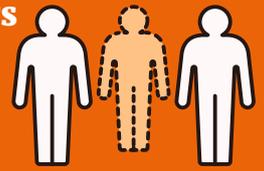


SCHOOLS WEEK

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

The school absence crisis: in numbers



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Why we want tutoring to take place in school



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It's ok for BAME teachers to hold conservative values



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Ofsted sacking opens a consultancy can of worms



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- Manifesto promise of £30k starting salaries by 2022 is abandoned
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SCHOOLS WEEK

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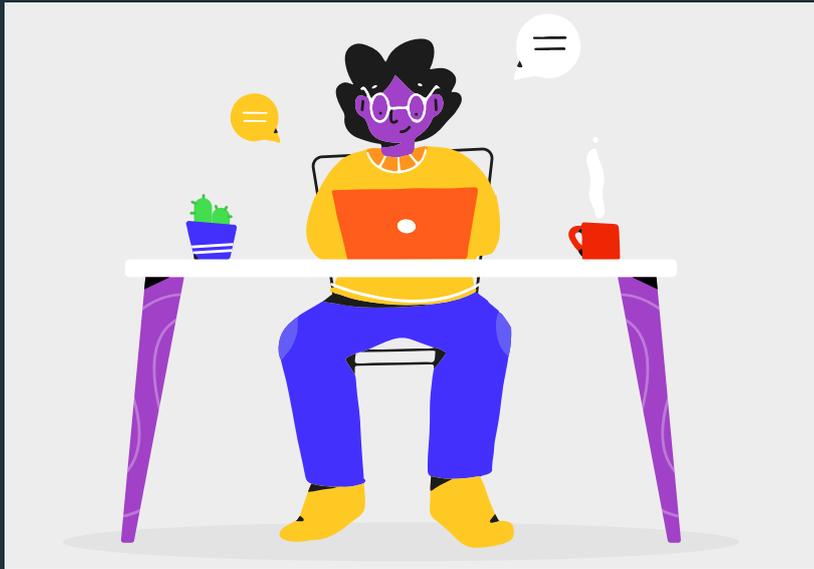
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No excuses not to adopt flexible working anymore



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We can't wait 130 years for real representation

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The government has gone from shameful to shameless

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Fix schools' image problem to tempt home-schoolers back

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Spending review

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Manifesto promise of £30k starter salaries by 2022 ditched

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The government has abandoned its pledge to raise the starting salaries for teachers to £30,000 by 2022-23. The target will now be reached a year later instead.

The Treasury initially confirmed on Wednesday that it still planned to deliver the commitment made in the Conservatives' election manifesto last year, despite enacting a pay freeze for teachers in the next financial year. However, they have since clarified that the deadline for the policy to come into effect has been pushed back to 2024, when the current Parliament is due to come to an end.

In order to meet the new deadline, the government would have to raise starting salaries to £30,000 from September 2023, a year later than they would have done under the old policy.

Unions reacted with fury yesterday after chancellor Rishi Sunak (pictured) announced that public sector staff earning more than £24,000 will receive no pay rise in 2021-22. Geoff Barton, general secretary of leadership union ASCL, said: "The government asks more and more of teachers and leaders, and then effectively cuts their pay. It should not be surprised if staff decide to leave the profession."

Paul Whiteman, leader of the NAHT union, said school leaders would be "justifiably furious



... hard-working public sector workers, who have been on the front line of the pandemic response should not be forced to pay for the recovery out of their own pockets."

The announcement also prompted confusion about the £30,000 starting salaries pledge, which was previously going to be achieved incrementally over three years.

The first shift – a 5.5 per cent rise in the minimum point of the main pay range – came into force this September, taking the starting salary outside London to £25,714. Had the old target remained in place, the starting salary would have had to be increased by more than 16 per cent in just one year.

Both the Treasury and the Department for Education did not respond to requests for further information about how the target will now be achieved.

Last year, education secretary Gavin Williamson said teachers should be in "no doubt

that this government fully backs them in every stage of their career, starting with rewarding starting salaries".

He added: "I want the best talent to be drawn to the teaching profession and for schools to compete with biggest employers in the labour market and recruit the brightest and the best into teaching."

Teaching has seen a rise in applications during the pandemic. But Ruth Talbot, deputy director of the DfE's teaching workforce directorate, said this week that she was "expecting this bulge in interest to be short-lived".

The pushing back of the deadline also means it falls outside the government's current three-year spending plan for schools.

Sunak confirmed yesterday that the government remains committed to its pledge to raise the schools budget by £7.1 billion by 2022-23.

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the funding pledge announced by the government last year would still result in an "unprecedented" 13-year real-terms freeze.

But Susan Acland-Hood, the DfE's acting permanent secretary, told the Public Accounts Committee yesterday that she was in talks with the Treasury to ensure "we don't ever get into a position where funding is a reason schools have to close during the pandemic". She hoped to be able to give more information "soon".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

DFE FLUNKS FUNDING QUESTIONS OVER NTP'S SECOND YEAR

The government's flagship National Tutoring Programme will be funded for an extra year, but the department was unable to confirm yesterday whether the cash is new.

Schools Week revealed on Wednesday that the scheme was heading for a second year, and the Department for Education belatedly confirmed the move yesterday.

Gavin Williamson said the spending review meant the government "can carry on delivering" its catch-up package "including £350 million to extend the success of the recently launched National Tutoring Programme".

But both the Treasury and DfE have failed to respond to repeated questions about how the additional year will be funded.

Schools Week revealed the department is sitting

on an unallocated £140 million from this year's promised £350 million for the scheme.

It's expected this will be used to fund the project for a second year.

Documents from Wednesday's spending review also show a £400 million pot of cash has been allocated for education in 2021-22. This is listed as Covid education spending "including schools catch-up and supplementary support for free school meals".

There were no further details about the cash, but sources close to the government suggested at least some of it was for year two of the NTP.

Despite repeated requests, the DfE would not say whether the £350 million mentioned by Williamson was part of the £400 million pot included in the spending review.

The government initially told newspapers in June that the NTP would be a "multi-year" scheme, but then switched it to a one-year programme shortly before the announcement was made.

Schools Week reported last week how heads had encountered a number of issues with the NTP, including a rule that only allows them to book tutoring in one subject per child, and a stipulation that pupils must be in school to receive online tutoring.

Elsewhere, schools will get £22 million funding to release staff to mentor new teachers as part of the government's new early career framework.

It's in addition to the already allocated £130 million for schools to offer new teachers a reduced timetable and additional training.

See opinion piece by Becky Francis Page 22

Winter plan



Christmas closure chaos as schools allowed to extend holidays

HÉLÈNE MULHOLLAND

@LNMULHOLLAND

EXCLUSIVE

The government's approach to schools closing early for Christmas was mired in confusion this week after two academy trusts were given the green light to shut a week early, just days after another trust was blocked from doing so.

Schools Week revealed this week that Focus Trust cancelled plans to close its 15 schools across Manchester and West Yorkshire on December 11, a week earlier than planned, after the government intervened.

But it has emerged that the Lion Academy Trust and the Lion Education Trust – partner academy trusts – have been told they can close all nine of their primary schools on 11 December. Parents were notified of the changed term dates early in the autumn term.

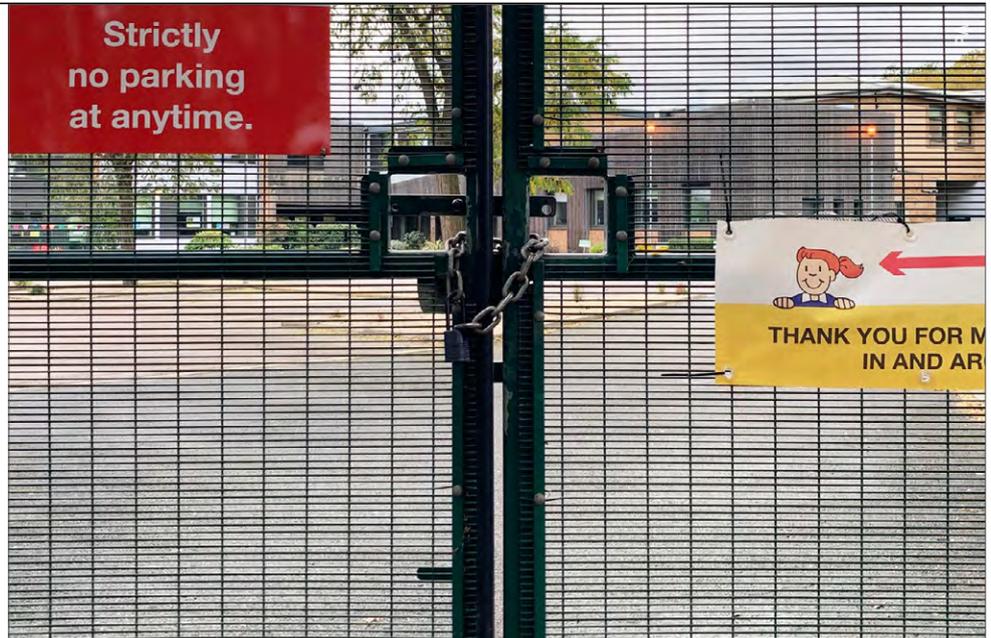
Dr Mary Bousted, National Education Union joint general secretary, said: "It speaks to the general chaos of this government, that on the one hand, two trusts are being allowed to shut their doors early this term while, on the other hand, the Focus Trust has been very publicly rebutted."

The Lion Academy Trusts runs six primary schools across Wellingborough, in Northamptonshire, and London, and the Lion Education Trust, has two primaries in Essex and one in London.

A spokesman for the trusts said they were contacted by Sue Baldwin, regional schools commissioner (RSC) for East of England and North-East London this week.

But they said the published term days "will be adhered to. These were revised at the end of September and were communicated in good time to our families and staff. We are proceeding on that basis and will continue to deliver the best possible education for all our pupils in every setting."

The government's winter plan, published on Monday, stipulates that schools "should not change their Christmas holidays or close early this term". Prime minister Boris



Johnson underlined the desire to keep pupils in school "as much as we can" during a press conference this week.

Bousted added: "Schools should be allowed to use their own judgment based on conversations with local health services, but a great deal of the mess we are now in could have been averted if Boris Johnson had acted faster and heeded advice on a circuit break for half term.

"As things stand, we emerge from lockdown with hardly any areas of the country in tier one, and a virtual Christmas for most families."

Focus Trust, which is based in the northwest of England, declined to comment. It had made the decision to shut schools early to ensure families could gather safely over Christmas, but this plan proved short-lived after it was given a "formal" notice.

Vicky Beer, the RSC for Lancashire and West Yorkshire, said in a letter to the trust seen by *Schools Week*, that she "cannot support" the decision and earned that, if the trust did not U-turn, she would "escalate" the case to ministers who "may wish to consider further action".

The trust backed down, saying it had been made aware for the first time that, under the Coronavirus Act 2020, individual

trusts had no academy freedoms to make decisions for Covid-related reasons, such as setting their own term dates.

Under coronavirus legal powers, the secretary of state can issue a temporary continuity direction "requiring the taking of reasonable steps" to keep a school open and also "require the alteration of term dates".

The DfE also denied Focus Trust permission to run two inset days at the end of term or move to remote learning.

The Confederation of School Trusts said the powers in the Coronavirus Act were not included in any guidance shared with trusts. Steve Rollett, CST deputy chief executive, said: "We do not think enough has been done by the DfE to communicate the powers the secretary of state has ... and to explain how these powers relate to existing legislation and academy freedoms, relating to the trust sector."

Meanwhile, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council has told parents that schools with term-end dates of either December 21 or 22 will close two days early. Schools will instead "provide home learning on these days".

The DfE confirmed that the council has been approached, but would not comment on the outcome of discussions. Stockport council has not provided a comment.

Explainer



The Winter Plan: what you need to know

Under the government's Covid winter plan, the country will return to a three-tier system of local restrictions next week, but with some changes to the system that was in place before November 5. Here's what schools need to know about the plan.

1 Schools will stay open ...

Under all three tiers that will be in place across the country from December 2, schools will remain open and pupils will be told to attend school or college "as normal, unless they are self-isolating".



There will also be an exemption to gathering limits for supervised activities provided for children, including wraparound childcare taking place before and after school, groups and activities for under-18s and children's playgroups.

2... and shouldn't change holiday dates

The winter plan states that schools "should not change their Christmas holidays or close early this term".



It comes after *Schools Week* revealed that an academy trust had been forced to U-turn on a decision to close early for Christmas, following government intervention.

According to the winter plan, parents "should continue to send their children to school during term time and students should continue to attend college right up until the end of term".

A time-limited change to social restrictions over Christmas "does not require any children to be taken out of school prematurely", it continued.

3 'Education settings' will pilot testing as alternative to isolation

An approach that will see regular repeated testing used as an alternative for self-isolation will be piloted in "education settings".



The winter plan has set out a plan to introduce frequent testing "as an alternative to the need for self-isolation for people who have had close contact with someone who has Covid-19".

Under such a system, those who had been in contact would be offered regular tests and will only have to self-isolate if they test positive.

The approach will be trialled in Liverpool first, then "some institutional settings", including the NHS, care homes, education and employers, before the end of the year.

If successful, it will be rolled out across the country from next year. A government spokesperson said further details will be published "in due course".

4 Tier 3 LAs will get rapid testing 'surge' - including for schools

The government's winter plan states that rapid testing will continue to be piloted in schools.

Local authorities that go into tier 3 from December 2 will also be offered the opportunity to participate in a "six-week testing surge".

This will enable local authorities "to offer tests to the general population as well as targeting high-risk workplaces and industries, hard-to-reach communities and schools in a coordinated effort to drive prevalence down".

Again, the government is yet to release further details.



5 Clinically extremely vulnerable can return to school

Clinically extremely vulnerable can return to school.

As national restrictions end next week, current guidance stating that clinically extremely vulnerable people should not go to work or school will also cease to be in effect.

Updated guidance published by the Department for Education states that from December 2, "all staff can continue to attend school in all three local restriction tiers".

However, schools in tier 3 areas "may wish to discuss flexibilities that support clinically extremely vulnerable staff, such as staggered start times to reduce travel during rush hour".

"In the future, the government will only reintroduce formal restrictive shielding advice in some local areas in tier 3: very high alert where this has been advised by the chief medical officer, and only for a limited period of time."



6 More guidance 'in coming days'

According to the winter plan, the DfE will update its guidance "in the coming days" to reflect "how settings should operate under the strengthened tier system".

The guidance will also include an updated contingency framework "in the exceptional circumstances in which further restrictions on education are required in any area".

However, the government said it would "do everything possible to avoid enacting those contingency measures at any stage".

It's been reported the Contain framework tier-system will be scrapped, but no further guidance had been published by the time *Schools Week* went to press.



In numbers

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The worrying stats behind falling attendance

School attendance slumped again last week, with one in ten pupils now off school because of Covid and nearly three-quarters of secondaries now affected. With two weeks still left of term, school leaders have warned the level of disruption is reaching breaking point. But the government is unmoved in its insistence schools must remain open. Here's four of the most worrying statistics.

REGIONS WITH MOST TEACHERS MISSING

1. YORKSHIRE AND THE NORTH EAST

17/11: 11%
09/11: 8%
02/11: 7%



2. MIDLANDS

17/11: 8%
09/11: 7%
02/11: 4%



3. SOUTH EAST

17/11: 7%
09/11: 5%
02/11: 3%

Source: TeacherTapp survey data

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PUPILS OFF WITH COVID

19/11: 876,000

12/11: 615,000

5/11: 361,000



Source: weekly government attendance statistics

REGIONS WITH MOST DISRUPTION

The proportion of a teacher's last class where one or more pupils were missing because of Covid (on Thursday, November 19)

Yorkshire and North East: 69%

Midlands: 69%

North West: 67%

South East: 53%

South West: 53%

East of England: 51%

London: 50%



Source: TeacherTapp survey data

SECONDARY SCHOOL PROBLEMS

Number of secondaries with one or more pupils self-isolating after a case in school

19/11: 73%

12/11: 64%

5/11: 38%



Source: weekly government attendance statistics

Investigation

Exams 2021: what's on the table as deadline looms

Despite waiting for months, *Schools Week* understands the government will fall short of its pledge to communicate the plans for next year's exams to the sector in November. But an announcement is getting closer. We spoke to insiders to see what was on the table...

The exams announcement will contain policies that address a few different areas, such as making exams easier, grades more generous, providing contingency measures for pupils who may be off on exam day and also attempting to balance up the difference in lost learning between pupils, schools and regions.

Making exams easier

This should include various measures. One of these could be content signalling, such as where advance notice is given by the exam board of what topics are going to come up.

While it gives schools a heads-up on what to expect, it has challenges as it may not be possible to do it for every subject – and there are concerns it could lead to varied interpretations by teachers.

Another idea tabled is around question paper optionality and whether the number of questions should increase. While this has its benefits, there are concerns it could cause distraction for some students.

Ofqual's interim chief regulator Dame Glenys Stacey has also told heads that formula sheets in science, more time for certain papers and being more sensitive of the ramping up of question difficulty are all in the mix. But she said none was "straightforward" and all involved "some compromise over technical validity".



Lost learning is 'key issue'

Arguably the most difficult area to find a solution for is how to compensate for varied learning loss across England.

One of the options on the table is to drop components. This could be the exam board stipulating which one to leave out, or for teachers to request which one should be dropped. Sources say an advantage of this idea is the "simplicity" of it.

Another proposal is running an appeals system after the series, where teachers can essentially appeal if content came up that pupils had missed out on having the chance to learn.

There are downsides to this as students may have a potentially poor exam experience, and it is mitigating for lost learning after the exam, rather than before.

There have also been calls to introduce some sort of regional grading system, with fears of pupils facing a "covid penalty" unless Ofqual takes geographical differences into account. However, experts have shot this down as unworkable.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said this is the "key issue", but admitted "we are not convinced that anything we have so far seen achieves" equalling out "the differential learning experiences of candidates".

Reserve papers likely to feature as contingency measure

The problem to solve here is how can pupils who may be isolating on exams day still take the test.

Mock exams at some point next year have been discussed as one way to mitigate this. But it would have to be decided whether they were teacher assessed or exam board assessed mocks, and what the standardisation approach would be.

Sammy Wright, a commissioner at the Social Mobility Commission, warned earlier this month that mock exams in January could disadvantage poorer pupils even more as they haven't had time to catch up on what they have missed.

Meanwhile, earlier the month the Education Policy Institute suggested benchmarking assessments if exams were cancelled.

Other options being discussed include a portfolio of teacher evidence and reserve papers after the exam series, the latter of which seems nailed on.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson told MPs in September they were "very much taking on board what Ofqual has said about maybe needing to have a reserve set of papers for youngsters who... may not be in a position to take the examinations".

More generous grades – but by how much?

Stacey has told ministers she wants to compensate pupils with "more generous" national performance standards next year (and beyond).

It's a strong indicator that some of the grade inflation seen in this summer's results, with centre-assessed grades being awarded, could be allowed to continue. But we don't know how much.

The regulator also said this week that applying comparable outcomes to exams results will not be enough to compensate for learning loss where it "affects some learners far more than others. There is still a case for applying the comparable outcomes principle, albeit only as a partial compensation strategy."

The Sunday Times has reported the amount of lesson time each pupil has lost to coronavirus could be recorded to allow universities to lower entry requirements for those hardest hit.

So, when will we find out?

Williamson has said "we should aim to inform the sector of the conclusions of the contingency planning in November".

To meet this deadline, the announcement would have to be by Monday. But *Schools Week* understands this will likely not be met. DfE said "we will set out our plans in the coming weeks".



News

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So much for transparency: DfE snubs exams request

JOHN DICKENS
@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

Gavin Williamson has snubbed demands from the education select committee to provide details of key meetings his department held with Ofqual in the run-up to the exams debacle, despite promising transparency.

The education secretary had been ordered by committee chair Robert Halfon to provide the information by Monday, after missing an earlier deadline.

But Williamson has not provided the correspondence and minutes of meetings his department's officials had with the exams regulator, despite telling the committee in September he was "very open" to sharing the information.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the refusal "beggars belief... It is completely unacceptable and adds insult to injury over this summer's grading fiasco.

"Students, parents, schools and colleges all deserve full transparency by the government over what discussions and decisions took place in order to understand exactly what went wrong."

During a committee meeting on September 16, Halfon asked for the department to publish "the minutes of all relevant meetings, submissions and emails between the DfE and Ofqual since March 26".

The committee is investigating what went wrong after the government was forced into

Q934 **Chair:** Will the Department publish, or give Ofqual permission to release, the minutes of all relevant meetings, submissions and e-mails between the DfE and Ofqual since 26 March?

Gavin Williamson: As you will know, Mr Chairman, we are very happy to work with you and the Committee on what information is required and needs to be released from the Department and, of course, with Ofqual as well. We have always been very open to doing that. As I said in the House the other week, there is advice that people need to be able to give in a free and frank way and with the confidence and belief that it would always remain confidential, but we are very happy to work with you to ensure that we do the absolute maximum to ensure that as much information as the Committee requires is made available to you.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/876/html/>

a spectacular U-turn over the controversial algorithm grades, instead issuing pupils their teacher grades.

During the hearing, Williamson acknowledged some of the advice would have been given in confidence and should remain secret.

But he claimed he was "very open" to working with the committee to do the "absolute maximum to ensure that as much information as the committee requires is made available to you".

Williamson also told the House of Commons in September he will "commit now" to working with the committee to "provide the information that they request wherever it is possible".

On the same day, schools minister Nick Gibb told MPs: "There are lessons to learn, and we want to be transparent."

Despite this, Halfon wrote to Williamson on November 10 as the information had not

materialised.

He said for the committee to "understand fully what happened here, and to effectively discharge our scrutiny role, we are dependent on accessing the relevant official papers and minutes of meetings relating to this episode".

Halfon requested the information be sent by Monday (23rd) at the latest. But this request has not been met.

A spokesperson for the committee told Schools Week: "It remains important for the committee to be able to understand the basis for the decisions taken on exams earlier in the year.

"As such, discussions and correspondence between the committee and Department for Education on obtaining the information we requested remain ongoing."

The DfE did not respond to a request for comment.

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR_93

Phonics gets legal check as union fights on

A school leaders' union is "assessing the legal status" of the year 2 phonics check this autumn in a bid to spare teachers an "additional and unnecessary burden".

In an update to its members, NAHT general secretary Paul Whiteman revealed that the union's fight against the controversial return of the tests was far from over.

In July, the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) announced that schools would be asked to administer phonics screening checks for year 2 pupils during the autumn

term after they missed the June test due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The tests were opposed by the NAHT, which said it would add pressure on its members who were already dealing with the fallout of the pandemic.

The union offered an alternative solution whereby teacher assessments would be provided, but the Department for Education has ploughed ahead with its plans. Schools are required to submit phonics results in December.

Whiteman said: "NAHT is currently assessing the legal status of these tests and the possible options available to the union as a whole and individual members."

James Bowen, the union's director of policy, added: "We know members are extremely frustrated about having to spend time administering these checks when they provide no useful information, so we are looking into the statutory requirements on schools with regard to the year 2 check."

The DfE was approached for comment.



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Investigation

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Inspector's dismissal opens up consultancy can of worms

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

An Ofsted inspector with 20 years of service was sacked after conducting an independent review which concluded that a school at the centre of a rebrokering battle was making "good progress". The dismissal highlights a "grey area" within the watchdog's rules for its part-time consultants and the work they do outside their duties with the inspectorate.

In September, the Department for Education published a termination notice for Landau Forte Academy Moorhead, in Derbyshire. The DfE said there was no "formal evidence" that the Landau Forte Charitable Trust was "providing has had, or is having, any impact on the outcomes of pupils".

The trust said it was appealing against the decision and commissioned an independent review from an Ofsted inspector who works as a school improvement consultant.

The inspector, who wishes to remain anonymous, produced the report on October 14, but two days later saw his employment with the inspectorate terminated for engaging in activities that "materially breached" his contract.

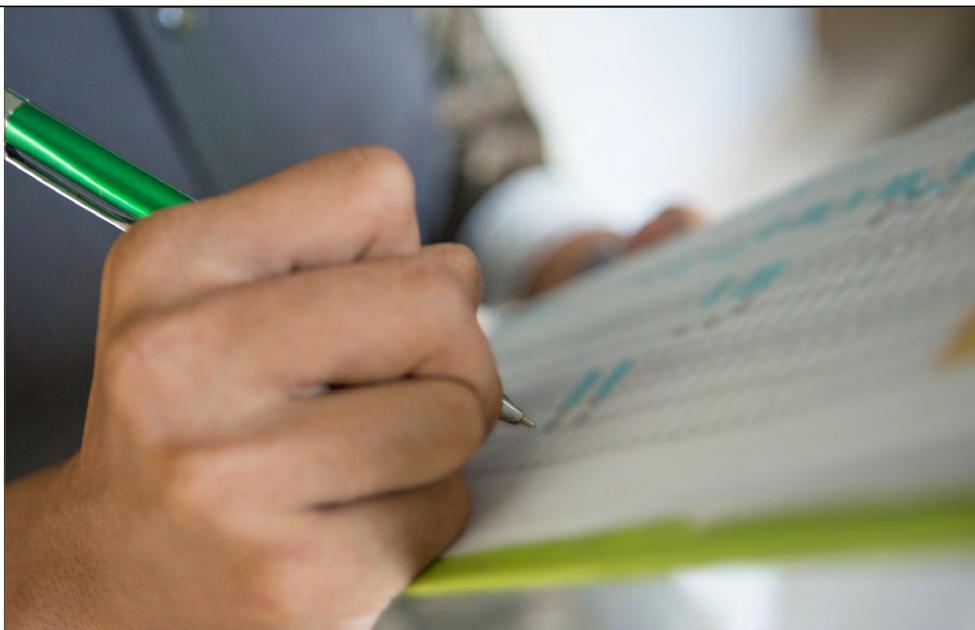
The report was said to have found the school was making "good progress" from its special measures judgment. It has not been published, however, so it is unclear how Ofsted came by it.

In the reasons given for the termination, Schools Week understands that Ofsted pointed out that inspectors must not use the inspectorate's name – except when working for the watchdog.

It added that Ofsted inspectors must never represent themselves as an inspector for purposes of commercial gain, nor use Ofsted information for purposes other than with Ofsted. Inspectors must also not disclose that Ofsted is a client or use Ofsted's name or brand for promotion.

However, the inspector claims to have breached none of these rules. He did not use the watchdog's name when promoting his consultancy work, only mentioning that he was a schools inspector who previously worked as an HMI, and only used Ofsted's name on his CV.

A spokesperson said Ofsted did not comment on individual cases. Its conflict of interest policy states that inspectors must declare "previous, present, or future consultancy work" with schools and trusts – yet it does not forbid them from doing such work.



The inspector told Schools Week that they regularly updated their conflict of interests to record which trusts they were working with to ensure they were not sent there on Ofsted business. They had never previously had a problem or been told to stop.

The role of Ofsted inspector (OI) differs from that of a Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) – which is a full-time position. OIs are mostly seconded from schools and colleges, and some also work in consultancy roles.

Schools Week found numerous examples online of consultants who highlighted Ofsted experience when offering their services. Clive Davies, of education support and consultancy firm Focus Education, said there was "undoubtedly a grey area... It would be very foolhardy of anybody to believe the schools' agenda isn't driven by what Ofsted is going to think of them."

"Therefore, this is where the grey area comes into it. If we didn't have knowledge of the framework from Ofsted, real knowledge, we would be found wanting in our ability to support schools as well as they would like us to."

Ofsted has got tough on inspectors doing other work. It banned them from running "mocksteds" in schools in 2015, with inspectors said to be charging up to £600 a day to help heads prepare for a visit from the inspectorate.

But schools commissioning independent reviews seems to be quite common. Khalsa Academies Trust, for instance, recently commissioned a review by the Confederation of School Trusts when fighting a termination notice for Khalsa Secondary Academy.

The case also throws up potential difficulties for organisations such as Challenge Partners, a charity that runs peer review programmes to inform school improvement. Its quality assurance review is described as being led by "an Ofsted-experienced lead reviewer, supported by senior leaders and headteachers from other schools in the network".

The charity did not respond to a request for comment.

Davies said that, while some of the firm's consultants have Ofsted experience, they have cut ties with the watchdog as navigating the grey area was potentially too troublesome.

Emails sent to OIs, and seen by Schools Week, warn against undertaking any form of "mock" visit or Ofsted training and revealed that a few OI contracts had been terminated due to such breaches since "interim visits" began in September.

Duncan Woodhead, of the FDA Union which represents inspectors, said he would have "serious concerns if merely stating on a CV that you were previously an HMI would cause Ofsted to terminate an OI contract".

When asked about the review, Landau Forte would only say that it was "explicitly not a 'mocksted', nor did it award any type of grade". It refused to share the report.

Moorhead school has twice been judged "inadequate". Carol Gray, interim regional schools commissioner for the East Midlands and Humber, has said there is a "very real risk that performance will not improve and children will not receive the education they deserve".

News

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Exams: Poor kids didn't lose out, but private school boost

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

There is “no evidence” that the system for awarding GCSEs and A-levels this year systematically disadvantaged poorer pupils or those with protected characteristics, an analysis by Ofqual has found.

But the gap between poorer pupils and their better-off peers in attainment of GCSEs at grade 5 or above actually widened slightly this year, new government data shows.

Ofqual published a technical report this week with in-depth analysis of the grades achieved by pupils of different genders, ethnic backgrounds, special educational needs status and eligibility for free school meals. The analyses aimed to examine “concerns” that the system used this year could have introduced inequalities, or affected pre-existing ones.

It concluded that there was “no evidence that either the calculated grades or the final grades awarded this year were systematically biased against candidates with protected characteristics or from disadvantaged backgrounds”.

Exams were cancelled after schools closed to all but the most vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers in March. Instead, schools were asked to provide centre-assessment grades and a rank order of pupils within each grade, which were then standardised by exam boards using a computer algorithm.

But the government was forced to U-turn and issue non-standardised centre-assessment grades after an outcry over the calculated grades, around 40 per cent of which had been downgraded at A-level.

Ofqual's report found that, had calculated grades been issued, the



results “would have been more closely in line” with the established relationships between student characteristics and outcomes seen in previous results. However, the changes seen by using final grades were “small”.

The analysis comes after new data out this week showed the attainment gap between poorer pupils and their better-off peers had narrowed overall this year, though it did widen in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving at least a grade 5 – a “strong” pass according to the government.

In a blog post for Education Datalab, researchers Dave Thomson and Philip Nye said the narrowing of the attainment gap overall “isn't conclusive evidence that some groups weren't disadvantaged by the 2020 arrangements”.

They added: “Nonetheless, the early results give a degree of confidence that disadvantaged pupils and those from ethnic groups that on average have lower attainment won't be further disadvantaged if centre assessment grades have to be used again in 2021.”

Government figures also show how private schools still saw the biggest boost in top grades at A-level following this year's exams fiasco, despite the decision to issue centre-assessment grades (CAGs).

This year, 60.9 per cent of grades issued to pupils in independent schools were an A* or an A, up 16.6 percentage points on last year, when 44.3 per cent were top grades.

The proportion of top grades issued in state schools only increased by 12.7 percentage points, from 23 per cent in 2019 to 35.7 per cent this year.

Private schools also saw a much bigger increase in the proportion of A* grades, up 11 percentage points, compared with a six percentage point rise in 2019.

It comes after Ofqual's report revealed that there was “some evidence” that around 6,300 GCSE entries by pupils with low prior attainment and unknown socioeconomic status “may have received disproportionately overestimated grades”.

Most of these pupils are at independent schools, Ofqual said, and the effect was “equally noticeable in grades using CAGs, calculated grades, and final grades”. About 6,300 entries represents around 2.4 per cent of all GCSE entries from private schools this year.



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Call for resits as over 1,000 hit by medical exam technical glitches

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

School exam managers and admissions experts are demanding that pupils whose online Oxbridge admissions exams were hit with technical problems are allowed to resit the tests.

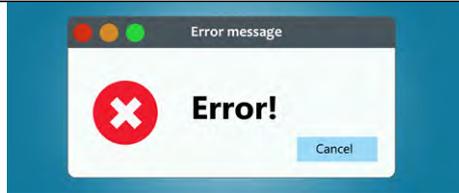
Schools Week can reveal that one in eight pupils who sat the BioMedical Admission Test (BMAT) – a total of 1,125 students – reported technical glitches during the exam. Experts said this renders the test “useless”.

Due to the fallout of Covid-19, admission exams such as BMAT, for pupils hoping to study medicine, biomedical science or dentistry, were switched to an online format at the start of the month. Cambridge Assessment, the exam board which administered the test, said it was working closely with universities to “ensure all applicants are considered fairly” and had encouraged those who faced problems to apply for special consideration.

The board said that around 3 per cent of the 10,500 students taking the test had “requested special consideration because they were unable to complete all or part of the test”.

A further 1,125 students, or one in eight, reported being hit by technical issues but were able to complete their test. BMAT results are due to be published today (Friday).

Yet a survey by medical admissions experts UniAdmissions suggests the disruption could



have been even greater, with 85% of around 1,000 students saying they encountered technical problems. Dr Rohan Agarwal, founder of UniAdmissions, added: “A resit is an absolute must or they tell universities to just disregard it. Special considerations won’t work because of the number of students involved.”

“The test is used very aggressively by universities to shortlist the best candidates for medicine. If the result for even a small percentage of students is off, that actually throws the whole system and makes the BMAT useless to a certain extent this year.”

Agarwal said that, if resits took place at the end of the year, in line with summer exams, universities would still have time to make informed decisions.

Schools Week previously reported that a number of schools said their pupils had been disadvantaged with tests not working, test links not arriving and formatting issues hindering the completion of the exam.

The BMAT is designed to provide additional evidence to support a candidate’s application to medical school. It is used by universities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College London,

but each university sets its own criteria.

A school exams manager, who wished to remain anonymous, said they feared the exam board “wouldn’t be able to measure the impact of the disruption” and “couldn’t level the playing field”.

Of the six pupils at that school who sat the BMAT, two encountered technical difficulties. While one was sorted quickly, the other pupil’s problems persisted, leaving them in a “flood of tears by the end”.

The exams manager added: “Medicine is highly competitive. I don’t know how they can even this playing field as if this happened to another student perhaps they wouldn’t have been so badly affected or reacted the same way.”

“I think the students should be given an option to resit a paper test so those online ones can be put to one side.”

Meanwhile Yasmin Sarwar, CEO of Oxford International College, said around half of the 30 students sitting the BMAT faced issues.

While she noted that it would be difficult for an individual’s experience to be categorised, she admitted that it would be “too difficult for the medical schools to make decisions without the tests as it’s just too competitive”.

A Cambridge Assessment spokesperson said: “We are working closely with those universities who use the results of BMAT to ensure all applications are considered fairly, drawing on information from our special consideration process.”

HÉLÈNE MULHOLLAND | @LNMULHOLLAND

Two days for a laptop? School heads ‘shocked’ by minister’s claim

A minister’s claim that laptops for disadvantaged pupils will be delivered within two days of being requested will come as a shock to most head teachers, a union leader has said.

Schools minister Nick Gibb rebuffed concerns from MPs in the House of Commons this week that the government’s scheme to provide free laptops for disadvantaged pupils was falling well short of what was required.

Schools saw their allocations of laptops slashed last month, despite Gibb claiming that “any school where pupils are self-isolating, and which has disadvantaged students who do not have access to a computer, is able to contact the department to acquire extra computers beyond those allocated.”

“All they have to do is phone the Department for Education, and they will have the computer,

if they fulfil the eligibility, within 48 hours of putting in that call.”

But Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders union NAHT, said the minister’s claim would come as a surprise to most school leaders.

“The government’s laptop scheme requires an urgent upgrade. Assurances by ministers that schools can get hold of extra laptops for pupils in 48 hours will come as a shock to most school leaders. In reality, many schools have had their laptop requests reduced by the DfE.”

Gibb’s comments also seem at odds with official guidance, which states that schools are only eligible to claim for laptops in certain circumstances, for instance if there are more than 15 self-isolating children within their school.

Andrew Dickinson, head teacher of Uplands

Manor Primary School, Smethwick, West Midlands, told *Schools Week* that he was still waiting for his allocation of 24 laptops, despite first lodging a request in early October.

Whiteman added: “There will be plenty of children who are being denied access to a device because of this regulation and we would urge the government to correct this immediately.”

New research shows that more than four in five schools with the most deprived pupils do not have access to the devices they need to help self-isolating pupils.

The Oak National Academy, an online classroom, is in talks with mobile phone suppliers to “zero-rate” educational websites, exempting them from tax and ensuring that the most vulnerable children are not left behind.

News

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Oh I DON'T like to be beside the seaside: £14m scheme flops

JOHN DICKENS
@JOHNDICKENSSW

A £14 million government scheme to recruit the “best and brightest” school leaders to turn around the country’s toughest schools missed its recruitment target by over two-thirds.

An evaluation of the government’s Talented Leaders programme, launched in 2014, found just 32 leaders of the promised 100 were actually recruited to struggling schools.

Furthermore, the government-commissioned review found just 21 of the heads stayed in their schools for the expected three years.

The study found that “a range of challenges” thwarted the programme, which aimed to place “top-performing heads” in schools facing the “toughest challenges”, mostly in rural, coastal or deprived areas that struggled to recruit “a great leader”.

These included not attracting enough applications from existing heads willing to relocate. More than half of those recruited were previously deputy heads.

Schools also shunned the scheme with “concerns about the loss of control over who would be recruited as a headteacher of their school”.

Instead, a “significant proportion” of Talented Leaders ended up applying directly for a headship position in a school, rather than being matched to one that had already signed up to be part of the programme.

“Successful Talented Leaders were primarily motivated to apply to the programme for



altruistic reasons, though many also saw this as an opportunity for career development,” the report stated.

“Contribution to relocation costs was not considered influential in encouraging matched Talented Leaders to join the programme (and many did not relocate).”

Leaders taking up a post at least 50 miles away from where they lived could access a relocation package of up to £15,000. But the report found this was “not considered influential in encouraging matched Talented Leaders to join the programme (and many did not relocate).”

Research from the final year of the programme showed just six leaders planned to stay beyond the three-year commitment.

“Of those who had already moved on or planned to leave, none stated that they had only envisaged that it would be a three-year commitment when starting at their school,” the report added.

“Reasons for leaving varied but included personal circumstance and wanting a new

challenge. In most schools they had already secured a replacement head. Those who were staying at their school highlighted they wanted to ‘finish the job’ and ensure changes were sustained.”

Heads who were given relocation costs and moved before the three-year mark had to pay “all or part” of the cash back.

But there were some positives of the scheme, run by the Future Leaders Trust, which later became the Ambition Institute.

The impact on schools was judged positive by mentors, staff and leaders across several areas including improving teaching and learning, boosting staff morale and improving pupil behaviour.

“Improvements in staff morale and job satisfaction were also reported,” the report added. “However, even in schools where all required major changes had been made, there was an acknowledgement that the school was still on an improvement journey.”

The package of support offered through the programme was also “highly influential” in recruiting leaders. This included £50,000 to build “sustainable leadership capacity” in a school, plus £15,000 for continued development of leaders and access to a mentor.

Hilary Spencer, chief executive of Ambition, said the biggest challenge was persuading heads to relocate to rural, coastal and isolated areas. It was “a challenge we know still exists”, she said.

As the numbers were “smaller than envisaged”, the scheme cost “less than 40%” of the £14 million, Spencer added.

Study finds lack of evidence on wellbeing programmes

A government-commissioned literature review, titled “School and college staff wellbeing” was also published yesterday (despite being completed in December).

Although there was a range of wellbeing intervention programmes in schools, the study found both a lack of evidence and monitoring of effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the schemes.

The study called for better signposting of support for staff and said there was little research of staff wellbeing in special schools, sixth forms and alternative provision.

Rather than just focus on addressing symptoms of poor wellbeing, schemes should also recognise indicators of positive wellbeing.

Another report was also published, titled “Exploring the relationship between teacher workload and target setting”. Sixty school staff were questioned on areas including the time spent on target setting, the value of such activities and the role of different staff in the process.

The report found most time spent in relation to target setting was actually on things such

as identifying and planning interventions to support pupils’ learning, analysing pupil data and meeting colleagues to discuss targets.

Overall, participants were positive about the value of targets and measuring progress against them, and it was “evident” that school leaders had taken time to improve the associated workload.

But there was concern that the same information was required in different forms across stakeholders, such as governors, trust boards and Ofsted – highlighting the potential for “streamlining” of work.

EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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School freedoms should not depend on falling in line with chaotic policy

A regional schools commissioner threatening an academy trust with potential legal action if it didn't do as they said is a shockingly sad example of ministers putting politics over principles.

This government has for years boasted about the freedoms its academies programme offers school leaders.

The Focus Trust used those freedoms to protect the wellbeing of its schools' communities – announcing it would close early for Christmas.

Turns out those freedoms only actually exist if you're willing to silently fall in line with the latest chaotic Covid policy. The government has really twisted the knife with its stubbornness to not even allow the trust to move to online learning, or run a few inset days.

But our story today (page 5) that reveals a separate trust has actually been allowed to close early for Christmas just adds insult to injury – at least break your own promises with some consistency.

It also creates a real headache, and more uncertainty, for school leaders – who will be ever more anxious to do the right thing for their

communities in the last two weeks of term as absences tot up.

The spending review, while committing to the £7.1 billion school funding promise, has created its own chaos.

Despite a pay freeze, starting salaries for teachers are going to be hiked to £30,000 (but this won't be until four years' time). Oh, and the department can't even explain how it's funding the second year of the National Tutoring Programme.

Meanwhile, we have more broken promises from Gavin Williamson. Not content with causing untold misery in the summer's exams, it now looks like he won't be honouring his own commitment to communicate plans for next year's exams this month (let's not forget politicians in Scotland and Wales communicated their plans ages ago).

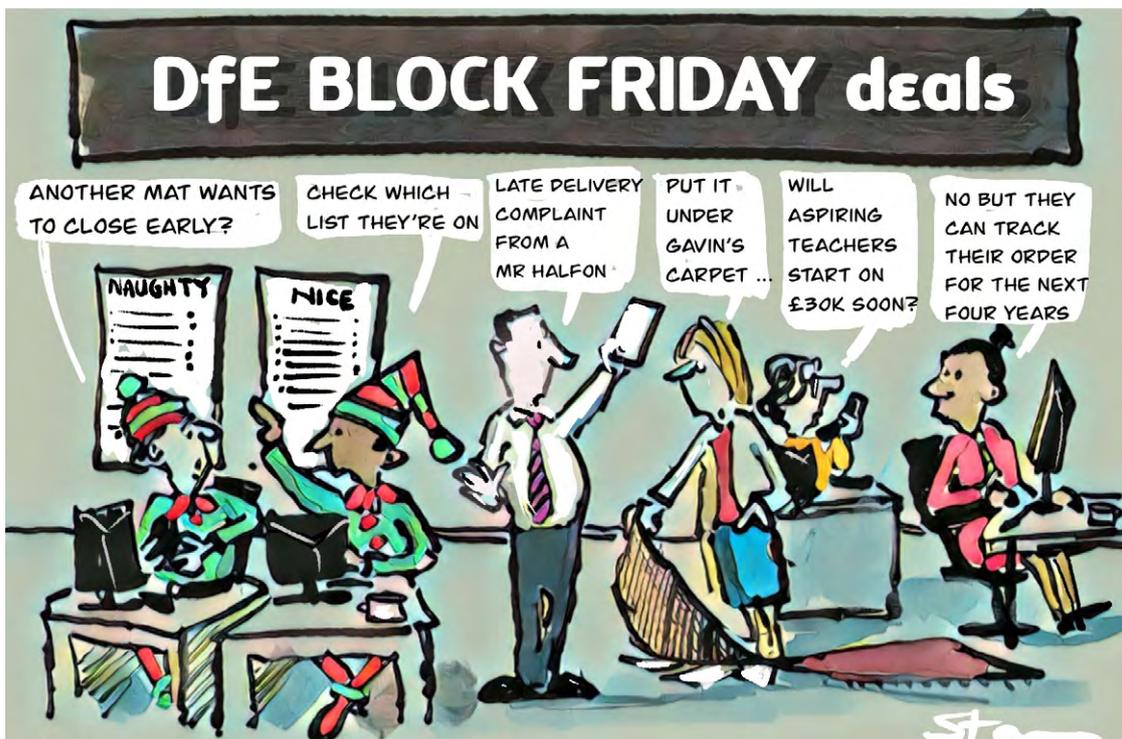
He also can't be bothered to meet his own promise of transparency over the summer exams debacle, and is obstructing the education committee from properly investigating what went wrong by refusing them vital information. A shameful week all round.

SCHOOLS WEEK



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DfE denies it withholds laptops on form-filling grounds

James Mook

This is absolutely true. We were unable to move forward with our laptops. When queried, it was because we had not completed the attendance form. I was also told by the local authority that this was the mechanism by which laptop release was decided.

Labour 'got it wrong' on scrapping Ofsted

Terry Pearson

So, from this piece we are to acknowledge that parliament, parents and the public need to be assured that standards in schools are as we'd expect them to be. That seems to be a pretty reasonable assertion. What we really need to think hard about then is how best to provide that reassurance, and that is where the challenges lie.

For sure, simply scrapping Ofsted will not remove all the problems people have with external inspections. We might say we have three options: maintain the status quo, modify the way Ofsted works or move to an alternative.

It looks like the first option is not what Labour has in mind so we need to think hard about the other two.

Streeting believes Ofsted should modify its operations, but what evidence is there to suggest the inspectorate is likely to do so to the extent proposed? Sadly, not much.

At present, we can't place as much faith in the regime as the inspectorate claims we can. Maybe Labour shouldn't have as much faith in Ofsted changing its ways, too.

Liam Hinkley

Headteachers and teachers couldn't be clearer and vote with their feet. I've had a successful career but have left the profession and 47 per cent of my colleagues are thinking the same! Tinkering will simply produce yet another framework to move fear-inducing goal posts yet again. The system is fundamentally flawed because it is imposed, rather than collaborative. People stop thinking about learning and talk about the latest 'guidance' instead. Think about how to motivate and improve an individual: anyone with any sense would use a coaching and mentoring model rather than a punitive pass or fail blunt instrument. Work with schools. Challenge them – absolutely, but an absolute dismantling of the dinosaur is long overdue.

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Robert Fryer

Pay freeze would be 'final straw', say unions

This is disrespectful, if carried out. As a practising teacher (also in my first year of teaching) I have first-handedly been part of the hugely increased workload which has left myself and other teachers exhausted. It is now a legal requirement



to provide online material for those self-isolating (fantastic) but it is not close to being a case of uploading the work from class – a brand-new, online-friendly version of the class material needs uploading.

The extra meetings to ensure Covid security, the extra meetings to assess students' progress during isolation periods, the expectation that those who are not completing coursework catch-up get caught up, the intervention after-school lesson – all of these have been initiated by Covid. To freeze pay now is nothing short of ignorance and disrespect (teachers' pay is roughly 6.5 per cent short of the equivalent wage in 2008, currently, and is well below the private sector wage for a graduate with a degree).

No teacher I know of has mentioned this as we get on with it and play our part. There have been many teachers quit already and this has caused staff shortages. NQT teachers are the last to be called upon to cover lessons (as per DfE guidelines) – we are doing so on a semi-regular basis.

Why penalise teachers when we are putting our hearts and souls into our jobs which are demanding increasingly more and more outside of our 8am to 5pm hours?

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

The government's culture war is chilling for curriculum rigour

Sharifah Lee, @Sharifahlee4

Did schools really need a reminder of such responsibility? This was not what was alluded to in the guidance. Scare mongering, instilling fear and a lot of fluff.

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Profile

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‘It’s going to take 130 years to have meaningful BAME representation’

Jeffery Quaye explains his ‘success by design’ strategy to break down the barriers in his own life and those of his students. By JL Dutaut

Jeffery Quaye, national director of education and standards, Aspirations Academies Trust

Jeffery Quaye is living proof that time is relative. Our interview proves he can squeeze into an hour what it would take any other mortal a whole day. Apply that to a year, or indeed a career, and you get a sense of how much Aspirations Academies Trust’s new national director of education and standards has already achieved – and, scarily, how much more he may yet accomplish.

Take, for example, the fact that he completed his PhD in maths education with Brunel University in under four years. That’s good going in itself, but Quaye did it while working full time as an assistant principal in one school and a maths adviser to three others, changing jobs to take on the vice principalship of a challenging school experiencing difficulties mid-way, and all the while practising as an additional Ofsted inspector.

Today, in the midst of the most disrupted year in education in more than a generation, Quaye is three months into a new role for Aspirations

while continuing to work as an examiner for Oxford University’s MSC in learning and teaching. He’s on Ofqual’s books as an external expert for mathematics and he’s advising the Department for Education on the implementation of its teacher recruitment and retention strategy.

In addition, he continues to be a lead Ofsted inspector – though that hasn’t been taxing of late – and a trustee of his local primary school – which surely must be.

Oh. And he’s married to a teacher – no easy feat – and a father of two boys.

Profile: Jeffery Quaye



PhD Graduation with family at Brunel University London (sons: Paris, 15, & Sydney, 12; Wife: Charlotte)



Paris, 15, & Sydney, 12, with their Arsenal tops

“If you don’t have enough people at the top, others might say it’s not for them. They will self-select”

deep underlying issues in wider society and in education. And you wouldn’t blame him for messing with space-time to get things moving quicker, but the sheer fact is that – for all the support for which he credits Aspirations Trust CEOs Paula and Steve Kenning – Quaye, as so many other people of minority ethnic backgrounds have described, has had to work twice as hard to have even a chance of achieving the same as his white colleagues. “I didn’t need a PhD for teaching,” he tells me wryly.

In fact, many headteachers are considered quite qualified enough with a BA and an NPQH. Quaye, for his part, holds a first-class BEng, a Master’s degree in education (with distinction), the aforementioned PhD, the NPQH, an executive certificate in high-impact leadership from Cambridge and a certificate in school



Receiving the Freedom of the City of London

management and leadership from Harvard.

Having become a leader – and one still on an upward trajectory – his approach to helping others up the ladder is two-pronged. First is his commitment to being a role model for others. “As long as you don’t have enough people at the top,” he tells me, “others might look to those roles and say it’s not for them. They will self-select.” Second is a belief in “success by design”. In the wake of last summer’s global anti-racist protests, Quaye wrote for Schools Week of his experience of racism in education, both overt and covert. Five months on, he is no less willing to use his platform to reiterate the charge: “There are people who have seen so many disappointments along the way, not for lack of being qualified or having the skill, but for the basic reason of lack of opportunity. And that is rooted in school cultures that don’t recognise

I can’t say for certain that the electrical and electronic engineering graduate with first-class honours didn’t in fact build himself a time machine during his studies in Hertfordshire and hasn’t been using it to great and subtle effect for the past couple of decades. But however much time he has, it’s clearly not enough. He is driven to improve equity, and the improvements are simply too slow. “Ten years ago, two per cent of head teachers were black, Asian or ethnic minority teachers. Now that figure has increased 100 per cent, but it’s still just four per cent. So at that rate, it’s going to take about 130 years to have any meaningful representation at that level!”

It’s an unnerving statistic – one that reflects

Profile: Jeffery Quaye



Quaye with Nick Gibb

either their value or that they can be of equal merit in those roles.”

Since the start of his career, Quaye has done everything in his power to ensure his value and merit were recognised. Having decided on education when he found himself enjoying mentoring other engineering graduates more than doing the engineering itself, he’s now a chartered maths teacher and a chartered London teacher and early on “became an advanced skills teacher, because that was almost like the pinnacle of best practice. So I aimed for that, but underneath I’ve always had that eye on leadership, because I think you have more influence through leadership.”

To be sure, he has influence now. And his focus isn’t just on equity for children from ethnic minority backgrounds. “My first leadership experience, I was tasked with improving maths, but then I had also the joy of being told to do that with English. So it was quite a meaty role, you know? The school was predominantly white British pupils, but the same issue of equity and excellence was at play. So for me, that strong conviction of wanting to transform life chances was the driver, not necessarily how many kids are from ethnic minority or diverse backgrounds.”

That was at Goffs School (now Goffs Academy) in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, where Paula Kenning was headteacher at the time. The results he contributed to there prompted David Cameron to single the school out for praise. “Dramatic improvement is possible,” he said in 2011, citing Goffs’ results by way of example.

Quaye had moved to Goffs from Hatch End



With Year 13 students and staff at the City of London of Academy celebrating Best A-level results in 2017

“That strong conviction of wanting to transform life chances was the driver”

High School in Harrow, where he held his first teaching position, and moved on from Goffs to Rivers Academy West London, where his assistant headship was complemented with a trust-wide role for maths. Then, it was on to City of London Academy in Southwark, where he took on the role of vice principal.

One of the first academies to open under New Labour’s school improvement programme, a 2016 short inspection said the school continued to be good and highlighted that “pupils identified as coming from a disadvantaged background make progress in line with their peers. In 2015 a larger proportion of disadvantaged pupils than their peers attained at least five GCSE grades at A* to C including English and mathematics.” By 2017, Quaye had overseen the academy’s best ever results in maths at GCSE and A-level, placing the school in the nation’s top ten per cent for pupil premium attainment.

Everywhere he has gone, the Ghanaian-born and raised Quaye has left a trail of successful results in his wake. He identifies closely with Nick Gibb’s statement that “education plays a vital role in tackling inequality”. He also believes deeply in the importance of excellent behaviour, but he is more inclined to talk about Aspirations’ new “no limits”

curriculum – a problem-based inter-disciplinary approach across key stages two and three – than “no excuses” behaviour policies.

In fact, reductive approaches are as far from his thinking as can be, an appreciation of complexity that has stuck with him from his engineering training. “Changing human behaviour is not as simple as designing something to do what you ask it. But you can create systems. You have to design that path and put in the supporting structures to enable the likelihood of that intention to manifest. Success by design.”

When Quaye moved to England for university, he left his parents behind. His father, a banker, is now deceased and his mother, a teacher, still lives in Accra where he was born. But he was moving closer to other family members. His grandfather had served in World War II and made his life here. Over the course of his life and career here, he has received more visits from Ghana than he has made back to his birthplace, but it’s a sacrifice he has willingly made to get on. “I didn’t do a visit for 14 years. The last time I did was 2018. You’re trying to fit so many different things in the summer period and you always have something scheduled for that block.”

And that’s the truth of it. There is no time machine. There is the pressure to prove yourself, that “niggling feeling for people from ethnic minority backgrounds that they have to always do extra to get that one opportunity”. There is the responsibility of being a role model that comes with being one of only four per cent. And there is passion for your work, which Quaye has in spades.

And the rest is organisation.

Success by design.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Crucial work is needed to tackle racial injustice in education, but it won't be achieved by silencing challenging voices like mine, writes Shivan Davis

In the educational culture war, new battlelines are drawn almost daily. Over the past few months alone, the killing of George Floyd caused fierce debate about decolonising the national curriculum, we've argued about whether Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion* is pragmatic or fascistic, and fallen out over whether "work hard, be nice" is a reasonable demand or a thinly veiled means of oppressing non-white students.

Needless to say, this pedagogic pressure cooker is a challenging environment, not least for teachers who align with "small-c" conservative educational values. But it is perhaps hardest of all for those small-c conservatives who happen also to be BAME. Like me.

For a start, being a pedagogical conservative does not mean one holds politically conservative views. Not that this should be problematic anyway, but there is no Orwellian doublethink here. A vast amount of evidence supports traditional teaching methods. "Lefty trads" are a thing. Get over it.

More insidiously, as a BAME teacher I am often expected to align with progressive causes by default. I'm made to feel I am betraying the cause of racial justice by advocating caution in the face of Twitter-based kangaroo courts. I am not. It is OK to be BAME and hold conservative educational values. It shouldn't even need saying.

What might bear repeating, though, is that seeing everything as black and white is a dangerous worldview. For me, some of the shifts causing these ruptures are welcome, and others less so. Some are outright dispiriting.



SHIVAN DAVIS

English teacher, St Joan of Arc Catholic School

Why it's OK for BAME teachers to hold conservative educational values

Take the question of decolonising the curriculum. As a teacher of English Literature, I happily acquiesce that the canon is evolving, that postcolonial works are a significant part of our shared heritage, and with hindsight that it is pretty inexcusable that the only character of colour my

curriculum? Yes, but proceed with caution.

Just as we must avoid the trap of cancel culture with regards to curriculum, so with pedagogy. When I trained with Teach First in 2015, Lemov's strategies were ubiquitously recognised for helping

"I'm made to feel I'm betraying the cause of racial justice by advocating caution"

former students encountered during their five years of study was Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*.

But the texts students read have stood the test of time; the best of them offer universal insight into the human condition. It is offensive to suggest BAME students cannot access these classics. Update the national

turn failing schools around and improving the life chances of underprivileged students. A few short years later, its detractors insist *Teach Like A Champion* is an example of "carceral pedagogy", designed to coerce students into obedience and compliance. That the book is now considered by some as a fascist's

textbook is hyperbole bordering on slander, and a troubling sign of the times.

Witness US charter chain Uncommon Schools' decision to drop their "work hard, be nice" slogan. I never liked it. Too bland, too corporate, too banal. But the statement justifying why they dropped it shocked me. Quite how they got away with equating 'niceness' with 'whiteness' is beyond me. Decency, politeness and good manners are a crucial part of being a good citizen, and if teaching them leads to more compliance and a more orderly classroom, great.

Far too many underprivileged and BAME students suffer the injustice of attending schools where not enough emphasis is placed on ensuring excellent behaviour. My former head (one of only one per cent of heads who are black in this country) used to do so on an almost daily basis. It made my job easier, made me a better teacher and led to happier children. That's how you improve the life chances of BAME students.

There is work to do to tackle racial injustice in education. The national curriculum does need to change. Inequalities between Black Caribbean and White British pupils have worsened since 2011, from a gap of 6.5 months to a staggering and heartbreaking 10.9 months. And there is the huge issue of BAME under-representation among the profession, particularly in leadership roles.

But the solutions to these problems will be found through pragmatic policy changes, not on a culture war battlefield that leaves teachers like me stranded in a political no-man's-land.



Opinion

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



BECKY FRANCIS

Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation

A chance to end the parental arms race

Amid criticism from school leaders over the National Tutoring Programme's rules, Becky Francis says it's a generational opportunity to close the gap

The days keep getting shorter, but news of three potential Covid-19 vaccines has provided welcome cheer. The emphasis in early coverage has been on efficacy - one vaccine showed a 70 per cent protection rate, the others over 95 per cent.

But for a group of health researchers at Yale, efficacy is not enough. Just as important is implementation. It's not only about whether the vaccine works; it's about production speed, the logistics of distribution, and above all, fostering enthusiasm and uptake among the public.

This approach could not be more relevant to the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), which the Education Endowment Foundation is helping to establish with a group of other charities and the Department for Education.

There is extensive evidence that shows us that tutoring is an effective way to boost learning. As a result, there has been global interest in using tutoring to support school

children affected by the pandemic. Efforts to scale up tutoring are under way from Australia to the United States, Botswana to the Netherlands.

But while overall tutoring is clearly a "good bet", just as with the vaccine, decisions about implementation really matter. In short, it's not whether schools use

tutoring that matters, it's how it is used that will be vital to both its short- and long-term success.

One important decision is about where tutoring takes place. Past evidence suggests that tutoring delivered during the school day will have the greatest impact. In particular, we know pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have the necessary technology at home for effective tutoring to take place. That's why we've suggested that where possible, tutoring takes place with pupils in schools, even if the tutor is online.

However, clearly introducing a new service during a pandemic requires compromises, and we've sought to build these in. In a range



of circumstances (for example, if pupils cannot be in school) delivery at home will be better than missing out. Wherever possible, NTP providers are currently working to put the processes in place to accommodate this, even if in-school tutoring remains the default.

“ Tutoring currently widens the disadvantage gap

Another decision is about how much tutoring to offer. Should tutoring be offered on a per-hour basis, for maximum flexibility, or in a different way? We've suggested that tutoring is provided in blocks of 15 sessions, typically focused on a single subject though in some cases these can be split, for example combining literacy and numeracy support for year 6 pupils. This decision is based on evidence that a focused block of sessions, with clear objectives tied tightly to the curriculum, is likely to be most impactful.

The NTP is designed to be a tool for teachers and in lots of other areas - such as which pupils are selected for tutoring, which year

groups receive support and which areas tutors focus on - teachers and school leaders are best placed to decide. To inform these decisions, and show our workings on the questions above, we've published an evidence guide for schools on the NTP website.

The Sutton Trust's 2017 Extra Time report concluded that "the parental arms race in England in the form of home tuition appears to be increasing". They and many others have shown that tutoring currently widens rather than narrows the disadvantage gap. The NTP is our chance to reverse this. It represents a huge opportunity to support disadvantaged students and their schools, and has the potential not just to support the educational response to the pandemic but to make a long-term contribution to the effort to close the disadvantage gap.

This year, we are on track to support up to 250,000 pupils in every region of the country. But if we can get the design of the programme right, attending to the details of implementation and learning and adapting along the way, the NTP has the potential to benefit many, many more.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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This government has some nerve telling teachers to keep calm and carry on, writes Mary Bousted

Tell your members to hold their nerve," a government minister said to me last week. He understood, he added, how tired teachers are and how challenging and stressful it currently is working in schools and colleges. But the school must go on, he insisted. Circuit breakers, rotas and extended holidays were not an option.

Holding one's nerve, I thought, would be possible if the profession felt the government was supporting it. But teachers do not feel that's the case. Indeed, they think the opposite.

The teachers, leaders and support staff that I speak to tell me that they feel abandoned. They are exhausted. If their school is in a high Covid area they are coping with significant staff absence as their colleagues isolate. One MAT CEO told me recently that each day 10 per cent of the teaching staff are absent – either because they have Covid or because they have been in close contact with someone infected with it. As staffing budgets are decimated, school leaders abandon "rarely cover" principles and teachers lose their non-contact time.

Just working to keep a school Covid-secure adds to the workload. The time taken to supervise staggered start and end times and lunchtimes, to keep pupil bubbles separate, and to supervise hand washing for primary school pupils, builds up.

Coping with rising levels of poor pupil behaviour adds to the exhaustion as children and young people express, in school, their anxieties about family breakdowns, parental financial worries and their own fears of catching the virus.

Then there is the requirement to



MARY BOUSTED

Joint general secretary
National Education Union

The government's Covid response has gone from shameful to shameless

provide remote learning for pupils who are isolating, on top of a full teaching timetable, using IT platforms that are unfamiliar and on which few have been trained. There is a keenly felt anger at the disingenuousness of a government which promised schools

professionals have that their workplace is not safe enough. These are particularly acute in secondary schools and sixth-form colleges which are packed full of pupils who, SAGE now tells us, can transmit the virus.

“There is a keenly felt anger at the government's disingenuousness

laptops for disadvantaged pupils, only to renege on that promise at 5pm on the Friday before half-term. Perhaps someone in government thought that was a good time to bury bad news...

These pressures are compounded by the belief many education

Viral levels in secondary age pupils are rising faster than any other age group; they are now 51 times what they were at the beginning of September, and secondary-aged pupils now have higher viral infection rates than any



other age group.

Uniquely, education staff are working in crowded places, with inadequate ventilation and cleaning, without social distancing, and with mask wearing only in communal areas. These are good conditions for viral transmission – which could explain why attendance rates among secondary school pupils are declining so rapidly. Nationally last week 22 per cent of secondary-aged pupils were absent. This rate will be much higher in areas of high infection.

So, in addition to hugely excessive and debilitating workload, school staff are scared. They are worried that they will catch Covid and terrified that they will expose their families to the virus.

Holding your nerve would be a huge ask in these circumstances even if the government was showing its support in real and practical ways. But it is not doing that. Rather, ministers are holding their hands over their eyes and putting their fingers in their ears.

Their mantra, that things are challenging but we are all doing jolly well, convinces no one, least of all those teachers taking GCSE and A-level classes who want to know, now, what is going to happen to their pupils taking these exams. If they are working in a school where year 11 and 13 have had to isolate repeatedly, they are worried sick about how they are going to cover the syllabus.

A competent government would have predicted these problems and acted quickly to find solutions. It would have supported the profession with deeds as well as words – which are cheap.

This government has done none of these things. It should be ashamed of itself.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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If policymakers want to assess the impact of home-schooling, their focus should not be on pushing a failing model into homes, writes Anna Dusseau

Publication last week of the Local Government Association’s research into “children missing education” has ensured the topic of home education stays in the headlines. It has also ensured that the conflation of “missing school” and “missing education” continues to have currency. Yet few have questioned its methodology, which results in numbering the young people concerned within a staggering range of between a quarter of a million and a million - a methodology founded in large part on offering a new and narrow definition of “formal education”.

With a rise of up to 200 per cent in home-school registrations amid the pandemic, Amanda Spielman’s point about avoiding decisions that are “driven by fear” is fair enough. What’s more, her comments to the current enquiry into elective home education (EHE) – which closed its call for evidence last week – are mostly optimistic. After all, who wouldn’t welcome more official recognition for EHE and the possibility of some financial support?

But my toes curled at her deliberate positioning of parents as mindless panic merchants. The muffled accusation that the current rise in home education is due to “misinformation on social media” echoes a familiar narrative that parents are untrustworthy and unable to think for themselves. If this is the dubious angle from which the Select



ANNA
DUSSEAU

Author and former teacher

Home-schoolers deserve better than misinformation and distrust

Committee are now pondering EHE inspections, then we’d best buckle up.

A far more likely narrative is that parents are withdrawing their children from school due to

data this summer placing the UK at the bottom of the league table for children’s life satisfaction and sense of purpose, it’s not unreasonable to suggest, at the very least, that parents

“ If the answer is to inspect, we may be asking the wrong question

a collapse of faith in the system itself. This perspective is naturally unpopular among stakeholders, yet vitally important to grasp. It would appear that a gulf now exists between the lived experience of many families and the official line on state education.

The rigid position of figureheads from Boris Johnson to ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton that “most children are better off at school” rings hollow after a year of disastrous mismanagement. In contrast, many families actually found a happier, healthier rhythm during the national school closure, with *The Guardian’s* Tobias Jones acknowledging that this time enabled him to “see [his] children in a new light”. Given Pisa

are scrutinised with a moral spotlight that the school system itself doesn’t withstand.

If the answer is to inspect home educators, it may be that we are asking the wrong question. While banging the drum of raising standards, Ofsted has more often provided a smokescreen for political meddling in education, forcing teachers to constantly recalibrate and destabilising provision. Is there any reason to suspect EHE inspections wouldn’t have the same effect?

Significantly, inspection tends to drive education away from its natural, holistic focus on the child, towards a target-oriented, corporate approach. Jeffrey and Woods’ *Feeling Deprofessionalised* is only one of

many studies that give weight to this theory, describing “market-oriented, managerialist, technical-rationalist discourse” of teaching exacerbated by high-stakes Ofsted inspections, including what I would call the legitimisation of an “inward gaze.”

Children’s achievement, both in the classroom and in other educational settings, is most powerfully shaped by real parental engagement, something too many schools have lost sight off, instead favouring a model of “parents acting as secretaries”, as FreeFlowInfo CEO Alan Cowley wisely notes. There are problems with EHE, but whatever they are, reducing it to a box-ticking exercise in the way inspection has already diminished the integrity of mainstream schooling is no kind of solution.

Nor is feeding an endless cycle of misinformation and mistrust, for which Spielman and the LGA are as responsible as social media. Basing our arguments on real numbers would certainly help to tackle that, but any debate must start from the premise that families long predate our 150-year-old compulsory education and 28-year-old inspectorate.

If policy makers want to stem the tide of “children missing education”, their focus should be on attracting them back, not on pushing a failing model into homes.

Anna Dusseau is the author of *The Case for Homeschooling: A Free-Range Home Education Handbook*

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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SUZANNE BROWN

Senior lecturer in initial teacher education, Sheffield Hallam University

No more excuses for failing to adopt flexible working

Opportunities for career progression to school leadership roles are limited for those who do not work full-time, says Suzanne Brown

Part-timer. Often the term is derogatory. "You part-timer!" On other occasions it's expiatory. "I'm only part-time!" It's a testament to how normalised full-time working is. Our response to Covid demands that we challenge that narrative.

When returning to work after the birth of my first child, I asked to work a three-day week. Unless I worked at least four days, came the reply, I would have to relinquish my head of faculty position. I was vulnerable in my new role as a mum. I did not put up a fight and relinquished a position I had worked 18 years to attain.

I didn't stay long in my newly demoted position. I felt my skills were not being used and my voice and expertise were not valued. But my unhappy experience did lead to something positive – a chance to explore whether my personal experiences resonated with those of others.

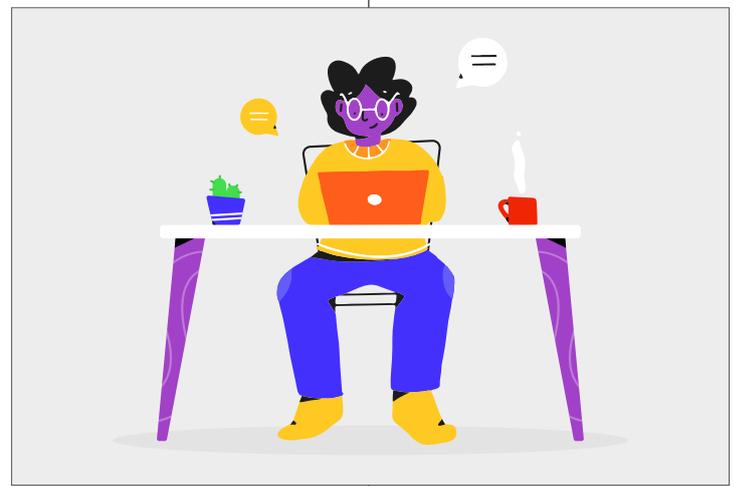
Through my research, I collected rich narratives detailing women teachers' lived experiences of part-

time working in secondary schools and how this shaped their career trajectories. The results shed light on why so few secondary school senior positions are occupied by those who prefer this pattern of working.

“ Flexible working enables parents to remain in the workforce

Contrary to stereotype, these women are highly committed to their paid work as well as to their families, and their reasons for working part-time are actually linked to a desire to do things well. They experience stress and guilt as a result of running both aspects of their lives to a high standard, exacerbated by their sense that their voices are not as valued as their full-time colleagues and that their opportunities for career progression are limited as a result of not working full-time. They perceive senior leadership to be lacking in understanding of, and empathy for, the challenges they face in managing competing demands on their limited time.

One of the key lessons learned during this pandemic has been the recognition of the importance



of access to childcare in enabling people – particularly women – to be part of the workforce. Models of working and work-based practices have changed enormously in a short

period of time.

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development part-time working is the most common flexible working arrangement. About a quarter of all employees work in this way, three quarters of whom are women. The school workforce is largely made up of women, many with families, yet teachers' requests to work flexibly appear more likely to be turned down than others in the wider workforce. In 2019, the NFER reported that 27 per cent of primary school teachers and only 19 per cent of secondary teachers worked part-time.

In addition, compounding the disparity in the proportion of men and women in senior positions, school workforce data shows that the number of secondary school

leadership positions being occupied by anyone working part-time is only around five per cent. This suggests that the chances of becoming a senior leader are slim for those who work part-time, especially women.

As we face a post-Covid economic downturn, it's worth noting that flexible working enables parents to remain in the workforce. Providing support for flexible working in schools is not only the right thing to do, it enables other parents to remain in the wider workforce too.

Schools are handling the pandemic magnificently. Through lockdowns, closed bubbles and enforced self-isolation, they have trusted that teachers will do their best and be committed to their work through hastily implemented new working arrangements. And teachers have lived up to that trust, demonstrating that changes in the way we work are possible when the need is deemed to be great enough.

There can be no question then that this can be translated into more empathetic attitudes and practices in relation to flexible working. The global crisis will abate, and it will not do to fall back on an old normal: now is the time for a new narrative around this pattern of working.

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



What do we know and what should we do about social mobility?

Author: Lee Elliot Major and Stephen Machin

Publisher: SAGE Publications

Reviewer: Sam Baars, director of research and operations, CfEY

As director of research at a think- and action-tank, I'm on board with the principle behind Sage's new *What Do We Know and What Should We Do About...?* series. The latest addition to the collection, focusing on social mobility, is authored by Stephen Machin and Lee Elliot Major. Both have a solid track record in this field, and it's not the first time they've joined forces on the topic. As a result, this is an assured and detailed book bringing together the latest research, wide-ranging recommendations for practice and authoritative critiques of conventional wisdom. Spoiler alert: schools aren't the engine of social mobility most of us think they are.

Social mobility has been carefully theorised and measured for decades by academics. It has since entered the public lexicon and lost focus after repeated manhandling by policymakers. The authors do a good job of restoring the clarity of the concept, its multiple meanings and measures. Indeed, the first half of the book – which deals with definitions, metrics and trends over time and between nations – is the strongest. Major and Machin set out four post-war periods defined by different combinations of absolute mobility (room at the top) and relative mobility (chances of different groups making it to the top). This demonstrates two important points. First, judging the state of social mobility depends on whether you measure relative or absolute rates in terms of incomes or occupational status. Second, today's declining rates of both

absolute and relative mobility in the UK are unprecedented.

In order to carry out robust research we need decent data and decent theory to make sense of it. On the former, Major and Machin don't pull any punches, offering a damning critique of social science budget cuts which mean we've only had two major youth cohort studies in the past 40 years. On the latter, the authors argue that debates about social mobility can't avoid talking about inequality, fairness and justice, even if politicians have a tendency to. Credit is due for making space for these discussions in a sub-100-page book.

The argument loses some of its composure towards the finale, with some muddle over whether the rise of automation poses the greatest threat to middle- or low-skill jobs. Likewise, while the book feels up-to-the minute with its references to Covid, it pays a somewhat heavy price in typos.

The book closes with a series of recommendations for action. A key takeaway is that we need to take a life-course view of education if we want to 'level up' society. The authors recommend boosting on-the-job training for low-skilled workers who are least likely to have received any training since school. As I pointed out recently to the education select committee, lifelong learning has spill-over

effects on children's learning too. Major and I share a childhood connection with Feltham, Middlesex, where we both attended the same FE college. That happy experience might explain the book's call for decent, high-status vocational training – and my complete agreement with it.

The reforms Major and Machin propose to the school system are less compelling. The authors argue convincingly that compulsory education isn't the engine of social mobility we think it is that closing attainment gaps has a limited impact on outcomes over an individual's life. I'm therefore not sure why they waste time on surface tweaks such as lotteries to increase access to grammar schools for FSM pupils. I'd sooner scrap grammars entirely.

Shortcomings aside, this book achieves a lot within a thin spine. It's a solid grounder for those new to the topic and has plenty of fresh perspective for readers who know the field well. With

the goals of the education system increasingly framed around social mobility, and young people's future prospects looking more precarious than they have for decades, it is certainly a timely read. Hopefully, they'll fix the typos on the next print run.



Reviews



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

@5Naureen

A theatre of dominance

@ThisIsSethsBlog

In this post, Seth Godin, founder of learning platform Akimbo, states that people who take part and those who watch sporting events may not realise that there are two forms of 'theatre' taking place, a theatre of dominance and a theatre of affiliation. What happens on the field is about winning/losing and hence, dominating. In the stands, a different theatre plays out – the theatre of affiliation. People turn up to these events wearing the colours of the teams they support and feel connected to strangers wearing the same colours. Godin suggests that what happens in offices can also be viewed through this lens. It made me think of governors' and departmental/SLT meetings. If there is no diversity of thought, a theatre of affiliation can result in groupthink. If the board is a weak one and is led by the head or the chair, then a theatre of dominance may play out. Neither is conducive to effective accountability.

TOP BLOGS of the week



CEO diaries - Are you a fierce competitor or a generous collaborator?

@RichardKSense

Written from the perspective of a CEO, this blog will be of interest to anyone who occupies a leadership position, including chairs of boards. Chief executive of disability charity Sense, Richard Kramer argues that leaders who are by nature fierce competitors will find meetings uncomfortable and stressful. Generous collaborators, on the other hand, are active listeners. They don't think they have all the answers and are happy to work with one another. Kramer writes about some lessons he has learnt about collaboration. The first is to be careful about using the word 'collaboration' as the very idea can cause fierce competitors to back away from projects where they might otherwise make a positive contribution. Secondly, note that collaboration is hard work as people are usually trained to work in silos. As Kramer says, it "takes practice if you want it to become a habit".

Heads-how many hats?

@jillberry102

Here, Jill Berry responds to a number of blogs and articles that warn against the idea of generic leadership skills. She is

sympathetic to the idea and appreciates the importance of the curriculum – the 'what' and 'why' of teaching. She also agrees that leaders should trust their subject experts, but she is uncomfortable with the idea that leaders should be experts in all subjects and worries that some aspiring leaders may be put off applying by the incredibly high bar this sets. The work she does with aspiring leaders is based around building their confidence, and she reminds us that leaders develop their leadership skills throughout their careers.

Berry states that governors at the school she led attended presentations by subject leads, which she also found helpful as a head. For governors attending such presentations, Berry's blog is a useful reminder that subject leads appreciate and gain from the interest too and an excellent argument for the system of linked governors, which ensures the whole board has oversight of what is happening throughout the school.

A wellbeing and coping resource to help people during Covid-19

@DrSMarkham

A geneticist by training, I follow medical Twitter as well as edu-Twitter. This blog is aimed at the former but is a valuable one to bring to the attention of school leaders, governors and teachers. In it, Sarah Markham states that Covid-19 is a personal crisis as well as a public health one. People are feeling under pressure and many are finding it hard to cope. Markham writes about the WellbeingAndCoping website co-funded by the NHS with input from international academics, health and mental health professional and educators. The website is suitable for the general public and will be especially useful to those who are in a caring role, which surely includes everyone in education. The website offers a range of strategies to relieve stress and anxiety. Importantly, people can select strategies that can fit into whatever time they have available, be it 30 seconds, three minutes or 30 minutes.

Research

The Research Schools Network will review a research development each half term. Contact them @rs_network if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

How can we adapt to new practices while keeping workload down?

Tom Stevens, evidence lead in education, Norwich Research School, and assistant headteacher, Long Stratton High School

Can you hear that awkward silence? It's the echo of countless unanswered emails in the inboxes of teachers everywhere. Covid has collapsed the ordinary staff meeting, and workload enemy number one – the whole-staff email – threatens to overrun us.

As argued by Laura McInerney in these pages, new ways of working may sound like a workload win, but the reality is quite different. And besides, video calls may have provided a neat replacement for face-to-face meetings during school closures but a return to the usual school timetable often renders that solution void.

The risk we run now is that teachers become mere recipients when they used to be participants. If they can meet, they are pixelated faces buffering at the mercy of school internet connections. Staffroom closures mean they are just as unlikely to meet informally. And even when colleagues pass in the corridor, can they tell whether they are still smiling behind the mask?

Teachers' working lives have changed, which means the conditions for school improvement have too. So how do we lead effectively when so much of our communication is now digital?

Useful lessons can be found in the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) implementation guidance, which makes clear that the key to school improvement is in getting the conditions right – creating a "conducive school climate". Of course, controlling the climate is harder while we're also controlling infection rates. But now that we are missing it, we are realising how much the "soft stuff" counts in shaping that climate.

School leaders used to rely on "taking the



temperature" of the staffroom. The ritual of a morning briefing would set the tone for the day. It was a chance for leaders to take questions, prompt reminders and model the positivity that a wet and windy Monday might otherwise blow off course. I know of faith schools where prayers and hymns are shared. While most of us weren't literally singing from the same hymn sheet, there was unity in these occasions that we might now miss.

The EEF guidance reminds us that motivation and capacity are rarely static. Instead, they can be "developed and built, but can also diminish and vanish". This is what is at stake, and it means wellbeing is the most important challenge we face.

Fortunately, we are a profession who have shown we can adapt. As part of the Research Schools Network, I have witnessed the rise of new practices to continuously acknowledge and support school improvement.

Many headteachers are pre-recording video briefings to act as a weekly keynote, and schools are using newsletters to celebrate achievements, signal upcoming events and restate shared goals. But as

important as this communication is, it's vital to ensure it is a two-way process. Using online surveys to consult colleagues, for example, positions them as ongoing participants. And the most effective aspect of the newsletter may very well be in proactively looking for the good news to report.

In the past, meetings may have discussed future actions. Now they take place in the moment as we share our screens. While that may be conducive to efficiency, it can also create or add to a persistent sense of urgency. It may not have the advantages of live discussion, but the back and forth of working together on a document can foster fruitful coaching conversations.

Beyond those conversations, continued professional development remains vital. Online provision has brought increased flexibility in when and how it is accessed, and many schools are reporting that as a distinct advantage.

When we emerge from the era of Covid, masks come off and staffrooms are full again, which of our new ways of working will we retain and which will we drop? School leaders will be thinking about lots of new challenges to re-establish staff wellbeing and sustain successes from a difficult time for teachers.



WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

MONDAY

We all know Gavin Williamson's neck has been on the line for a while now, but MPs were slightly taken aback when the speaker appeared to promote one of his colleagues to his job during education questions.

Calling the chair of the education committee, Sir Lindsay Hoyle said: "Let us head to the secretary of state for education, Robert Halfon".

Hoyle quickly corrected himself, before proclaiming he had pre-empted Halfon's "next promotion".

"We have a good secretary of state already," Halfon replied, demonstrating that despite his outspoken criticism of the Department for Education, he's still very much a team player at heart.

TUESDAY

Ministers frequently espouse the virtues of the additional freedoms supposedly given to schools under the academies programme.

But it seems they don't want schools using their freedoms if it involves doing things that are a pain in the backside politically (such as closing early for the Christmas holidays).

This week the Focus Trust was forced to U-turn on its decision to close its 15 schools across Manchester and West Yorkshire from December 11, a week earlier than planned. The trust said the move was to safeguard staff and pupils and "protect precious family time together".

But the DfE cried foul over the move, with regional schools commissioner Vicky Beer threatening to use powers

handed to the government under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to keep the schools open.

So much for trusting school leaders.

WEDNESDAY

All eyes were on chancellor Rishi Sunak this week as he delivered his first spending review.

Although the biggest news was the public sector pay freeze (here we go again), there were also some mystery figures buried in the review documents that caught the attention of a few people in the schools community.

Alongside a figure of £1.4 billion, which is the allocation for Covid catch-up and free school meals support this year, there was also an allocation of £400 million for that purpose in 2021-22.

Sources told *Schools Week* that at least some of this seemingly additional cash would be spent on making the National Tutoring Programme a two-year scheme (something the government announced but then backtracked on in June).

However, by the time *Week in Westminster* went to press, nobody at the DfE or Treasury had been able to tell us whether the funding was definitely new, and whether it includes the £140 million that remains unspent from this year's programme.

And these people run the country!

THURSDAY

In a further sign that the government wasn't really across the detail of the spending review this week, the Treasury was forced into a humiliating climbdown.

Officials initially confirmed that despite the pay freeze announced for next year, they were still committed to raising

teachers' starting salaries to £30,000 by 2022-23.

This prompted some to point out that this would mean a very large increase for a lot of staff in September 2022 in order to get starting salaries over the threshold (and higher pay bands raised accordingly).

Presumably at some point the penny dropped inside the Treasury, which issued a hasty clarification today that when it said it was committed to the policy, it actually wasn't.

The government's position is that it still intends to raise starting salaries to £30,000, but by the end of this Parliament, which runs until May 2024.

The DfE subsequently issued a blog post in an attempt to further calm the waters, stating it remained committed to "achieving a £30k starting salary", but that the pay freeze means progress towards it is "slower".

We'll believe it when we see it.

The DfE was also keen to point to academies' freedom to set their own pay, meaning staff in those schools could still see salary increased, proving that ministers do actually like giving schools more power to make their own decisions, but only when it is in their political interests.

Heads have repeatedly said throughout the pandemic that the reams of updates to guidance they have to read has added to their workload and anguish. We reached a new low today when the DfE sent out an important update on its "Action for schools" document, which then disappeared from the DfE's website for several hours - meaning everyone was unable to access it.



ROBERT GORDON'S COLLEGE



ROBERT GORDON'S COLLEGE - HEAD OF SENIOR SCHOOL

Robert Gordon's College is a leading co-educational independent day school in Aberdeen. There is an opportunity for an innovative and experienced individual to join the College as Head of Senior School. The post is available from August 2021.

The school has a diverse pupil population, and we welcome applications from all backgrounds. Bursaries are very important and the school's motto, 'be all you can be', demonstrates our desire to help pupils to shape their identity by taking part in an unparalleled range of subjects and activities.

The Head of Senior School holds a key leadership position within the College, ensuring the smooth running of the Senior School. The ideal candidate will be able to focus on operational detail and provide strategic thinking. Effective use of digital technology is essential, as is the ability to communicate with multiple stakeholders.

Joining the College's Leadership Team, the Head of Senior School will report to the Head of College. They will also lead a team of Deputy Heads, and are responsible for setting the tone, values and ethos of the school.

The successful candidate will have relevant school leadership experience and must be eligible to be registered with the GTCS. Applicants should be familiar with the Professional Standards for Leadership, including critical engagement with literature, research and policy. A focus on wellbeing for all community members is essential.

A competitive salary, commensurate with the role, as well as fee reduction for children at the school is offered to the successful candidate. A relocation package is available.

Interested candidates are invited to contact Robin Macpherson, Head of College, (email r.macpherson@rgc.aberdeen.sch.uk) or tel: **01224 606112**) for a confidential discussion. To apply please upload a video of 1- 2 minutes explaining your suitability for the role, by sending a downloadable link or via WeTransfer, together with a completed College application form (available at hr@rgc.aberdeen.sch.uk) and CV if wished, to Ms Frances Winter, HR Manager, f.winter@rgc.aberdeen.sch.uk by 10am on Monday 14 December 2020. Please do not use the Apply Online function on the College website.

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.





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



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Lin Min Khant

BTEC Construction Learner of the Year
& BTEC Young Learner of the Year 2020