemned its "anti-British" rhetoric. Is it anti-British to be truthful about the past?

This "culture war" would be no more than a passing irritation were it not for strong signals from government in recent weeks that it might not hold the line in defence of a rigorous historical education against such ill-informed attacks.

Take the DfE's recent guidance for the RSHE curriculum, for example. It had little to do with history, but the wording left ambiguity about whether some of the stipulations should be applied across all subjects. Schools were forbidden from using any material produced by organisations with "a publicly stated desire to abolish or overthrow democracy, capitalism or to end free and fair elections". Concerned about making use of sources produced by the (decidedly anti-capitalist) Communist Party in my A-level Soviet Union course, I contacted the DfE for clarification. The response, several weeks later, left me none the wiser. And then last month equalities



JONATHAN MOUNTSTEVENS

Deputy headteacher, Beaumont School

The government's culture war is chilling for curriculum rigour

minister Kemi Badenoch showed her willingness to invoke the law as a weapon against schools that are deemed to be less than politically impartial. I have argued elsewhere that I do not think this is a viable

established fact, but I am concerned that her remarks are likely to deter history teachers from grappling with challenging curricular questions. In a speech in which the threat of legal action against schools was

“Is it anti-British to be truthful about the past?”

approach, and ironically Badenoch was one-sided in her comments on what would constitute an offence.

I agreed with her point that critical race theory is contested, rather than

less than subtle, she argued that "our curriculum does not need to be decolonised". Was she suggesting a school that sets out to decolonise its history curriculum is breaking the



law?

Decolonisation means different things to different people. The government seems to want to take on teachers who are trying to paint Britain as the villain of history so that children will hate their country. Maybe these people exist, but I have yet to meet any of them. What I have come across is a lot of history teachers who want the curriculum to do a better job of representing the diversity of the past and of the historical discipline itself.

Those leading the debate about a representative curriculum, such as Claire Hollis, make their arguments on the basis of historical rigour, not anti-British sentiment. If the government continues to create a climate of fear around these issues, aligning itself with those who are more interested in throwing insults at "snowflakes" than in historical accuracy, schools may well fight shy of making changes and pupils will be the losers.

In short, anyone – minister, MP or other – who thinks history teachers should feed kids a diet of comforting stories about an imagined past, especially while simultaneously telling us not to indoctrinate them, is stopping us doing our job.

Comprehensive, "warts-and-all" education about the past is in the interests of all young people, and it is not only historians who should care about it. A government that has consistently made a strong social justice case for academic rigour should be first to affirm its commitment to the teaching of history in all its complexity, and to condemn those who distort it in order to suit their political agenda, whether they are on the left or the right.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MATHILDE
IVESON

AMELIE
NICHOLS

Year 9 students,
St Francis Xavier
School



We can have sustainable schools if we pull together

The best place to start the green revolution is in our schools, say Mathilde Iveson and Amelie Nichols

We've been honoured to be called Yorkshire's answer to Greta Thunberg in coverage of our eco team's work. But it's too easy to say environmentalism is a young people's issue, and then let us solve all the problems. For sure, when we have the support of other pupils, we find being part of the eco team easier and more encouraging, but it isn't always the case. It's the support of the adults that really makes the difference and keeps us going, and we are lucky that all the staff at St Francis Xavier support what we are doing.

After all, it's our future that is most at risk if we don't care for our environment. By doing small things such as picking up litter, measuring our food waste, making eco presentations and publishing a trust-wide eco newsletter, we are showing our communities not just where the problems are, but how to solve them. Meanwhile, we're developing our knowledge of science, English and our public speaking skills. It's a win for us, for

the school and for the community.

And when we all pull together, it's surprising what we can achieve. We were recently invited to The Guardian offices after one of our group wrote to them about the

“ One billion sounds like a lot, but it's only a first step

single-use wrapping on their magazines. Shortly after that letter, the newspaper changed to a potato starch wrapping. Now we've written to our MP, Rishi Sunak, with some ideas about making improvements in our constituency. Little things lead to big changes, but some things are simply out of our reach. If Mr Sunak shows leadership on environmental issues, then others will follow. We will be able to achieve much more with his support than without.

Let's be honest. Preventing devastating climate change is urgent. A report this week says we are already past a point of no return. But we can't give up on making the planet sustainable for longer. We deserve that hope, and that's why we challenge our leaders, whether that's our MP or



our headteacher, Stuart McGhee.

To be fair to them, they have responded positively. Mr Sunak visited the school when it was awarded the 2019 Education Estates Award for Sustainability. And we couldn't have received that award without Mr McGhee, who has signed St Francis Xavier (SFX) up to Ashden's LetsGoZero campaign to make schools sustainable by 2030, or without the staff at SFX - who mostly manage to stay on the right side of our Eco Team Police Department, switching off their lights, computers and projectors when they're not in use!

The government has said it will fund £1 billion to help improve the energy efficiency of public buildings. More solar panels would help us power our school as well as St Mary's primary next door. But

our heating system and insulation need improving too, and there are a lot of schools. One billion pounds sounds like a lot, but it's only a first step to making schools carbon-neutral, which is what we really need. It makes sense for so many reasons.

First, the money saved on bills could be spent on teachers and resources. Second, where schools lead, communities follow. Delivering the prime minister's "green industrial revolution" depends on us. And third, it would mean that our schools could teach us about respecting our environment, not just through their words, but through their actions.

Maybe when we have that, then more of our peers will join in with the little things. In the meantime, we'll keep acting locally and thinking globally. And if you're sitting around waiting for another Greta to get your school started, don't. The talent and passion are there if you just nurture them.

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



Inadequate

Author: Priya Lakhani

Publisher: John Catt

Reviewer: Melissa Benn, writer, campaigner and founder of the Local Schools Network

Priya Lakhani is a dynamic businesswoman, a barrister-turned-cooking sauce entrepreneur and now the award-winning founder CEO of Century tech (or CENTURY as it is rather distractingly capitalised throughout this book), and currently sits on the UK government's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Council. A talented and telegenic performer, Lakhani has now produced this punchy, boldly titled polemic which comes garlanded with praise from a range of voices within the current political and educational establishment.

Inadequate claims our education system is not fit for purpose, particularly in the area of Artificial Intelligence - Lakhani's special area of interest and industry. As a preface to her proposals for reform, she conscientiously takes us through the development of the so-called fourth industrial revolution and the potentially dazzling, and threatening, implications of AI.

In one of the most interesting parts of the book she discusses the urgent need for ethical regulation, raising the alarming prospect of AI creations so sophisticated they could easily find ways around human attempts to close them down. (If you want to sample the true flavour of the nightmare ahead, imagine hundreds of thousands of Donald Trumps in robot form, refusing to concede power.)

But while there's a lot of talk of the need for a "system rethink" and the power of working "smarter, not harder" there are fewer concrete solutions. For example, she identifies routine marking as one of the many mind-numbing, unnecessary data-related tasks that has made contemporary teaching such a miserable job and one that AI could really help with. Rightly concluding

that teaching will always remain a largely human endeavour, Lakhani nonetheless uses this opportunity to slip in one of several, by her own admission, "shameless" plugs for CENTURY products.

More broadly, she accuses our education system of failing in a number of key areas - a bloated curriculum, over-rigid accountability measures and inflexible testing and exams, as last summer's GCSE and A-level debacle made frustratingly clear. Our teachers have no real creative and intellectual freedom, causing them to leave the profession in droves and as a result of all these developments our young people are suffering what appears to be an escalating mental health crisis.

These are significant charges, but they are hardly new. Over the past decade a host of progressive educationalists, campaigners and groups such as Headteachers' Roundtable (to name but a few) have warned of these developments, only to be knocked back time and again, accused of trying to sabotage the government's quest for "high standards".

Not only does Lakhani fail to acknowledge these alternative voices, but she has an unfortunate tendency to characterise anyone with an interest in education - bar herself, I presume? - as either an unhelpful busybody or a dangerously vested interest. This leads to the odd lumping together of a neo-traditionalist figure like Nick Gibb with the teacher unions.

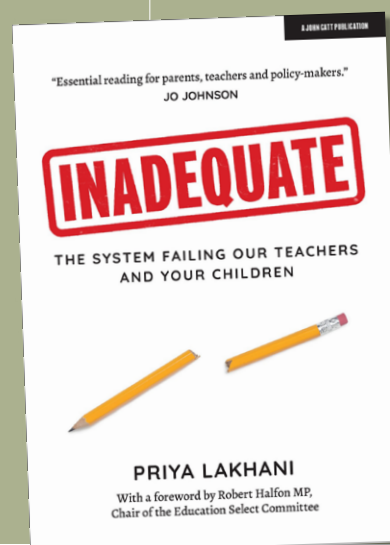
Lakhani makes no mention of the structural problems

that shore up our "inadequate" system, including the yawning gap between private and state school resources, the creeping expansion of selection that overwhelmingly benefits the affluent, or undemocratic practices in so many academies, from vastly inflated CEO salaries to the worrying suppression of union activities.

But judging from the book's influential endorsers, many from within the Tory party, *Inadequate* signals the new reach and power of a cross-party, cross-sector coalition advocating a limited menu of reform - one that has gathered significant momentum in this crisis year.

For a crisp summary of Lakhani's valuable proposals, jump to page 141. Here you will find calls for a slimmed-down curriculum, the replacement of our stressful and inefficient exams with more low-stakes assessment, a demand for teachers to be given the freedom to teach and sufficient in-school resources to enable young people to deal with rising stress and actually enjoy their school life.

Let's hope Lakhani is given more of a hearing within the DfE than the many who have made similar proposals over the past few years and been dismissed out of hand as slothful utopians. I still retain some hope that we can do better as a country. An education system adequately serving the majority of young people would mark a promising start.



Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is Sonia Thompson, Headteacher, St Matthew's C of E teaching and research school, Birmingham

@son1bun

Bookshop Blurbs

@jonnybid

Jon Biddle is the consummate teacher who reads and reader who teaches. The reading-for-pleasure champion is now on a mission to save our independent bookshops. He has created an impressive map of over 200 of them and is inviting teachers to champion their local bookshops as guest contributors to his blog. Here, fellow teacher/blogger Stephen Conner celebrates two of his favourites, transporting us to a cornucopia of diverse books, special reads and quiet spaces. "Every visit is a joy, and leaves me a little bit poorer but more than a little richer too," he writes, and it made me want to jump on a train to Nottingham. In this most challenging of times, when the power of a good book to comfort and cheer is needed more than ever, Jon's rallying cry loud and clear: use your independent bookshop, or lose it.

Done is better than perfect

@MaryMyatt

The inimitable Mary Myatt pulls no punches in this blog on the potential dangers of chasing unachievable goals – a timely

TOP BLOGS of the week



message for school leaders with such a weight of responsibility on their shoulders. Quoting Sheryl Sandberg, Myatt warns that "aiming for perfection causes frustration at best and paralysis at worst" and that "the pursuit of perfection is unrealistic". The blog reveals how leverage can only be achieved by focusing on what matters at each level of the school, from meetings to how we communicate with parents, and ends by painting a picture of what "sensible" leaders are doing: questioning every facet of their practices in the name of sanity. Without this reflection time, attaining the achievable may well be lost in the name of pursuing perfection. We can't say Mary didn't warn us!

Making a good impression

@head_teach

Matthew Evans is a headteacher who never fails to challenge my thinking. Here, he confidently takes his readers on a journey to locate what "impressionistic knowledge" is. Relying on his own memories of an uninspiring French teacher and his loathing of PE, he borrows the term from Bereiter and Scardamalia to explore how impressionistic knowledge allows us to do and think, diving deeper into the connection between impressions and episodic memories. Evans makes a strong case that impressions are

important for educators to consider; they form our values, steer our interests and may make us want to study. However, he cautions against allowing impressions to take teachers to a place where students enjoy the lessons rather than the subject. Too much fun with too little connection to disciplinary knowledge may in fact "reduce future propulsion towards further study". The blog ends with a list of don'ts for providing children with good impressions. It is not about providing "customer satisfaction over curriculum mastery". Instead, he charges us to create curricular experiences that are worthwhile, authentic and "shape inclinations and dispositions, long after the memories have faded".

Climbing and the art of data minimalism

@jpembroke

I saw James Pembroke speak in Birmingham some years ago and he spoke sense about assessment then. I'm happy to report he's still doing it now. In this blog, he weaves a skilful narrative of Messner's climb of Mt. Everest in 1980 as an analogy for how assessment has become a beast, bogged down in a quagmire of spreadsheets. His challenge to us is to ask ourselves honestly about the purpose of assessment in our schools, and not to fudge the answers. "Who is data for? What impact will it have?" If the responses are not weighted in favour of impact on learning then we may well be chasing after diminishing returns. The blog ends with a description of a chance encounter in the Welsh hills that opened Pembroke's eyes to the importance of perspective and of travelling light. Data is essential, he maintains, but what he advocates is a revaluation of the purpose of that data to unleash our schools' full potential to be fleet-footed, flexible and to endure. Especially in these trying times, that makes perfect sense to me.

Research

The Centre for Education and youth will review a research development each half term.
Contact them @TheCFEY if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

How do essential skills shape young people's life outcomes?

Will Millard, head of engagement, CfEY and Elnaz Kashefpakdel, Head of Research and Impact at The Skills Builder Partnership

What is it that young people really need to learn in order to thrive throughout school and later life? This question has always been hotly contested, and rightly so: the things young people learn at school set them up for further study, training or employment.

However, when it comes to the narrow question of skills, there's less debate. You'll likely find overlap in what a teacher, parent, politician, chief executive or young person thinks pupils should learn. The importance of skills such as working constructively in a team, communicating effectively, or setting suitable goals seems unarguable. But how do such skills actually shape outcomes for young people during school and later life?

This question was the focus of an evidence review, conducted by The Centre for Education and Youth (CFEY) for the Skills Builder Partnership. CfEY identified and reviewed studies examining how essential skills – defined by Skills Builder Universal Framework as listening, speaking, problem solving, creativity, staying positive, aiming high, teamwork, and leadership – shape outcomes in three key areas: education, employment, and social and emotional wellbeing.

What we found out is that goal setting appears to be particularly important in supporting young people's academic attainment. For example, one longitudinal study found that setting suitably ambitious and targeted goals towards particular job roles and career trajectories led to improved academic outcomes among pupils with special educational needs (although this relationship is not as strong for young people without special needs). Evidence from smaller studies



suggests that interventions supporting communication and teamwork correlate with improved academic results, for children in the Early Years as well as university undergraduates.

Being able to communicate effectively and stay positive can lead to improved employment outcomes for some young people. For example, French academics used longitudinal datasets to highlight how young people's communication skills and perseverance help to explain differences in income, in particular among young people with the highest salaries. Studies examining the performance of interns in Mexico, and another examining communication lessons on US medical trainees, found that interpersonal skills were significantly associated with improved professional performance.

The evidence is perhaps strongest in relation to the impact of skills on young people's social and

emotional wellbeing. We found a range of studies outlining how interventions targeting children's self-esteem, decision making and communication can lead to heightened self-assurance and improved social functioning. For example, analysis of data from evaluations of a US programme targeting pre-school and elementary children's resilience found that, on average, the intervention improved pupils' prosocial behaviours while reducing the incidence of bullying and aggression. We also found evidence that skills-focused interventions can impact positively on young people's social and emotional wellbeing outside mainstream settings.

Despite a large body of evidence examining the link between interventions, skills and outcomes, we encountered gaps. We also found that more studies focus on university students and recent graduates than on young children. We would like to see more research that examines the opportunity costs associated with teaching skills explicitly versus not doing so. Where evidence examines the links between interventions, skills and outcomes, it often doesn't make causal claims.

And then there's the million-dollar question: what does all this mean for teachers? Where studies in our review explored the features of effective delivery, they indicated that essential skills interventions tend to be more effective when they are regular, long term, explicit, embedded, structured, supported and targeted. The review highlights alignment between the evidence base and Skills Builder's approach, and teachers, employers and practitioners working in youth organisations can view Skills Builder's six principles of best practice on the Skills Builder website, alongside free resources for teaching essential skills. Case studies about implementing the framework are available in CfEY's 2017 report on the teachability of essential skills.



WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

MONDAY

With accusations of cronyism rife within government, along comes the news, courtesy of *The Sunday Times*, that the Department for Education awarded a £1.7 million contract to Populus, a consultancy that happens to be run by the husband of schools minister Nick Gibb.

Michael Simmonds's company was paid for "market research services to support the initial teacher training recruitment marketing campaign" – a brief that falls under one Nick Gibb. However, unlike all those Covid contracts, this was awarded via a proper tendering process.

The contract is one of a number handed to Populus by public bodies over the past year. The Financial Conduct Authority just paid it £11 million for market research, while Populus was one of five suppliers that split £20 million for Ofcom market research in August.

It's also not the first time the DfE has hired the consultancy.

Annual reports published by the department show it spent £333,000 with the company in 2019-20, £271,000 in 2018-19 and £284,000 in 2017-18.

Nice work if you can get it.

TUESDAY

Instructions to stock up on tinned food are always a little ominous, so we can imagine school leaders were more than a little concerned to read updated guidance on school food in relation to Brexit.

The new guidance on the food supply chain from January 1 states that schools "may need to consider whether changes are necessary".

These might include "varying the timing and number of deliveries to allow for transport delays" and "being as flexible as possible on delivery times".

It also says schools may need to consider "ordering longer shelf-life products during this period, such as frozen foods or foods that can be safely stored at room temperature".

It's not as if school leaders have anything else going on ...

WEDNESDAY

Gavin Williamson once again proved he can talk for more than ten minutes without saying much when he appeared at the Schools and Academies Show.

The education secretary gave his usual spiel about how proud he is of schools, before launching into non-announcements about Ofsted and exams.

We hear Gav was due to appear for a full half-hour, including a Q&A, but claimed last minute that he had to be in a meeting.

Instead, he sent in an 11-minute pre-recorded speech, and delegates were left with a holding screen until the beginning of the next session (although perhaps that was more interesting than the speech that preceded it).

As shadow schools minister Wes Streeting remarked: "Maybe if Williamson had stuck around for Qs yesterday he might have understood the struggles schools are facing on the ground."

Unlike Williamson, Amanda Spielman put herself forward for questions when she appeared on the same bill.

Interviewed by David Laws, a former schools minister now head honcho at the

Education Policy Institute, she accused him of asking a "very tabloid question" about how she would rate (in Ofsted grades) her time in office.

Apparently flattered, Laws responded: "Thank you."

But the chief inspector refused to give him a "nice, neat soundbite".

"I think we do a really tough job across the board, but does it mean we're perfect? Of course it doesn't. There's always room for improvement, but [I'm] determined to stay on the path for improving ourselves."

See Gavin, that wasn't so hard, was it?

With a total of £556 million, the DfE was second only to the Department of Health and Social Care in the amount spent on procurement during the pandemic, according to today's damning National Audit Office (NAO) report that revealed PPE suppliers with political ties were given "high-priority" status.

Elsewhere, a contract handed to Public First (a company set up by Michael Gove allies James Frayne and Rachel Wolf) was awarded after some of the work had been carried out. The NAO warned procuring work without a formal contract "increases risks, including underperformance".

The company was hired by the Cabinet Office, Gove's own department, in March to carry out focus group and communications services. The department then awarded a retrospective contract in June for a maximum of £840,000 for work already carried out and potential future work. Public First invoiced for £550,000. Trebles all round, etc.



LYMM HIGH SCHOOL

Director of Finance and Operations

Start Date:	January 2021 (or as soon as possible thereafter)
Contract Type:	Full-time (with potential for flexible working, including term-time only)
Contract Term:	Permanent
Salary:	£58,422 - £61,672

We need a dynamic and dedicated Director of Finance and Operations to provide strong financial and operational leadership for our highly successful school, and to maximise commercial opportunities as we move into the next, exciting phase of our strategic development. Candidates must have a strong business acumen, expertise in finance, experience of working with high-performing teams and a clear understanding of how to run highly efficient support services in support of an organisation's mission. Prior experience of working in a school environment is not essential but candidates must possess a precise, analytical and agile mind, creativity, strong interpersonal skills, plenty of drive and energy, and commitment to the ethos and aims of the school.

Lymm High School is an 11-18 school with nearly 2000 students (380 in the 6th form) and exceptional resources, including 28 acres of beautiful grounds, a swimming pool, leisure complex and our own residential centre in Anglesey. A very good and well-established school already, we have made rapid progress in recent years and have no intention of resting on our laurels. The potential here is huge. Depending upon the skills and experience of the successful candidate, there are opportunities for flexible working in terms of hours/days of work and the potential for some remote working. This could include holidays that align with school holidays.

Please see the linked documents and our website for further details. Ordinarily, we would offer the chance to visit the school but obviously that is not possible in the current circumstances. However, if you cannot find the information you need to help you decide whether we are the kind of school you would be happy working in, please do let us know and we would be happy to arrange phone calls or a 'virtual' meeting. Contact recruitment@lymmhigh.org.uk with any queries.

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this legal requirement.

The successful applicant's appointment will be subject to satisfactory pre-employment clearances including a Disclosure and Barring Service check (formally CRB).

For further details and an application form please visit: www.lymmhigh.org.uk

Closing date for application: 9am, Friday 4th December

Interview Dates: TBC

Application forms should be returned to recruitment@lymmhigh.org.uk



We're looking for a Deputy Head Teacher

£55,338 - £61,166 (Leadership Scale 12-16) + Outstanding benefits package

As Deputy Head Teacher at Oversands School, you'll have the chance to lead and shape our school and deliver the kind of education you always wanted to. Working with the Head Teacher, you will set the vision for the future of the school, ensuring we have the right people and plans in place to see that our young people - whatever their needs - leave the school feeling proud of what they've achieved.

That's why we're looking for two pretty unique individuals as our deputies, one for education and one with a pastoral focus. You will be a passionate leader of teaching, learning and assessment or an advocate and leader of the pastoral care aspects if a child's development. If you would like to be a part of the quality education or the behaviour and welfare of pupils please do get in touch.

Oversands School is an independent, specialist residential and day school in rural Cumbria, providing high quality education for girls and boys aged 8 to 19. The school meets the needs of a diverse group of pupils with challenging behaviours, alongside a range of other associated conditions which can hinder academic progress.

You'll receive a competitive salary, Teacher Pension Scheme, Full school holidays, as well as extensive Group staff benefits such as Health Plan/Employee Assistance.



Visit www.witherslackgroupjobs.co.uk for the full job description, benefits and to apply. For an informal discussion about the role please call Helen Park, Office Manager on 015395 52397. ► Closing Date: 1st December 2020

The Witherslack Group is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of its young people. This post is subject to an enhanced DBS check. We are an equal opportunities employer welcoming applications from all sections of the community.



DEPUTY HEADTEACHER

Lion Academy Trust - Wellingborough - Olympic & Warwick Primary

A key element of our success as a trust is our consistency in our approach, models, policies and practices. Visiting any of our schools on any given day you will observe the same high expectations, the same teaching and learning strategies and the same welcoming, positive and supportive atmospheres. Working with the Executive headteacher, you will be based at Olympic and Warwick Primary Schools, Wellingborough and be responsible for leading teaching and learning alongside a team of leaders. This is an exciting opportunity to join a committed team to further develop the schools in their educational offer.

Closing Date: Friday 4th December 2020 12.00 pm

Interviews Week.comm: Monday 7th December 2020

All initial enquiries should be made to Kerry Ridge, Operations Manager

kerry@lionacademytrust.net

Any offer of employment for this post will be subject to a satisfactory Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service, medical checks and two positive reference checks.



Olive Academies

Are you an experienced marketing and communication professional who has a passion for education?

Our network of academies is growing and we need a Marketing and Communications Manager to work closely with our senior leaders, to lead and develop our marketing and communications strategy, plan and deliver multi-channel campaigns, social media activity, internal communications and proactive PR for OA's academies, ensure we provide the best support to all our staff, and engage with our key stakeholders effectively.

Headteacher posts at two Trust schools in Dudley, West Midlands.



Hob Green Primary School ●●● The Bromley Pensnett Primary School

Organisation type: Academy Trust
Contract: Permanent/Full time
Salary description: Leadership Group Pay Scale: L15 to L21 subject to experience and negotiation

Closing date: 27 November 2020

Visit to schools and Trust: Due to Covid-19 restrictions this will not be possible.

Interview dates: 7 and 8 December 2020

Taking up post: Easter 2021 or September 2021 for the right candidate.

Trust Headteacher

drb Ignite Academy Trust, Birmingham (nine primary schools in Birmingham and Dudley, West Midlands)

These are exciting times for our Trust. We are developing a committed team of talented staff, supportive parents and a strong board of trustees. We require exceptional school leaders to lead improvement in two of our Dudley schools and to play an influential role in wider Trust developments.

We need leaders with:

- a deep commitment to and knowledge of the education and well-being needs of all pupils.
- a clear vision for a dynamic, engaging and inclusive primary curriculum.
- extensive experience of EYFS, KS1 and KS2.

- a proven track record of successful leadership, delivering results and improving outcomes.
- a commitment to working collaboratively.
- the ability to inspire staff and pupils and champion success for all.

You will be supported by a strong central school improvement team and dedicated group of fellow headteachers who work together through a culture of collaborative effort and trust.

We can offer you:

- a dynamic professional development experience.
- opportunity to make a major contribution to the development of a growing and ambitious organisation.
- a values-led culture that underpins the attitudes and behaviour of all involved with the Trust.

Download application form and Information Pack: www.drbignitemat.org
Return completed application form to: rhawkins@drbignitemat.org

Closing date: 27 November 2020

Contact details: drb Ignite Academy Trust

Telephone number: 0121 231 7131

Contact: James Hill – Trust Executive Director of School Improvement



Timbertree Academy is part of United Learning, a national group of academies and independent schools. It's a happy, lively, forward thinking school that secures good outcomes for its pupils by offering the very best education, care and services to its children and families.

Our developing West Midlands cluster comprises Timbertree, Corngreaves and Ham Dingle Primary Schools, with all three being led by an Executive Headteacher.

An excellent opportunity for a leader looking to combine the running of

their own school with the benefit of working closely with an Executive Headteacher as well as within a developing cluster enabling high quality, bespoke school improvement and wider opportunities for both staff and students to work collaboratively.

If you are looking for an exciting and highly rewarding role, offering excellent professional development, and if you have a strong commitment to improving the lives of all young people, we encourage you to visit us.



Beacon View Primary Academy
 The best in everyone™
 Part of United Learning

An excellent opportunity to build on your previous experience and lead Beacon View through the process of collaborative school improvement.

As the Principal, you will combine the autonomy of leading the school, with the benefit of being part of a successful national group of academies and independent schools which share a mission to bring out 'the best in everyone' and improve the life chances of the children and young people.

Beacon View is one of three schools within a local cluster within the Paulsgrove area in Portsmouth, with all schools being within walking

distance of each other. Cluster partnership will enable high quality, bespoke school improvement and wider opportunities for both staff and pupils to work collaboratively across the schools.

If you are looking for an exciting, challenging and highly rewarding role within a Group that offers excellent professional development, and you have an unshakeable commitment to improving the lives of children and families, we look forward to hearing from you.



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 | 07904 158737

Drew Richardson-Walsh | 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.

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