

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

Putting libraries at the heart of the bounce back



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Boris is taking a big risk with his 'big bang'



P5

Three ways to get the edtech strategy wrong



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DfE to slash tutoring subsidy to 10%



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Unlock: Schools get set for their greatest test yet

- Leaders warn larger schools will struggle with back-to-school testing
- Schools consider 12-hour days to process all pupils in time
- Heads seize opportunity to test early after DfE clarifies stance

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR_93

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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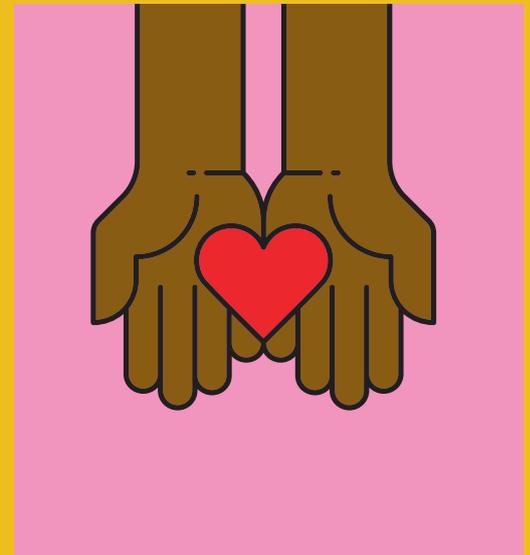
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Academy trust gets its day in court



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We should value what schools do more fully

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Why I'm exhilarated but fearful

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Can research back up any opinion?

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Tutoring subsidy 'taper' could hit the worst-off schools

JAMES CARR

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EXCLUSIVE

Government plans to "taper" subsidies for tuition delivered by its flagship National Tutoring Programme could leave schools having to pay 90 per cent of the cost of sessions within three years.

The Department for Education has published a £62 million tender for a supplier to run the NTP between May this year and next August.

However tender documents seen by Schools Week reveal the government is planning to dramatically reduce its subsidy of the scheme over the coming years.

This is despite research accompanying the tender warning a decrease in subsidies could "skew provision away from the most disadvantaged schools".

The documents also confirm a move to extend the NTP for two further years after 2021-22, as revealed by Schools Week in January.

The NTP was launched last year to help children catch up on lost learning brought about during the coronavirus pandemic. It is split across two pillars – tuition partners and academic mentors. The tuition element offers 15 hours of subsidised tutoring for school pupils.

Currently, schools pay just 25 per cent of the cost of tutoring sessions, with the remaining 75 per cent subsidised by the government.

But tender documents show the government plans to reduce subsidies slightly to 70 per cent next year, then to 50 per cent for 2022-23 and to just 10 per cent in 2023-24.

The subsidy levels between 2022 and 2024 are "subject to spend[ing] review confirmation and may be subject to change", the documents state.

But even in the tender papers, concerns are raised about the impact of tapering the subsidies.

Preliminary findings of an "NTP year 2 subsidies discussion", published alongside the tender documents, state that "90 per cent of schools not part of NTP highlight insufficient budget as a main barrier to participation".

It also found that even at current subsidy levels, "the most disadvantaged schools are taking up NTP tuition at a lower rate than other schools; a decrease in subsidies could further skew provision away from the most disadvantaged schools".

However, the government believes a "tapering" subsidy model will help make the



NTP sustainable in future years. It is understood ministers want schools to use greater levels of pupil premium funding to fund "evidence-based" programmes, such as tutoring.

An accompanying report on multi-year support states the scheme "could be the latest example of government successfully jumpstarting a market" and gives examples of how the government's plug-in electric car grant in 2011 has increased ownership of electric vehicles.

During a presentation shown to organisations interested in running the second phase in January, the DfE stated it was aiming to provide 15 hours subsidised tutoring to about 450,000 disadvantaged pupils through its tuition partners in the second year of the scheme, up from 250,000 this year.

However the tender documents reveal expectations have now risen to 524,000 pupils for 2021-22 and 650,000 for the following two years.

In December, a prior information notice stated a future contract for phase two of the programme would be worth £130 million. However, Schools Week understands the overall amount allocated to the programme in 2021-22 has now exceeded that figure.

It follows an announcement from the prime minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday that an extra £83 million would be spent on the NTP, on top of part of the initial £350 million funding, which is being carried over into next year.

The tender for a supplier is worth £62 million, but this excludes subsidies for the programme. The tender documents state the DfE has "provisioned circa £120 million already for subsidy payments" for 2021-22. This means

the total government spend in year two could amount to over £180 million.

The current tuition partners programme is run by the Education Endowment Foundation, and was designed with the help of four other charities – the Sutton Trust, Impetus, Nesta and Teach First.

It is not known if EEF will bid again to run the scheme for a second year.

A Teach First spokesperson told Schools Week it would "need time to carefully consider before deciding what role we might want to play in its future".

The £83 million in additional funding for the NTP announced this week was part of a £705 million package announced by the government to aid catch-up.

Of the extra funding, £302 million is for the "recovery premium" for state primaries and secondaries, which the DfE claims will be worth £6,000 to the average primary school and £22,000 to the average secondary school.

It will be based on the number of children eligible for the pupil premium in each school, and can be used to "help schools to bolster summer provision for their students, for example, laying on additional clubs and activities, or for evidence-based approaches for supporting the most disadvantaged pupils from September".

£200 million will also be "available to secondary schools to deliver face-to-face summer schools". There is also £102 million to extend the 16-to-19 tuition fund and £18 million for early years support.

However, the DfE refused to say this week whether all the funding was new investment from the Treasury, or was being taken from existing DfE projects.

Johnson defies unions and goes all-in for March 8

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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All schools will reopen on March 8, dashing hopes of a more phased approach and prompting warnings of a return to the “stop-start schooling” of the autumn.

Boris Johnson told MPs on Monday that all pupils in schools and colleges could “safely return to face-to-face teaching” the week after next.

But it emerged this week that scientists had advised the government that reopening all schools at the same time could increase infections by up to 50 per cent.

While all primary pupils will be expected to attend school from March 8, secondary leaders will be given “discretion” over how to bring back pupils for mass testing in the first week.

But from the week starting March 15, attendance will be mandatory for all pupils apart from those who are self-isolating or have been advised to shield.

Face coverings are also recommended in secondary school classrooms until Easter at the earliest.

Leaders said the government’s approach “may prove counterproductive and lead to more disruption”, with fears of a repeat of last autumn, when schools were forced to regularly send whole year groups home because of Covid cases.

“We fear that England’s less cautious approach runs the risk of increasing the rate of infection and prolonging the damaging cycle of stop-start schooling,” said Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL school leaders’ union.

Schools have been closed since January 5 to all but the most vulnerable pupils and children of key workers.

This week’s confirmation of a “big bang” approach has come amid warnings about the risks of bringing up to 10 million children and adults back together while infections levels remain relatively high.

Johnson admitted to parliament on Monday that lifting lockdown “will result in more cases, more hospitalisations and,



A school teacher sitting in his classroom watching Prime Minister Boris Johnson announce schools are to reopen to all

sadly, more deaths”.

But he insisted that classrooms were “the best places for our young people to be”.

In papers released this week, the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling said its “consensus view” was that the opening of schools was “likely to increase effective R by a factor of 1.1 to 1.5 (10 per cent to 50 per cent)”.

The group also said an “initial limited and cautious” reopening – for example only primaries – for a limited time “in the absence of easing other restrictions” would allow the impact on community transmission to be assessed.

The government’s decision also comes after the latest Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission study from Imperial College showed primary school-aged children had the second highest infection rates in early February.

Data published by the Office for National Statistics this week also showed that the teaching and education workforce was the fourth most likely to test positive for Covid-19 between September and early January.

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said Johnson had “pressed ahead with this gamble on the wider opening of schools and colleges in one swoop and ignored the

advice for a phased return”.

“It is incumbent now for government to ensure robust safety measures are in place in our schools and colleges.”

In DfE guidance issued this week, schools were advised to “consider staggered starts or adjusting start and finish times to keep groups apart as they arrive and leave”.

However, this “should not reduce the amount of overall teaching time”.

Schools should also “not plan for rotas as there is no requirement to reduce occupancy in schools”, the guidance states. “Instead, everyone must follow the system of controls.”

There is also “no need for class sizes to be adjusted from the usual size”, the DfE said.

According to the guidance, although children are “gradually being removed” from the shielding patients list, those who are confirmed as clinically extremely vulnerable should “shield and stay at home as much as possible until further notice”.

Clinically extremely vulnerable staff are also still being advised not to attend the workplace, and schools should talk to their staff about how they will be supported, “including to work from home”.

In its roadmap, the government has said it “anticipates that it will no longer be necessary to advise shielding beyond the end of March 2021”.

Alamy

Back to school, but not to the exams hall

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It's been a bumper week for government announcements, with ministers setting out their plans for wider school reopenings, mass testing, exam replacements and catch-up spending. Here's what we learned.

School reopening and testing

- All schools to reopen on March 8
- "Discretion" for secondary schools on how they bring back pupils for mass testing over the first week
- Secondary pupils to be tested three times on-site and once at home by the end of the first two weeks back. Twice-weekly tests at home thereafter
- Secondary schools and colleges can start testing before March 8 if they want to
- Primary and secondary school staff will also do twice-weekly home tests, but no requirement for testing of primary pupils
- Attendance mandatory for all primary pupils from March 8 and all secondary pupils from March 15, apart from those who are self-isolating or shielding



Exam replacement

- The government is pressing ahead with plans to award GCSEs, A-levels and some vocational qualifications based on teacher assessments
- Proposed "mini-exams" from exam boards will not be mandatory
- Boards will provide "optional" questions for each subject, which schools will be able to use alongside things like coursework and mock exam results when determining grades
- Schools will still be the first port of call

- for appeals, but will only have to consider whether they made an error or failed to follow their own internal processes
- Schools will then appeal to exam boards on students' behalf if they are not satisfied
- Teachers will have to submit grades by June 18
- Results days have been moved to the week starting August 9, rather than early July as initially proposed
- Another autumn exam series will be held for pupils who want to try to improve their grades.

Catch-up

- £705 million in additional catch-up spending, but DfE won't say if it's all new money
- £302 million of the cash will be a "Covid recovery premium", allocated based on pupil premium numbers
- £200 million to be handed to secondary schools to deliver "face-to-face summer schools"
- £102 million will expand the 16 to 19 tutoring fund
- £83 million to expand the National Tutoring Programme
- £18 million for early years support

Agnew but not goodbye: Lord back on trust board

Former academies minister Lord Agnew (pictured) is to rejoin the academy trust he helped found as a trustee, it has been announced.

The Conservative peer founded the Norfolk-based Inspiration Trust in 2012, but resigned from his role as a trustee in 2018, almost a year after he was appointed as an education minister.

This week, the trust announced Agnew – now efficiency and transformation minister at the Treasury – will be rejoining its board.

The trust has also announced the appointment of a new chief executive. Gareth Stevens, currently the trust's director of secondary education, will succeed Dame Rachel de Souza, who is standing down to take up the role of children's commissioner

for England on March 1.

Agnew's involvement with both the trust and government has previously prompted accusations of preferential treatment.

The Department for Education denied double standards in 2018 after forcing one academy trust to share documents relating to important decisions made by bosses, but allowing the Inspiration Trust not to.

Agnew, who was previously a non-executive director at the DfE from 2010 to 2015, stood down as chair of Inspiration when he was appointed to government in 2017.

He ceased to be listed as a person of significant control that April, but

did not stand down as a trustee until August 2018.

Agnew said at the time that since becoming a minister, he had been "unable to give as much attention to the trust as I would prefer".

New trust chief Stevens is currently responsible for providing support to eight secondary schools. He was previously the principal of Hethersett Academy in Norwich.

De Souza was appointed as children's commissioner in December despite concerns over her "knowledge and experience". She will replace Anne Longfield, who has held the post since 2015.



Teachers prepare to give pupils their grades

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Teachers will set GCSE and A-level grades this summer, with schools expected to declare that their pupils have been taught “sufficient content” to allow them to progress to the next stage in their education.

Ministers and exams regulator Ofqual this week confirmed their plans for replacing summer exams in 2021 with teacher assessments, and sought to reassure schools and pupils that they would only be assessed on “what they have learned”.

The use of additional materials from exam boards to aid assessment, dubbed “mini exams” in some quarters, will not be mandatory, with teachers expected to use a “breadth” of evidence such as coursework and mock exam results to reach their judgments.

With teachers handed responsibility for grading, education secretary Gavin Williamson was warned this week he must take “personal responsibility” for the assessment system this year.

Last year’s system of centre-assessment grades standardised by computer algorithm was abandoned after around four in ten A-level grades issued by schools were downgraded.

Shadow education secretary Kate Green said Williamson “cannot pass the buck on to school staff, who will be doing everything they can to support pupils this summer”.

Exam boards will publish detailed guidance on how to assess pupils. However, this has only been promised before the end of this term, leaving schools facing a further wait for clarity.

Dr Philip Wright, director general at the Joint Council for Qualifications, said boards will provide guidance at “the earliest opportunity”. But Green warned there would be more weeks of “anxiety” as students and teachers wait for the guidance.

By Easter, exam boards will also publish optional questions for schools to use. The government revealed this week that “most” will be past questions, but “a proportion of previously unpublished questions will be included in all subjects”.

Teachers will then have until June 18 to submit their results, with headteachers having to sign a declaration that students have been taught “sufficient content” to allow progression to the next stage of their education.



However, the government has confirmed it will not set requirements for the minimum amount of content students must have been taught.

Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said the process outlined was “better than the original consultation proposals” and was likely “the least worst option available”.

But she warned that “substantial time” will need to be set aside for the assessments and internal quality assurance, and “it may well be that extra staff need to be employed to release teachers for this important work”.

Following the submission of grades, exam boards will begin an external quality assurance process, with higher or lower-than expected results to trigger “visits” to schools – though these could take place virtually.

Students will also be given three opportunities to appeal.

As proposed in the original consultation, schools will be the first port of call.

However, there has been a change to the grounds for escalating an appeal to exam boards.

The consultation proposed that schools could appeal to exam boards on pupils’ behalf if it was thought they hadn’t acted “in line with the exam board’s procedural requirements”.

But the government said this “did not sufficiently take into account the workload it would place on teachers, as well as the importance for students of having their appeal heard by a third party”.

Under the revised plan, schools will only have to check for errors and whether their own processes were followed.

Then, if pupils want to take it further, schools can appeal to exam boards, which will review both the school’s processes and the evidence used to determine a student’s grade to confirm whether

the grade was a “reasonable exercise of academic judgment”.

If a student disagrees with the final result, an application can be made to Ofqual’s Exams Procedures Review Service.

Dr Patrick Roach, general secretary of teachers’ union NASUWT, fears that without “careful management and appropriate processes” the appeals process could result in “excessive workload” for schools.

But Tom Middlehurst, curriculum and inspection specialist at ASCL, said the decision for appeals to be led by exam boards should reduce the burden on schools over the summer break.

Results days will be on August 10 for A-levels and August 12 for GCSEs. For the second year running, an autumn exam series will be held for pupils who want to try to improve their grades.

Natalie Perera, chief executive of the Education Policy Institute, said different approaches could “result in large numbers of pupils appealing their grades this year or extremely high grade inflation, which could be of little value”.

Sir Jon Coles, chief executive of United Learning and a former adviser to Ofqual, warned that “schools will worry that if they are not as generous as they possibly justify, they will disadvantage their students”.

But Williamson told MPs yesterday that the government didn’t feel it would be “possible” to peg overall grades to those issued in a previous year, as it would mean the likely use of an algorithm, which ministers have ruled out after last year’s fiasco.

However, schools will still be encouraged in their internal quality assurance to consider grades for this year’s cohort compared to previous year’s exam cohorts “to make sure they have not been overly lenient or harsh”.

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Investigates

Schools gear up for mass Covid testing

JAMES CARR
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School leaders are exploring staggered starts and extended days to ease the “mammoth logistical task” of mass Covid testing of returning pupils.

Boris Johnson announced on Monday that schools would begin reopening from March 8, with secondaries testing pupils three times on-site in their first two weeks back.

Some leaders said that larger schools would struggle, but others said it was “not an insurmountable challenge”.

What is the government asking schools to do?

The government wants all secondary pupils tested four times by the end of the first two weeks back, with tests needing to be between three and five days apart. Secondaries will have flexibility on how they bring pupils back to be tested, but only for the first week.

The first three tests will be conducted on-site and the fourth at home. Pupils will be allowed to attend lessons as normal after their first negative result.

After the four initial tests, pupils will switch to twice-weekly home tests.

There will be no asymptomatic testing of



primary pupils, but primary staff will continue with twice-weekly home testing. Staff in secondary schools will also switch to twice-weekly home testing.

The Department for Education also confirmed on Wednesday that secondary schools and colleges could start testing pupils before March 8 “if they would like to do so”.

However, testing at home “should not start” until the week beginning March 15.

All testing is voluntary and requires “informed consent”. Deliveries of extra equipment started this week.

Schools prepare for early tests and longer days

Leaders are preparing to take advantage of the clarification that secondary on-site testing can begin before March 8, and some are considering

Continued on next page

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

SECONDARY SCHOOLS



PUPILS

No testing



4 TESTS IN FIRST TWO WEEKS - 3 ON SITE AND ONE AT HOME

TWICE WEEKLY HOME TESTING THEREAFTER

SCHOOLS TO RETAIN A ‘SMALL’ TESTING SITE FOR THOSE WHO CAN’T TEST AT HOME



STAFF

CONTINUED TWICE-WEEKLY HOME TESTING



INTRODUCE TWICE-WEEKLY HOME TESTING



Investigates



extended hours to get it all done.

Stephen Chamberlain, the chief executive of the Active Learning Trust, said his trust was exploring “one possible creative approach”, paying staff overtime to conduct tests from 8am to 8pm to “test as many children as we can”.

Leora Cruddas, from the Confederation of School Trusts, said some of her members were also considering extended opening hours during the first week.

Hamid Patel, the chief executive of Star Academies, said his schools were planning appointments on March 4 and 5.

This will reduce the risk of transmission if a test is positive and allow siblings to attend together, he said. It will also reduce the need to separate pupils before testing “because they will be on-site at specific times”.

Second and third tests will then be easier to administer as pupils could attend at a designated time with others in their bubble.

Poole Grammar School in Dorset is one of three schools that took part in an early trial of lateral-flow testing last year.

Dr Amanda Smith, its head, said the school would stagger the return of year groups between March 8 and 10, testing two year groups on the first day back, three on the second and two on the third.

“The added benefit is that it will also allow some reintegration time for each year group, helping them to settle back into school routines.”

Logistical challenges for largest schools

Julie McCulloch, director of policy at the ASCL school leaders’ union, said allowing testing



before March 8 would help “take the pressure off” for some schools, but “not all will be ready to start testing next week”.

An average-sized secondary school would need to conduct more than 2,800 on-site tests within a fortnight.

NHS Test and Trace guidance estimates one testing bay could do 11 tests an hour. Schools would need at least seven staff members overseeing testing, but this would increase if more bays were in use.

For example, according to a workforce planning tool distributed by the DfE, a school using ten bays would need 17 staff members.

McCulloch said ASCL’s modelling found there was no way of testing a roll of 1,000 pupils three times in a fortnight without using at least seven bays and 14 staff on the busiest days.

Those difficulties would increase for larger schools.

Cruddas said it would “not be possible” for some of the biggest schools to test their pupils

even once within the first week.

But Patel said schools had “planned testing in preparation for return in January and have administered tests to consenting staff and to pupils who have attended the site during lockdown”.

“Scaling up these arrangements is not an insurmountable challenge.”

Smith said the government’s aim was realistic. “It will be slow to start with, but will speed up over time.

“Our experience was that the first time was a bit daunting for students so the more you can prepare them for it, the better.”

Matthew Clements-Wheeler, the chair of Kenilworth Multi-Academy Trust, admitted that while it was a “mammoth logistical task”, schools had been given time to plan and he was “optimistic it will work”.

And Vic Goddard, co-headteacher at Passmores Academy in Essex, said the limit on testing at school meant there was “an end in sight”. It was a short-term inconvenience rather than a long-term drain on resources.

Concerns over rural schools

Some logistical problems may be exacerbated for rural schools.

It was easier for pupils in towns and cities to walk or be dropped off at school for staggered testing times, Clements-Wheeler said.

However in rural settings “you’ve only got one shot to bring the kids in each day”.

Chamberlain said pupils arriving on buses would mix before testing, which might mean larger numbers were sent home to isolate if a test was positive.

Face coverings in secondary classrooms ‘recommended’

The government is recommending that face coverings be worn in secondary classrooms until Easter, but it will not be compulsory.

The change was announced earlier this week by the Department for Education, following the announcement that all schools will reopen on March 8.

Ministers said they were recommending that the use of face coverings in secondary schools be extended to all indoor environments, “including classrooms”, for a “limited period” until Easter.

Face coverings have been required in indoor communal areas of secondary schools.

However, the DfE is now recommending they “should be worn in classrooms or during

activities unless social distancing can be maintained”.

This does not apply if a face covering “would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity, for example in PE lessons”.

There are also exemptions for those who rely on visual signals for communication, or communicate with or provide support to such individuals, and those who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical impairment or disability, illness or mental health difficulties.

“No pupil should be denied education on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering,” the guidance adds.

In primary schools, face coverings should be

worn by staff and adult visitors “in situations where social distancing between adults is not possible (for example, when moving around in corridors and communal areas)”. But children in primary school “do not need to wear a face covering”.

Speaking to *Breakfast* on BBC One on Thursday, Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said masks in secondary classrooms were “highly recommended”, but not compulsory.

“We are saying it is not mandatory ... to have masks in classrooms, but it is highly recommended because we want to do everything we can to reduce the risk of transmission in the school.”

News

EXCLUSIVE



'Printed' resources may cost schools millions

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The government has said its £4 million pledge for catch-up resources may take the form of "printable" documents, prompting concerns the scheme could cost schools millions of pounds.

The Department for Education is looking to spend £3.9 million on catch-up materials for the next academic year, possibly including "diagnostic tests" to help teachers find gaps in children's learning.

A tender notice published this month said the range of services may include the creation and maintenance of various "in-class and catch-up" resources in "various formats".

But at a virtual market engagement event last week, department officials said they "anticipated" the scheme would provide downloadable, printable resources.

Officials claimed there were data protection issues with using web-based resources, although such an approach was still under consideration.

Education leaders said this week that the money should instead go directly to schools.

"We don't really understand why the government is asking companies to tender for a fairly lucrative contract without first engaging with schools to ask what kind of catch-up support they might need," said Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders.

She added that the government should let skilled teachers "get on with the process" of helping their pupils catch up, providing the funding they needed.

"This should include the ability to source appropriate resources from whatever provider, and in whatever format, they choose."

Andy Baines, a former teacher and the founder of online tutoring system Planet BOFA, said the bill for printing resources could run into millions of pounds.

If schools printed 20 sheets for five subjects for each pupil at 2p a sheet, that would cost £2 per pupil. Extrapolated across 7.8 million pupils in years 1 to 10, that would cost £15.6 million, he said.

"To go about trying to find resources that increase teachers' workload and won't save them any time seems to be counterintuitive."

The proposal also seems at-odds with DfE directives to save money on printing and copying.

Lord Agnew, the former academies minister, faced a backlash in 2018 after saying that cutting down on "staggering" copying bills was "one small example" of how schools could save money.

Andy Bullough, a senior research fellow at the Sheffield Institute of Education, said he would like a hybrid approach of paper and online.

"You want something that isn't one size fits all," he said.

The DfE aims to award the contract in June, with an initial set of resources published in September before a "full range" became available from January.

The officials also said they were not expecting the resources to be new, with suppliers being "very welcome" to draw on existing materials.

The Oak National Academy, an online learning platform set up last year, said it had not ruled out bidding for the contract.

But Matt Hood, Oak's principal, said the platform wanted to see the final tender first.

"There are some things in there that are a bit similar to what we do, but there are things that are different."

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Oak hopes shared quiz results will help schools

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH EXCLUSIVE

The Oak National Academy is looking at how it can use millions of quiz results from pupils to help schools determine learning lost during the pandemic.

Pupils using the online learning platform usually complete quizzes at the end of sessions. Oak is exploring potential research partnerships in a bid to share the data with schools and the wider education sector.

"It's not the most sophisticated thing in the world, but we think it's there," said Matt Hood, Oak's principal.

"Pupils have completed well over 100 million lessons and most of those lessons come with a quiz. There's a lot of data and information here."

"It's all anonymous, but in aggregate it might provide us with some interesting things that we could learn about the period that's just happened that will help us with the period that is about to come."

Oak has also launched a new tool to allow pupils to send their quiz results back to teachers, through either a unique link or by uploading it on to Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams. Teachers will then be able to see a breakdown of the pupils' answers.

Previously there was no "efficient" way to report scores back, because the site was set up to be used without pupils having to log in.

Hood said he'd heard reports of pupils having to take photographs of their quiz results, or teachers manually typing out the quizzes into their own forms so they could collate the data.

The tool still has its limitations - teachers can't collect whole-class data in one go, for instance.

But Hood added: "We've just got this one over the line, and I'm sure that when the next task comes we will welcome it when it arrives and we will do our best."

News



EXCLUSIVE

Trust will take academy takeover battle to High Court

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

An academy trust will take its legal battle to keep hold of one of its schools to the High Court in a claim which, if successful, could create “new possibilities” for trusts in similar positions.

Khalsa Academies Trust has won permission to apply for a judicial review of a government decision to terminate the funding agreement for Khalsa Secondary Academy, a Sikh free school in Buckinghamshire.

The school was placed in special measures in January last year after Ofsted inspectors found it was ‘inadequate’ and raised safeguarding concerns.

It was then issued with a termination warning notice in February, followed in June by a termination notice issued by Baroness Berridge, the academies minister, confirming plans to strip the school from the trust.

In her letter, Berridge said the trust had failed to show it had the “necessary experience or knowledge to improve a failing school”, and that there was a “lack of evidence” that Nick Singh Kandola, the chief executive, was being “held to account”.

But the trust claims the government acted irrationally in terminating the funding agreement in light of the “impact of Covid-19 and the steps that had been taken by the trust following the Ofsted report”.

The trust also claims that the government failed to properly consult with the Network of Sikh Organisations and breached the Equality Act 2010 by treating the school differently to Catholic or Anglican academies.

Kandola said the DfE’s decision “simply did not recognise the circumstances under lockdown or the work being done to improve the school”.

The trust filed a claim for a judicial review in August last year, weeks after the Sikh Academies Trust was announced as the government’s preferred sponsor to take over the school.

The funding agreement was initially due to be terminated no later than October 31, but the trust and the DfE agreed to a court order that means the department will not take any “irreversible” steps until the claim is determined by the court.

Khalsa’s initial judicial review request failed, but the High Court confirmed its second attempt was successful last week.

If the challenge succeeds, it may set a precedent for similar future cases.

Simon Foulkes, a business consultant specialising in education at Lee Bolton Monier Williams, said such claims were “rare”, but that if the trust was successful on any of its grounds it would “certainly create new possibilities for trusts in similar positions, although each matter will be dealt with on its merits as circumstances will never be exactly the same”.

“Any trust considering such action should consult with expert solicitors who have good links with appropriate accountancy expertise so that early advice can be taken.”

A DfE spokesperson said it had identified a “strong sponsor that protects the Sikh religious character of Khalsa Academy” and that the decision to issue a termination notice “was taken with the best interests of pupils, parents, and staff in mind”.

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£190k for polling on catch-up

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The polling company Ipsos MORI has been commissioned to evaluate the use and impact of the government’s Covid catch-up premium, officials revealed this week.

The Department for Education allocated £650 million in catch-up premium to schools for this academic year, which amounts to about £80 for each pupil in the country.

Graham Archer, the DfE’s director for qualifications, curriculum and extra-curricular, told MPs that Ipsos MORI and Sheffield Hallam University would carry out research that will give a “clear sense of how the premium and related funding is being used”. The contract will cost £190,000, he revealed.

It means that the DfE “will be able to say much more effectively in due course what the impact has been”, he said.

Schools can decide what catch-up initiatives to spend the premium funding on, including subsidised tuition through the National Tutoring Programme.

The parliamentary education committee this week asked officials about the funding’s impact in schools.

Archer said schools were “only now getting the great bulk of that money”, but said the DfE was already seeing a “range of uses”.

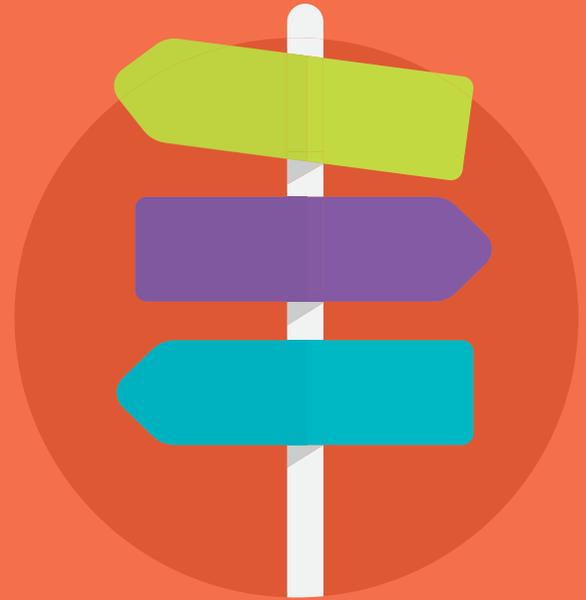
“We’re getting some sense of some effective use on evidence-based programmes of work ... and to support children with mental health and other needs that are getting in the way of learning. We are also getting some evidence of use to support remote education.”

The Ipsos MORI contract comes on top of up to £143,000 spent with Renaissance Learning on research looking at the extent of lost learning. The DfE published its first interim report this week (see page 16).

The government has also tendered for an £85,000 contract to look at the harms caused by the pandemic.

Asked why so much money was being spent on “consultants”, Archer said: “Our view is that the best way of getting a good sense of lost learning was in the way described, using tests that schools regularly make, using a sense of prior attainment.”

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Schools cut screen time for pupils and staff

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

INVESTIGATES

Schools have introduced “comfort breaks” and days away from computer screens to boost the mental and physical health of staff and pupils during remote learning.

Schools have had to provide remote education for most pupils since the third lockdown in January, but some have adapted their approach after feedback from staff, pupils and parents.

Although all pupils are expected to return to schools from March 8, remote learning must still be provided for any pupil who has to continue to learn from home.

This could include those sent home to self-isolate because of a confirmed or suspected Covid case, or contact with someone who has the virus.

Belinda Chapple, the head of Caterham High School in Ilford, Essex, said her school had reduced hour-long lessons to 40 minutes to allow pupils regular breaks from their screens.

The changes were made after the school noticed pupils struggling with screen fatigue, and parents got in touch to raise concerns their children were “glued to screens all day”.

Meanwhile staff said increased screen time affected their physical health, with back, neck, shoulder and eye problems reported.

Chapple said a survey found 95 per cent of parents favoured the introduced changes as they allowed children to be more active, while staff savoured the “pause for breath to refocus” between lessons.

A survey from Teacher Tapp this month found that 80 per cent of primary teachers said their biggest worry for their pupils was loss of social experiences and wellbeing, rather than any dip in academic learning.



The Guardian reported last month excessive screen time could impact children’s mental and emotional development, sleep patterns and eyesight.

Barnhill Community High School, in Hayes, Middlesex, has introduced ten-minute comfort breaks between morning lessons, and longer breaks and lunch periods after determining the increased screen time of remote learning “is not healthy for sustained periods”.

John Jones, the school’s head, said the reduction of “draining screen time” was introduced “to ensure the wellbeing of staff and students is looked after”.

Some schools have gone further and introduced regular screen blackouts.

Nene Park Academy in Peterborough held a “no screen day” last term, encouraging pupils to spend the time completing community activities, such as charity work or learning a new skill like first aid.

Since January the school has also

shortened lessons from 60 to 45 minutes, and extended lunch from 30 minutes to an hour.

Rob Grover, the school’s principal, said that the initial drive to ensure children kept learning meant they were “almost blind to the side-effects” of increased screen time. Regular surveys of parents and pupils helped to identify the issues.

“It is so important that we take time to step away from the screen and engage in activities that help boost mental health and encourage human interaction.”

He said another “no screen day” would be held, while the school was looking into keeping the extended lunch and regular breaks for children learning remotely this term.

Elsewhere, Meols Cop High School, in Merseyside, has introduced “no screen bingo” one afternoon each week in which pupils take part in activities that benefit their wellbeing and the local community.

Another UTC faces uncertain future

JESS STAUFENBERG

@STAUFENBERGJ

EXCLUSIVE

The future of another university technical college hangs in the balance, despite it receiving emergency funding.

East London UTC was given its second financial notice to improve last month - after a £375,000 government bailout last year. It also chalked up a £1.8 million deficit in 2020.

The college's 2019-20 accounts show the Department for Education warned governors last month it was "minded not to approve" the 14 to 19 institution's requests to expand and take on students from age 11 to improve its sustainability.

"Although negotiations are continuing, the outcome of these is inherently uncertain," the accounts say, adding that without extra cash the UTC would not be able to "meet its liabilities".

Ofsted rated the college 'requires improvement'. It has 111 students on roll.

The situation raises the question as to whether the DfE would rather allow struggling UTCs without good Ofsted results go to the wall rather than change their business model.

Kim Donovan, the college's principal, said there were no plans to close, but declined to comment further on the ongoing uncertainty about its future.

Eleven UTCs have closed since the first technical institutions were created by Lord Baker, a former education secretary, in 2010.

East London UTC, which was first issued a financial notice in January last year, hoped the DfE would agree to extend its starting age after it came out of special measures in June 2019, say its accounts.

But "after making enquiries on the level of support from DfE and ESFA", governors concluded it "does not have adequate resources to meet its liabilities [...] without further financial support from the ESFA or elsewhere".

Eight of the 48 UTCs across the country have received financial notices to improve.



Three of those have since closed.

Buckinghamshire UTC, whose financial notice was issued in 2016 and lifted the following year, also faces an uncertain future.

Its accounts reveal the 'requires improvement'-rated institution recorded a £336,000 deficit last year, and that "the long-term financial sustainability of Bucks UTC depends ultimately" on increasing its 135 students through recruitment at 11 or joining a multi-academy trust.

A proposal to join the Merchant Taylors Oxfordshire Academy Trust has been resubmitted after the DfE rejected the first application. The UTC did not respond to a request for comment.

David Robinson, director of post-16 and skills at the Education Policy Institute, said "one-on-one bespoke funding responses" were "not enough" to save the UTC model.

"In terms of the transition at 14, I don't think any amount of Baker Clause reinforcement is going to save that," he added, referring to the legal duty on schools to make pupils aware of vocational study routes.

UTCs "either need to start from age 11, or at age 16".

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL school leadership union, said UTCs faced

"pressures because of the challenge of recruiting pupils into a 14-19 setting".

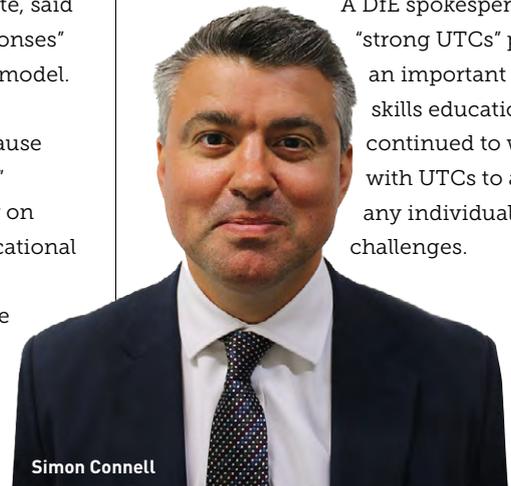
"Solutions depend on the circumstances, and we would always say that leadership teams and governing bodies are best placed to decide on how to respond to pressures according to their context."

He would expect the government to provide appropriate support to any school or college facing financial pressures.

Simon Connell, the chief executive of the Baker Dearing Educational Trust charity, which supports UTCs, said the "raised profile of employer-led technical education through the FE white paper" meant many high-quality MATs wanted a UTC.

Twenty-three UTCs are in academy trusts, while four recruit from age 11.

A DfE spokesperson said "strong UTCs" played an important role in skills education. It continued to work with UTCs to address any individual challenges.



Simon Connell

Speed read

DfE study finds inequality underpins learning loss

Pupils in schools with the poorest intakes are further behind in reading than their counterparts in schools with more affluent rolls, a study into lost learning caused by Covid-19 has found. The Department for Education has released the first report from a research project run by Renaissance Learning and the Education Policy Institute, which was commissioned to assess the learning loss experienced by pupils as a result of the pandemic.

1 PUPILS IN POORER-INTAKE SCHOOLS FURTHER BEHIND IN READING

After adjusting for historic differences in progress, the study found that pupils in primary schools with high free school meals (FSM) eligibility rates were two months behind in reading, compared to 1.7 months for those in schools with low FSM rates.



For the purposes of the study, schools were deemed to have high FSM rates if more than 25 per cent of pupils were eligible, while schools were said to have low rates if less than 10 per cent were eligible.

At secondary level, pupils in high-FSM schools were 2.2 months behind, compared to 1.5 months in low-FSM schools.

2 READING IN ALL YEAR GROUPS HAS SUFFERED

The research found that all year groups combined appeared to have lost around two months of learning when it comes to reading.



But the figures differ slightly between year groups.

Between year 3 and 6, estimated learning loss ranged between 1.8 and two months. For year 8 and 9 pupils, the losses were between 1.6 and two months.

"Pupils who have just started in year 6 and pupils who have just started year 9 experienced the largest losses (2 months) but this is not materially greater than those in years 3, 4, 5 and 8," the report warned.

3 YEAR 7 PUPILS EXPERIENCED SMALLEST LEARNING LOSS IN READING

Estimated learning loss in reading was substantially lower among year 7 pupils, at just 0.9 months, the study found.



One possible explanation for this disparity, the report states, is that the cohort was out of school for less time than others, because primary schools reopened to year 6 pupils earlier last summer.

However, the report also notes that year 7 is the smallest group for which it is presenting results, and the number of pupils is "significantly lower" than in last year's data.

It is therefore possible there is a "systematic bias in the schools that have participated in Star Reading assessments to this point", it said.

4 LEARNING LOSS IN MATHS IS GREATER



It is estimated that primary-aged pupils have lost around 3.2 months of learning in maths.

However, it was not possible to derive "robust estimates" for maths learning lost by pupils in secondary schools.

5 EVIDENCE OF REGIONAL DISPARITY IN READING LOSSES



Pupils in the north-east and Yorkshire and the Humber experienced the highest rates of lost learning in reading across both primary and secondary age groups.

At primary level, the majority of pupils were typically behind by between 1.7 and two months. However, primary pupils in the north-east lost an average of 2.4 months, while those in Yorkshire and the Humber lost 2.2 months.

This pattern is repeated at secondary level where the north-east's adjusted learning loss was found to be 2.3 months and Yorkshire and the Humber 2.4 months.

Learning loss in reading at secondary level was between 1.3 and 2.2 months in other regions.

Nerd note

The interim findings are based on more than 400,000 reading and maths assessments taken in the first half of the autumn term, compared with results in previous years.

In their report, the researchers presented two sets of figures. The first were simple mean figures for all individual pupil learning losses based on results in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20.

But these figures would reflect both the impact of the pandemic and different rates of progress that pupils typically make in a normal year. To control for this, the researchers calculated "the mean progress pupils made in each region in 2019/20 and subtract this from our estimate of learning loss".

The report adds: "In other words, we assume that in the absence of coronavirus, pupils in the region would have made the same progress as pupils in the region last year...this provides a better estimate of the effect of the pandemic on pupil outcomes."

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Q&A

Q: Tell us about the Foundation for Education Development. What does it stand for and who can get involved?

A: The whole aim is to champion a long-term vision and plan for education in England. We're non-political, and we encourage everybody to have that conversation.

We believe that the time is right for at least a ten-year cycle, as opposed to things changing at least every five years, or in reality every two or three.

We're not a membership organisation. We encourage anybody to get involved in our work and contribute to it. Anybody can be a member, so to speak, but we don't ask anything for it.

Q: You set up the organisation towards the end of 2019. How has the pandemic shaped your work?

A: We started this when no-one knew what Covid was. We did our first three-month consultation, and then it hit.

But as a result we've had an education consultation that's run through virtually an entire pandemic.

This means we've got a unique insight into the conversations that have been had across education, business, parents, community during that time. Thousands of people have been drawn into the consultation.

Q: Your national summit takes place next week, albeit online. Are there benefits to holding it virtually?

A: When we were originally planning to do this in June, we had about ten speakers. Now it's 120 over four days.

It's a who's who of the system in many ways. We have the



Q&A Carl Ward

Carl Ward, chair of the Foundation for Education Development, chief executive of the City Learning Trust, talks to *Schools Week's* chief reporter Freddie Whittaker about the foundation's upcoming national education summit.

"We started this when no one knew what Covid was"

secretary of state opening it with a keynote. We have Robert Halfon, chair of the education select committee. We have Wes Streeting from Labour.

We already know we're going to have upwards of 1,000 people at the summit throughout the four days.

Q: How long do you expect the work of the FED to last?

A: We gave ourselves three years. But it will probably be a little bit more because the pandemic hit and everything stopped.

We were due to publish our national consultation report next week, but now it'll be the last week of April, so our second year won't start until May.

We want to write ourselves out

of history. In three years we don't want to exist because we hope we will have a ten-year plan or at least the processes being put together by the government.

Q: You are doing an "in conversation with" Gavin Williamson. What do you want to hear from him?

A: The prime minister has talked about the need for a long-term plan. So I suppose what I want to know, both as chair of the foundation and as a school leader, is how we're going to pull that together and how long will that long-term plan be.

There is, I think, a desire from our education system to want to say, right, this is a time where we can go on a long journey for our

children and young people.

Politics has a five-year cycle, but for us the important cycle is the 14 years from ages 4 to 18.

Q: There have been calls for a long-term funding plan for education. Are you backing those?

A: There's no doubt there'll be many organisations that are talking about the need to increase funding, especially in the medium term as we recover from Covid.

But the reality is that it's not the amount of funding, but it's what we do with it. As a leader in education, I've wasted so much money over the years, not deliberately, but because every few years the policies change.

We do need agility, because the world changes, but we also need stability.

And if we worked out what we needed over the next ten years or longer, if we had a more sensible approach to the churn of policy over time, we could invest our money more wisely.

Q: Many leaders are calling for changes to things such as assessment and inspection as we come out of the pandemic. Is that part of what you're looking at?

A: Right at the start, the FED decided that it wasn't going to get involved in the discussions of the here and now. Inspection, accountability, assessment, curriculum, funding. They will always be there.

But if they are placed on a very solid platform, a foundational plan, then they will operate better.

If we can create that foundational plan, then the next part would be discussion of the type of things that will be needed in assessment, accountability, etc. Lots of organisations are already out there doing that. We're not adding to that noise.

While you were away...

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Children's tsar takes parting shot at ministers

Ministers should commit to making children "better-off", rather than talking about increasing numbers attending 'good' or better schools, the outgoing children's commissioner has said.

Anne Longfield used her last speech in the role to launch a broadside against the government, claiming she often had to "force officials and ministers to the table" to talk about vulnerable pupils.

She also warned that failing to set a "clear goal that's about children's lives" risked repeating "the mistakes of the past ten years", when successive governments have focused on school improvement targets "without noticing" that some outcomes were getting worse.

Longfield, who leaves at the end of this month, will be replaced by academy boss Dame Rachel de Souza.

In her speech, she warned that a government pledge to "level up" would be "just a slogan" unless it focused on children. All political parties should "set a clear goal that's about children's lives, not the institutions they attend".

Ministers often point to increases in the

number of pupils attending schools rated 'good' or better by Ofsted as evidence that their policies are working.

But researchers have warned the statistic is "flawed" because it failed to take into account increasing pupil numbers and because 'outstanding' schools until recently were generally exempt from reinspection.

"Instead of talking about increasing the number of children going to a good or outstanding school, I want the government to commit to making children better off," Longfield said.

"Otherwise, we will repeat the mistakes of the past ten years, when governments have focused on school improvement targets without noticing that the outcomes for children attending these schools are, overall, getting worse." Her office pointed to government data that showed level 2 attainment at 19 had been falling for several years.

The children's commissioner is an independent national role sponsored by the Department for Education, with a

responsibility to promote the rights, views and interests of children. As such, it requires regular engagement with ministers and Whitehall.

Longfield said that the issues holding many children back were not being tackled and that she was "fed up with hearing 'we don't know' from people whose job it is to know".

"I have to force officials and ministers to the table, to watch them sit through a presentation, maybe ask a question, and then vacantly walk away. I do not believe this truly reflects the extent of government and the public's commitment to helping children succeed."

A government spokesperson said protecting vulnerable children had been "at the heart of our response to the pandemic, driven by our commitment to level up opportunities and outcomes".

"Anne Longfield has been a tireless advocate for children, and we're grateful for her dedication and her challenge on areas where we can continue raising the bar for the most vulnerable."



Anne Longfield

Exit payment cap faces the scrap

Schools should be "prepared for challenge" from former staff whose exit payments were capped after a government U-turn on the regulations.

The government faced a legal challenge by unions against a £95,000 cap introduced in November last year, aimed at limiting payouts to departing public sector staff, including those made redundant.

However, the Treasury has now decided the regulation should be revoked after an "extensive" review concluded it may have had "unintended consequences".

Unison, which represents school support staff, said the cap would have affected those in the local government pension scheme who were made redundant after they turned 55 as their benefits were payable immediately.

Despite the Treasury decision, staff who left between November 4 and February 12 may have been impacted.

The government said individuals could ask their former employer for the amount they would have received had the cap

not been in place.

It also encouraged employers to pay the extra sums.

But Polly O'Malley, a partner at law firm Stone King who specialises in education sector employment law, said it "would appear that the onus is on the individual to ask the employer to revisit this, so they may approach the school employer and request an increase to the payment".

"There doesn't currently appear to be any obligation on employers to proactively seek out those individuals, but obviously schools will need to be aware that they might be approached."

O'Malley said it was likely to affect "very few" schools, but they nonetheless should be "prepared for challenge".

A Treasury spokesperson said: "Following an extensive review, we have withdrawn the cap on exit payments due to the unintended consequences it had on employees."

"We remain committed to bringing forward proposals at pace to tackle unjustified exit payments."



Pay rise for just 6,400 teachers

Only around 6,400 unqualified teachers will be eligible for a pay rise this year, the government has predicted.

The chancellor announced last year that public sector workers earning more than £24,000 would face a pay freeze this year. Those earning below the threshold would get a rise of at least £250.

But in its evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB), which makes recommendations on teacher pay, the Department for Education said the £250 award would "typically" only apply to unqualified teachers, as the minimum pay point for qualified teachers in 2020-21 was £25,714.

The report estimates that about 5,200 full-time equivalent unqualified teachers may be eligible, but it also gives examples of how adjustments can be calculated for differentiated London

pay ranges. That could boost the estimated number of unqualified teachers receiving the award to 6,400.

The rise will cost up to £2.2 million, which schools will be expected to meet from existing budgets.

Unions last week rejected the pay freeze and called on the STRB to defy ministers and recommend a rise.

The ASCL and NAHT leadership unions, with the National Education Union and Voice, warned in a joint statement that the freeze "will inflict yet another real-terms cut to teacher and school leader pay".

A DfE spokesperson pointed to last year's pay settlement, which included a 5.5 per cent rise for new teachers and 2.75 per cent increase to all other grades. Teaching remained an "attractive and rewarding career", they said.

EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Williamson must back teachers all the way on grading

Teachers have been put firmly in the driving seat when it comes to exams this year, with the government confirming that teacher assessments will be used to issue GCSE and A-level grades.

The spectre of so-called “mini exams” also appears to have dissipated, with the government instead pledging to have exam boards provide optional questions for use in schools alongside other evidence.

It suits the government at times like these to say that it’s putting its trust in teachers. However, as we all know, this can often be taken as shorthand for leaving education professionals to shoulder the blame when things go wrong.

With no plan to adjust grades nationally to bring them into line with those seen in previous years, it is likely that once again we will see huge upset on results days. The government’s plan is better than it could have been, but is by

no means infallible, and there will undoubtedly be students who feel hard-done-by when they get their teacher assessment grades.

As we know, it is incumbent on school leaders to stand by their staff in times of great adversity, and we have seen proof of this happening in the past year as heads and their employees have worked together to deal with the Herculean task of responding to this pandemic.

It is therefore incumbent on Gavin Williamson to stand firmly behind teachers when concerns about grading this year inevitably surface. Teachers will be rightly angry if the education secretary runs for the hills when the going gets tough.

Ministers have made a point, especially recently, of thanking teachers for their hard work over the past year. But it remains to be seen if these are just hollow words, with no actions or support to back them up.

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Children’s commissioner to warn of over-focus on school improvement in critical last speech

Janet Downs

I fully agree with Anne Longfield’s analysis except for one: her opinion that anything less than level 2 qualifications, defined by her as 5five GCSEs level 4 or above, means young people with level 1 qualifications have no qualifications at all. Level 1 qualifications have a value: they demonstrate a basic level of competence. It’s a pity Longfield didn’t argue for a recognition of level 1 qualifications instead of dismissing them.

March 8 school reopening guidance: 13 things we learned
Sim

I am worried about my children going to school. Parents shouldn’t be forced to send kids to school. It should be parents’ personal choice, Only parents know what is best for their kids. Testing children is not practical, all pupils may not be comfortable with testing. Government should wait for the infection rates to go completely down. It should extend the lockdown.

Why we shouldn’t rush to scrap GCSEs in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic

Dennis Sherwood

“GCSEs and A-levels have been an extraordinary national success....And they do a lot more than just provide internationally trusted grades...” (Tim Oates, February 19, 2021)

“Exam grades are reliable to one grade either way.” (Dame Glenys Stacey, evidence to the select committee, September 2, 2020). That second statement, in plain English, means “an A-level certificate showing ABB really means any set of grades from A*AA to BCC but no one knows which” (and likewise for GCSE). Tell that to a student denied an AAB university place.

If exam results “reliable to one grade either way” are “internationally trusted”, then that trust is surely misplaced.

And is it any surprise that an organisation that generates income from selling GCSEs is arguing in favour of maintaining them?

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Dr Zubaida Haque @Zubhaque

PM sets out March 8 school reopening plans

We have literally gone from “schools are safe” on January 3, to schools are “vectors of transmission” on January 4, to schools are safe to fully reopen on March 8 - *without implementing/ adding ANY further Covid-safe measures to schools (other than school facemasks and home testing).



Unions ‘increasingly concerned’ government will order full school reopening on March 8

Katrina Farrar

I’d like to see the GCSE 2022 changed as I feel they have not had a fair chance to prepare for mocks in 2021. They should concentrate on just a few core subjects, such as maths, English, and double science, then one chosen subject, so they can achieve the highest grade possible. This would help the children to feel more confident about GCSEs and help teachers to achieve desirable results - and free them up to help other year groups catch up.

DfE faces £263,000 bonus bill for staff who helped set up mass testing scheme

@HelenLPike

The wasted senior leadership time was of course free of charge...

@mbdinn

Which never happened! What about the school staff who spent their holidays preparing - will they get backdated pay too?

@wesstreeting

£263,000 down the pan and they don’t have a proper testing programme to show for it.

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FUTURES

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Profile

JL DUTAUT | @DUTAUT



‘Libraries can be the absolute heartbeat of a school’

His global success began with putting a library at the heart of a school turn-around. Now Richard Gerver’s out to bring that success to more schools. By JL Dutaut

With all the talk of school closures and the digital divide, innumerable column inches have been written about laptops and dongles. Much less about books. Of course, the days of teaching a set course from an approved textbook are long gone, and so access to teachers and their resources matters much more.

But the closure of schools has also meant the closure of school libraries. And not just them. The majority of local libraries have closed too, with some sites staying open “for emergency public computer access”.

“With Covid, we’ve seen the massive divide between the haves and the have-nots in

terms of digital technology and many other essentials,” says my interviewee. “But what’s been less talked about is access to books in homes – shelves of books and parents that model that.”

Book sales have declined year on year in the UK for well over a decade. But the pandemic has seen a resurgence. Over 200 million books were sold in 2020, the first time that number has been exceeded since 2012. And in the year before the pandemic, the UK’s 3,667 public libraries issued 165 million books to 7.3 million active borrowers.

So this isn’t a piece about the demise of the book, news of which has evidently been greatly exaggerated. But it is a piece

about the complex relationships between the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution and an enduring legacy from the first. And it’s a piece about school libraries – long since rebranded as ‘learning and information centres’ in many schools. And last but not least, it’s a piece about the man recently put in charge of promoting their value – celebrated former headteacher and new president of the School Library Association, Richard Gerver.

He’s effervescent in conversation and has clearly been reading into his brief. “In 2019, one in eight schools in the country didn’t have a substantive library. My fear is that, particularly in larger schools, when they’re

Profile: Richard Gerver



With Lynn on their wedding day. 2013



With Lynn on their 27th wedding anniversary. Buxton, 2019



With Barack Obama at an Advanced Leadership Foundation event. Madrid, 2019

“Libraries are not ‘nice to haves’ but a core part of the bounce back”

looking to trim budgets, one of the first things that might go might be the trained librarian.”

Although Gerver has long since moved on from working in schools, his wife of 28 years, Lynn, is still a practising headteacher. He feels, he tells me, like he’s still “living semi on the frontline... I can understand why there might be a cutback in books. But I think we’ve got to use Covid as a catalyst for good. We need to make sure schools realise libraries are not ‘nice to haves’ but actually form a core part of the bounce back.”

A cynical reader might say this is exactly what you’d expect the president of the School Library Association to say. It’s certainly true that Covid has been used as a justification for just about every educational agenda. But Gerver has form on school libraries that long predates the pandemic and this new role.

In 2001, just eight years into his drama teaching career and with four of those

already under his belt as a deputy headteacher, he was seconded to Derbyshire County Council as a literacy consultant on a project “to remotivate demotivated boys in reading and writing”.

As part of that work, he found himself one day visiting a local school in hot water, Grange Primary School. He fell in love. “It was so unexpected. I wasn’t looking for a headship. I’d only been in this seconded role for a few months. There had been no substantive head for 18 months. An amazing woman who’d been in the school 30-something years had been acting head on three occasions at least and had never wanted the job. They’d had something crazy like eight heads in ten years.”

He applied, got the job in 2002 and in the space of two years transformed the Long Eaton school into a nationally and globally celebrated learning environment. He won

‘school headteacher of the year’ at the British National Teaching Awards, and picked up an award for the school at the UNESCO World Arts Education conference.

Central to the school’s transformation was its library. Well, in point of fact, when he started there was hardly one to speak of – just some bookshelves in a corridor.

On the outside, “it was an unbelievable building. It looked like a mini Hogwarts in the middle of this socially deprived community.” But the inside was a different story. He describes “unused rooms piled high with crap”. Decision made. “We’re going to build a library, and we’re going to build the best damn library in the area.” He hired a skip, emptied the rooms and “begged, borrowed and stole” everything he could to transform them. He persuaded one of the governors to train as a librarian and to operate the new facility on a teaching assistant’s wage.

Profile: Richard Gerver



Talking to a London Business Forum audience. BAFTA, 2020



Headteacher of the year award, 2005



Receiving an honorary doctorate from The Duke of Devonshire. University of Derby, 2016

“I don’t want to be that old fuddy duddy telling teachers now how to do the job”

And then he built a curriculum around it. “Every class had timetabled library lessons. And it had a profound impact, and particularly on kids from an area of social deprivation, whose limitation was they lived in a very insular community. They had a limitation on aspiration, on experiences. The library became a catalyst for us.”

In 2007, urged on by none other than his idol, Ken Robinson, Gerver left a transformed Grange Primary School to go full-time into writing and public speaking. His latest of four published volumes, *Education: A Manifesto for Change*, came out in 2019 to wide acclaim (and a critical *Schools Week* review he jokingly barbs me about!).

He’s very conscious that he’s been out of the fray for 14 years. “I don’t want to be that old fuddy duddy who ten years, 15 years down the track is telling teachers now how to do the job.”

But Gerver also hasn’t run out of things to say. As a boy who at the age of nine had developed a debilitating stammer as a result of his father’s toxic presence at home and his parents’ traumatic separation, who’s gone

on to the top of the teaching profession and then become a globally renowned public speaker, we should probably hear him out.

As well as the digital divide, we’ve heard a lot over the past year about schools’ vital role in supporting disadvantaged children. On paper, Gerver would never have been classed as one of them. He attended a private school in north-west London at great expense. “I had the most incredibly privileged education,” he tells me. But the turmoil in his childhood home is an example of the limitations of our classification and a cautionary tale for what might become evident as schools reopen.

It’s also an encouraging one about the power of teachers. It was his primary school teacher who saw past the stammer and came up with a plan. “His belief was that the nervous tic comes from being so worried about being you, and what people think of you. So he got me speaking other people’s words. And it worked.” From three lines in the school play, Gerver progressed to reading aloud in class. And here he is today. “He was

an extraordinary teacher. He spent so long really trying to climb inside who I was rather than dismiss me as just a name on a register.”

He went on to develop a passion for drama. He studied it at university and “clung on to the dream of being an actor, even though I’d failed at rep”. Then he met Lynn, who was starting out on her teaching career. She invited him to help out with some drama activities for her class, and the rest is history – personally and professionally.

There are lessons here as we begin the long road back towards normality. As the government works on its plans for tuition and catch-up and summer schools, it’s worth remembering the power of a teacher with time to invest. As the curriculum focus falls most heavily on English and maths, we should keep in mind the power of reading for pleasure, of reading aloud and reading to perform. As the handwringing continues over disadvantaged pupils, it’s worth remembering that disadvantage comes in many forms that aren’t necessarily systemic. As plans emerge to build a digital legacy on the foundations set over the past year, it’s worth remembering the enduring power of the analogue world.

And as resocialisation efforts centre on sports and outdoor activities, nobody should forget that libraries have long since stopped being the lonely, hushed abode of bookworms. As Gerver has shown, “they can be the absolute heartbeat of a school”.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MARY BOUSTED

Joint general secretary, National Education Union



Boris Johnson's 'big bang' is a big risk

The prime minister's decision for a full reopening on March 8 makes no sense, writes Mary Bousted

Throughout this awful pandemic, the National Education Union has followed the science and been proved right time after time. We tracked the spread of Covid in schools and colleges and the disruption it was causing to pupils' education from September to December, when far too many were isolating at home rather than learning in school. Not only were the most disadvantaged pupils disproportionately affected, but ignoring it eventually forced the cancellation of exams.

Now the prime minister says again that opening schools is his priority. He wants our journey out of lockdown to be irreversible. On both counts, we agree. Once back, it is crucial that pupils remain in school and continue to benefit from learning in classrooms. Unfortunately, Boris Johnson's "big bang" school return jeopardises that.

The plan ignores the collective view of all the education unions, of his scientific advisory body, SAGE and reportedly that of his own chief medical officer too. In opting to take

a different path to wider opening than all the other nations of the UK, the prime minister must take responsibility for the outcome.

If transmission rates rise again in schools, peaking as they did last December with secondary pupils the most infected age group and primary pupils the second most

infected, the responsibility will be his. As we remember all too well, this approach resulted in schools becoming "vectors of transmission" – his words – and greatly facilitated the spread of the virus to families and into the community.

The NEU has been clear throughout that a safe and sustainable school return is essential for our children. We are working to support that, and key to our proposals is a phased school return – exactly what SAGE recommended in its recent advice to government. It would allow the effects to be assessed and actions to be taken early if reopening caused too great a rise in the R rate.

Why Boris Johnson has not taken

this option is beyond me. Surely the prime minister, who professes that he wants to be "cautious", is concerned that schools should not again become vectors of transmission? Children and young people are highly unlikely to become very ill with Covid. Indeed, most are likely to be asymptomatic.

“The responsibility will be his if transmission rates rise again

But adults in their contact group – school staff, family and members of the local community – are not free of risk.

A "big bang" approach to wider opening increases the chances of rising infection rates and compromises the one government success story of this pandemic: the successful rollout of the vaccine. This possibility is only heightened by the new variants of Covid that are up to 50 per cent more infectious. It also increases the chances of new and even more concerning mutations.

For all the politicians' talk of Nightingale classrooms and ventilation units, the fact remains that none of these will be in place

by March 8. That alone should give pause for political thought.

The NEU is determined that schools and colleges will have the safest, most sustainable opening. We will campaign locally for a phased return and for additional safeguards for education professionals, particularly those most at risk. We will work to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected until they are vaccinated and their vaccinations have taken effect. We will continue to campaign for priority vaccination for all school and college staff.

The NEU will engage with local public health officials and with local authorities to examine local trends in data and look to act with them if Covid rates of infection are increasing. We will support schools and colleges who move to rotas as a way of retaining in-school teaching and learning whilst suppressing viral transmission on-site by creating the space for social distancing.

As we have done throughout the pandemic, the NEU will speak truth to power. And as it has been throughout, that truth will be led by the science. What a pity the government has not followed our example.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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QAIS HUSSAIN

Year 12 student, St Mary's Menston Catholic Voluntary Academy, Leeds

Why I'm elated we're going back to school



This lockdown has been a nightmare. The government must throw everything at making sure schools stay open, writes Qais Hussain

The prime minister's announcement that I and my peers can return to school on March 8 is perhaps the best news I have received throughout this pandemic – better even than my GCSE results.

Truth be told, I have been struggling. If schools were closed for much longer, I don't know if some of my cohort would have coped. In fact, I and many others wish the announcement had come earlier. While schools have looked after the most vulnerable admirably, the pandemic response has created new vulnerabilities. If I'd been born to key worker parents, my lot would have been so different.

Every day, my motivation has been decreasing. Every day, I have witnessed my friends getting stressed out about falling behind on their schoolwork or failing their exams. People who were unassailably confident in school before the pandemic have been reduced to tears by this pandemic.

I have become an alarm clock for my friends, ringing them up on

Snapchat or WhatsApp to wake them up for their online lessons. Many have long since got into the habit of logging on in the morning and leaving the remote lesson playing while they go straight back to bed.

With school closures, there has been no structure. Sleep patterns have changed, with some I know

now going to sleep at 2am and getting up at 1pm. Schools don't just offer education and social interaction, they also offer stability and routine. School is something positive to wake up to.

The psychological damage comes on top of widening inequalities. During the first lockdown, according to UCL research, one-fifth of pupils – an estimated 2 million – did no schoolwork at home or less than an hour a day, while 17 per cent put in more than four hours a day. Nearly one-third of private schools provided four or more online lessons a day, compared with just six per cent of state schools.

For my part, I don't feel like I have learnt anything through remote

learning. Teachers are going through the motions, but – through no fault of their own – we are essentially their training dummies.

And while the research into online learning makes grim reading (as grim as the experience itself), it's only a drop in the ocean of

to open schools. I've written in the national press and campaigned for it. Now I am petrified that the consequences will be on me should things go wrong.

But I'm no Covid denier or conspiracy theorist. I'm no natural supporter of the government and I'm certainly not selfish. I just think we need to stop treating my generation's right to an education like a yo-yo and focus on keeping schools open. Simply put, I don't think we can all survive the isolation of schools being closed again.

One of the compromises students have to make is to wear face-masks in classes. I loathe the idea of sitting in class suffocating with my glasses steaming up. But if that is the sacrifice we have to make to keep schools open, you will get no complaints from me.

In parliament on Monday, Keir Starmer suggested teachers should be vaccinated before March 8. He is right. Refusing to feels like another example of the government trivialising teachers. They deserve peerages, let alone a job. And if this return is to be irreversible, as the prime minister stated and as we so desperately need, it seems like a small price to pay to see to it.

“ I am exhilarated schools are opening and fearful they could close again ”

damaging news young people have had to endure. Every week, another damaging survey about growing inequality. Every week, new statistics about a growing mental health crisis. Lost learning. Lost earnings... And the constant stream of headlines only exacerbates the problems. Or did you think we don't read them?

The long and short of it is that the only way to avoid these scary statistics is to keep schools open.

So while I am exhilarated that schools are opening, I am fearful they could close again. And what worries me even more is that we'll take the blame if cases rise again, as university students did.

I have been lobbying my local MP

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MARK ANDERSON

Former teacher and head of education, Net Support



The traps the edtech strategy must avoid at all costs

The Covid lockdowns have provided a golden opportunity for government to work out a well-thought-through strategy for edtech, writes Mark Anderson

problem isn't a lack of technology or gadgets but a lack of support and training for using them effectively. The failure of the Interactive Whiteboard initiatives still stands as

We can't build a robust system without solid underlying infrastructure. Scotland's Glow, based on Microsoft 365, is used by all teachers and students in the

tools together and puts intelligence into the hands of teachers and senior leaders regardless of where they are located.

Three national lockdowns in, by and large most schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs) are making a good go of blended learning. It's been challenging, even for those who have been successfully using edtech for years, to say nothing of the vast majority who were thrown in at the deep end without much support. The truth is, the challenges of the pandemic have been exacerbated by a lack of clear communication and poor strategy from the top.

A Damascene conversion in Whitehall with regards to edtech's sustained place in the education landscape creates a golden opportunity. But if they are to make a long-term success of it, there are three key things the government must avoid at all costs.

1. Do not throw technology at schools as a panacea

For too long, successive governments have thrown technology at the sector with a hope and a prayer that it will act as a silver bullet. For all our focus on the digital divide, the greatest

a totem of this failed approach.

With blended learning here to stay, teachers require specific equipment, such as laptops – preferably without Russian malware. More importantly, training on how best to use technology should be a core part of their CPD from day one. There is no one-size-fits-all technological solution, and training should reflect that. It should be autonomous, contextual and ongoing if it's going to be part of a clear and effective digital strategy, rather than another sticking plaster.

2. Do not keep edtech infrastructure fragmented

Unlike in Scotland and Wales, there is no central infrastructure that acts as the backbone for education in England. Students, teachers and parents are left to jump between different systems and programmes each day.

country and all other tools hang off this core infrastructure. But while Microsoft and Google offer solid foundations, what's really needed is a central management information system (MIS) that joins the dots.

Teams has a great feature called Insights, which lets teachers see which assignments students have attempted, how long they spent on it, whether they answered part or all of the questions and so on. This intelligence is great, but only if it can be pulled through to teachers alongside other insights, such as attendance and past performance in an easy-to-digest manner.

While this has been frustratingly absent, new MIS providers are disrupting the market with cloud-based solutions that provide a backbone that can be accessed anywhere, any time. Technology cannot work in isolation, and this fragmentation creates workload. Schools need a MIS that links all

3. Do not ignore teachers when making policy

There have been glimmers of hope in the past few years. The EdTech Strategy Group set up by the previous education secretary showed government was starting to listen to teachers. This needs to be much more strategic. We need a clear approach to how it will work in practice.

The cornerstone of any effective policy is people. It's not about whether teachers can use this or that package. It's about finding out what tools they need to do their job efficiently to improve the life chances of students. If government doesn't listen to the profession, it won't matter what technology they throw at the sector. It will be wasted money. Without involving teachers and leaders in the decision-making process, there will be no buy-in, and technology will become more of a hindrance than a help.

The education sector doesn't need another Whitehall diktat. It needs a real strategy based on ongoing training and a solid infrastructure created in partnership with those charged with using it.

“The cornerstone of any effective strategy is people”

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The return to school without exams presents a golden opportunity to provide a truly balanced curriculum, write Rebecca Boomer-Clark and Jake Curtis

Our organisations support some of the country's most vulnerable teenagers – the very children who, sadly but unsurprisingly, have been hardest hit by the pandemic. Together, we have been considering what seeds of hope have come out of the past year and how we can harness these opportunities to support them to thrive.

First and foremost, this period of interrupted education has provided a rare opportunity for us to reflect on the long-term vision for our education system. Schools have demonstrated the vital role that they play in helping to mould healthy and happy citizens who contribute to their community, their country and the world around them, as well as securing academic outcomes.

Perhaps if schools were held to account against some of these wider objectives, and not just their academic results, they would feel more incentivised and rewarded for that incredibly tough work. In normal times, the effort that goes into keeping those students who are 'on the edge' in school, learning and achieving, is often unseen.

But throughout the pandemic, we have seen many schools step up in ways they couldn't have imagined previously. The level to which they have been able to adapt to challenging new circumstances proves once and for all that there is a false dichotomy between academic rigour and pastoral support. The best schools do both. They understand that the relationships

REBECCA BOOMER-CLARK

Trustee, Jamie's Farm and director of academies, Ark



JAKE CURTIS

Deputy CEO, Jamie's Farm

Schools teach and care. We ought to value both

developed in one arena enable engagement in the other, that they are mutually reinforcing.

During repeated school closures and lockdowns, engagement with

previously. This is not a surprise; just as there were many children for whom school represented exam stress and social pressure, there were a great many others for whom

“ We all know just how much deeper the toll of this 'winter lockdown' has been

parents and families leapt to the top of many teachers' priority lists. For the past year, they have fulfilled the jobs of food bank operator, social worker and education welfare officer. We believe there is an opportunity to maintain those connections in order to provide the kind of joined-up support that we know enables all young people to flourish.

Vulnerability comes in many forms, so the support we offer our students must be flexible and personalised. All of us, children and adults alike, have lost the sense of routine, purpose and connection that helped bolster our mental health. We know that many of the students who have struggled the most were not necessarily even on the radar of pastoral teams

school provided a chance to succeed, a supportive routine and valued friendships.

We all know just how much deeper the toll of this 'winter lockdown' has been. Because of the shared nature of this challenging period, there is an opportunity for empathy and connection between professionals and their more vulnerable students in a way that may have been difficult to achieve before.

When schools return next month, staff will have to be very sensitive to mental health issues arising in places they would not have foreseen and offer interventions based on individual need rather than any 'label' or previous diagnosis. These interventions will need to be based



on nurture, routine and challenge to ensure pupils feel fulfilled and confident once again, especially if there is time to acknowledge and appreciate successes and qualities. Simple 'shout-outs' offer so much to ensure children feel truly proud of the good decisions they make.

So, the lack of formal exams this summer presents a huge opportunity for schools to embrace the richer elements of the wider curriculum and broader life at school. There may be wonderful opportunities to provide even more outdoor activities, sports, drama and music when all pupils return. Participation in these activities is heavily correlated to increased engagement with school for vulnerable students. They are also crucial ingredients to promoting the long-term physical and mental health of all children.

Exams will return. As will routine Ofsted inspections. But it should not be at the expense of the insights gained in their absence. Schools have shown their incredible capacity to teach and to care in the toughest of circumstances. As we emerge from this (hopefully) final period of interruption, it is vital we ensure our school system provides the best of both into the future.

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



Fear Is The Mind Killer

Author: Dr James Mannion and Kate McAllister

Publisher: John Catt Educational

Reviewer: Ed Finch, trust champion, Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust

If you've been a teacher for a few years you'll have been on the receiving end of INSET on helping pupils 'learn to learn'. The word 'metacognition' was used a lot. Maybe there was a bit on the importance of hydration to keep the brain working. Maybe a poster of tricks to get information to stay in the adolescent memory. And maybe you gave it a couple of weeks and sighed with relief when it wasn't mentioned again.

Well, you'll be glad to know that this book ain't that. Author/researchers James Mannion and Kate McAllister are keen to face up to the mixed results of previous attempts at 'learning to learn' and to distance the programme they have put together from some of the 'snake oil' peddled under the L2L brand. They say four successive cohorts who took their course at a school they call Sea View Secondary, from entry at year 7, achieved remarkably higher attainment. Overall, they saw a greater than ten per cent increase in pupils achieving 5 A* to C including English and maths at GCSE, and closed the disadvantage gap from 25 per cent to less than five per cent. These are serious improvements that deserve to be taken seriously.

The authors are so acutely aware that what they propose will not be to the whole profession's taste that they form a section of the book as a trial. They take on and counter some big points from their imagined accusers – 'Knowledge is Foundational', 'Children are Novices', 'Generic Skills Can't Be Taught, or Don't

Transfer'. To me, if I'm entirely honest, this didn't seem quite necessary: frame it as knowledge or skills, I don't mind. Surely educators are pragmatic enough to see a win as a win, even if it runs counter to their preferred pedagogy. You taught these young people how to do better at school. What was it you taught them?

The answer is forthright. Many pupils are so deeply afraid of failure that they simply can't engage in learning. Before you can make an impact on attainment you need to make an impact on that fear. Once pupils are confident, able learners, great subject teaching will be able to flourish. They might do better in life after school too. What pupils were taught at Sea View was complex, with three distinct 'moving parts'. Metacognition, self-regulation and oracy. Pupils were learning to debate, were involved in project-based learning (PBL), took part in 'Philosophy for Children' structured discussions and kept learning journals.

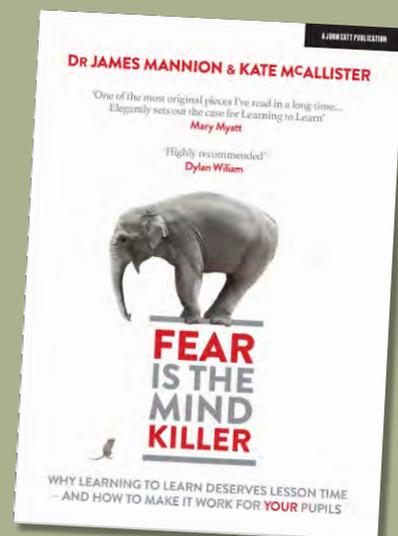
Aware that the very mention of PBL will have raised hackles: the authors point out that if you want to convey a body of knowledge, then direct instruction will be your tool; but if you want learners who can manage their time, communicate, adopt roles and support each other, you will have to think about project work. Subject-specific skills may not be transferable, but time management, confidence to participate in lessons, pride in presentation and respect for one's own learning certainly are.

The programme was complex and time-intensive. Five periods a week in year seven decreasing each year as the first

cohort moved through – more than any other subject. Mannion and McAllister tell us they took periods from computing, humanities and the arts. One wonders if, with the inspectorate's new-found fervour for the wider curriculum, that's a step too far for even the bravest. Would you surrender a period a week from your own subject?

Could the Sea View programme be replicated in other schools? The authors think it can and say this book provides all the tools you need. In fact, they go further and provide contact details so you can get in touch and join them on the journey to braver, more empowered learners.

That's brave in itself. But as desirable as the book's aims might be, I wonder how many school leaders will be brave enough to take a punt. This is a provocative and entertaining title that will provide plenty of food for thought, but fear may indeed be its greatest obstacle.



Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is **Robin Conway**, director of research and innovation at John Mason School

@JMSREFLECT

Kick-Starting the Virtuous Cycle of High-Quality Centralised Resources

@MissSayers1

In this piece, “(passionately) boring teacher” Miss Sayers advocates convincingly for centralised resources created and shared within subject teams. As with most things in education, there are different views about the value of centralised resources, and Sayers explores some of the reasons that she and her team opposed them for so long.

However, she also explains their experience of a vicious cycle of “survival planning” that drove up workload without necessarily improving the quality of teaching. Sayers goes on to make a strong case for the value her team found in developing these. She explains how a focus on developing high-quality, shared materials gave her team “the time and desire to continually improve their resources and teaching without feeling overwhelmed”.

What Questions Do We Need to Consider for “Catch-Up”?

@MrAWGordon_

Terms such as “catch-up” and “recovery curriculum” are deeply loaded, and Mr Gordon recognises this problem from the start, raising valid questions about the

TOP BLOGS of the week

concepts. He rightly distils the issue to two key questions: “What are the gaps in learning?” and “What actions can we take to fill these gaps?”

From there, he goes on to unpick these ideas further with a series of questions for consideration relating to planning, communication, curriculum and teaching. Although Gordon rightly emphasises the need for a whole-school approach, many of these questions would be worth teachers reflecting on in smaller teams as they prepare for March. Gordon shares the approaches he found most powerful in September and his 7Rs of “reconnecting”: “routines; relationships; retrieve; research; re-map; regulate; re-teach”.

Is The Education System About to Reform?

@head_teach

As we move from thinking about the immediate impact of the pandemic to the deeper issues it has raised, here is a challenging and insightful piece from headteacher Matthew Evans. Reflecting on the way the past 12 months have challenged our ideas about the nature and purpose of education, he offers thoughtful analysis of the inherent paradox of the examination system, what the idea of ‘catch up’ reveals about our assumptions about curriculum, and considers the role of schools in allowing the rest of society to function effectively.

While the piece doesn’t entirely answer

the main question (and who could?), it is a thought-provoking read. I suspect this will prove a prescient guide to the debates of the next few years, especially the question “why are we prepared to gloss over...inequality in normal times but not when it is a consequence of the pandemic?”

Expert Teachers 1 – What Teacher Expertise Isn’t

@curricteamlead

This is the first post in a series that promises to make for challenging reading. In it, assistant headteacher for teaching, learning and curriculum Pete Foster starts by exploring what expertise is not. He uses research to challenge some common misconceptions, such as that expertise equates only to experience or that it is universal.

The piece concludes with some practical recommendations, promising more to follow. The post is relevant to those interested in taking ownership of their own professional development – which should be everyone! – and lays out some key ideas to help shape this journey. If you believe, as Foster does, that “expertise isn’t a threshold you pass; it’s a continuum you move along”, then this is worth your time.

The Knowledge / Skills Debate: Reflections

@Mr_Raichura

Talking of building expertise, my final selection this week is a thoughtful piece summarising head of science Pritesh Raichura’s reflections on this debate and what it means for his teaching. However, I must confess that I was particularly piqued by the fact that his ideas were shaped by participation in a ‘Clubhouse’ discussion. In the final third of this piece, Raichura discusses the nature of this new social media platform and what it can offer. Having heard about it without really gaining a clear understanding of what it is or involves, it is interesting to hear why he finds it “an excellent platform for teachers to share their thoughts and debate issues in a very human way”. I think I’m going to have to give it a go.

Research

The Chartered College of Teaching will review a research development each half term. Contact @CatScutt if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

Can you really find research to back up any opinion?

Cat Scutt, director of education and research, Chartered College of Teaching

The Chartered College of Teaching has recently launched its Certificate in Evidence-Informed Practice, which culminates in teachers engaging in some of the most complex debates in education. In a way this might seem strange – surely acting based on evidence negates the need for debate?

Yet, in a recent research-engagement survey I found myself strongly agreeing with the statement “Education research can be used to support any opinion.” Why? Well, we see it happening all the time.

Differing research methods

Different research often has conflicting findings, sometimes due to the research methods used. One piece of research might use attainment as a measure of effectiveness, while another might use student or teacher reports. These won't always have the same outcomes!

For example, experiments around ‘the testing effect’ found students don't always know what works best for them. Students who studied material repeatedly were more confident about how much they remembered than those who had studied the material only once then undertaken recall activities, but actually remembered less.

As we seek to understand what might work best in distance learning – the topic of the Chartered College's latest report – self-report is a key source. But we need to recognise its limitations. This includes looking carefully at who participated in the research and any biases they might have. For example, teachers working in an online school are perhaps more likely to report positive outcomes for online learning, given where they have chosen to work.

Likewise, schools who have



invested heavily in a particular approach to distance learning might be more likely to report positively on its impact – an example of sunk cost bias. This applies to researchers, too. They are not without their own biases. And then there's the risk of publication bias, a topic covered recently in this very feature by Baz Ramaiah. Studies that find an impact or cover a ‘hot topic’ are more likely to be published than those that don't!

Context matters

We can also usually find research that backs up our opinions because, as Dylan Wiliam argues, “everything works somewhere, and nothing works everywhere”. Context matters, and boundary conditions are important to understand.

This is more nuanced than just recognising that approaches that work in higher education might not work with young children. Things that work ‘on average’ might affect individual students differently. For example, the EEF reports that setting and streaming has a small positive impact for higher-attaining students but a negative impact overall. Meanwhile, approaches that work with novice learners

may become counter-productive when used with experts: the ‘expertise reversal effect’.

Confirmation bias

Given varied research findings, confirmation bias becomes crucial. We tend to uncritically accept research that confirms our existing beliefs while seeking fault in research that contradicts them. The government regularly demonstrates this selective adoption of research findings to suit their priorities!

Our views can also influence the messages we take from research. Dylan Wiliam once tweeted a summary of a paper that found that “Increased use of student-centred teaching methods is linked to increased student wellbeing but lower achievement, which in turn, link to increased adult life satisfaction, but lower earnings”. The paper itself interested me less than people's reaction to the tweet. Some immediately seized on this as justification that ‘student-centred teaching methods’ shouldn't be used, while others saw it as a strong argument for them – depending on the outcomes they prioritised.

Given the importance of gaining buy-in as part of the effective implementation of any intervention, there's also the risk of creating a vicious cycle. If we believe something won't work, but are asked to do it anyway, it's likely it won't be implemented effectively. It thus won't have the hoped-for impact, reinforcing our belief that it doesn't work.

Teacher expertise

So it's by no means easy to be ‘evidence-informed’. It requires expert teachers to stand as a bulwark against poor implementation – teachers who are confident in identifying robust research, are aware of possible biases, and understand how results might transfer (or not) to their contexts. That's exactly what our new certificate seeks to develop and recognise, and why it so strongly embraces difficult debates.



WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

MONDAY

If there's one thing, dear reader, we hope you take away from *Schools Week* each edition it's that the devil is most certainly in the detail.

But even we must admit that on Monday when Boris Johnson announced the return of schools on March 8, we (along with majority of the sector) were so bewildered that the announcement was for once promptly followed by in-depth Department for Education guidance, that we failed to spot that technically, the government has once again broken another promise.

Back in January, the government promised schools would get "at least two weeks' notice before pupils return".

As avid SW reader Mike Cameron (quite rightly) pointed out on Twitter, announcing the move at 3.30pm on Monday, February 22, when the school day has ended, doesn't quite leave the promised two weeks.

Then again, it's possible the government was confused. After promising we'd hear the plans for lifting lockdown directly from him, Boris Johnson's government then spent most of the weekend briefing national newspapers about the proposals, causing further anxiety among school staff.

Although most of the beans were spilled in advance of Monday's statement in Parliament, we suspect that's not what schools had in mind when they were promised two weeks' notice...

WEDNESDAY

What can you do with six minutes of your time in lockdown three? Wait for the kettle to boil? Go for a brisk walk round the block? Create a plan to replace exams this

summer?

For education secretary Gavin Williamson, that was approximately how long it took for him to express regret for the government breaking the law by failing to disclose PPE contracts.

Controversial commentator Piers Morgan badgered Williamson on the matter live on television and actually thanked him for saying he "deeply regrets" what happened.

"Next time if you want to spend more time talking about your brief, just say that at the start, it saves so much," Morgan declared.

We wonder when Williamson plans to express regret for the various pitfalls in his handling of the pandemic's effect on schools.



Christmas appears to have come early for teachers this week, after Ofsted generously offered a break from its monitoring inspections to help them to get pupils back in safely.

But many school leaders were flabbergasted when it was revealed that the hiatus will be pretty short-lived. Inspectors plan to pause for just one week before

(virtually) starting to turn up at the school gate again.

The updated guidance adds that, for the rest of the term, Ofsted will "continue to carry out our monitoring inspections remotely by default".

However, the watchdog will carry out on-site inspections "if we have any immediate concerns – for example, about safeguarding or the leadership of a school".

With concerns already rife about school reopenings driving an infection rate rise, we suspect the thought of extra visitors is probably the last thing leaders need...

THURSDAY

The Twitter-verse briefly lost its mind on Thursday morning when the first picture of Kenneth Branagh's transformation into Boris Johnson for next year's *The Sceptred Isle* was released.

The five-part drama charts the PM's work throughout the first wave of the pandemic.

However, unfortunately Michael Crawford (of Frank Spencer fame) will not be appearing as our equally accident-prone education secretary Gavin Williamson.

A travesty, as we can all agree. It's a role he was born to play!





Bright Futures Educational Trust is a highly collaborative partnership of seven schools and a large teaching school based in the North West. As a result of our imminent growth we have two exciting opportunities.

Director of Business and Commercial Finance

Salary: £68,862 rising to £75,956

We are looking for a qualified accountant, who has experience of bringing sustainability, economy and efficiency to a growing and developing multi academy trust. You will lead on the commercial development of Bright Futures. You will also be responsible for strategic procurement and contract management, whilst driving value for money through evidence based resource investment.

Demonstrating effective people skills, you will foster an environment of support, development and challenge in the central finance team.

Closes: 8 March

Marketing and Communications Manager

Salary: The full time equivalent pay is £34,728 rising to £38,890 per annum. See the information pack for full details.

We are looking for an experienced and qualified marketing and communication professional who can design and deliver a comprehensive marketing plan to support Bright Futures'

strategic aims. You will also be responsible leading on digital content, public relations and designing compelling content in various formats.

Demonstrating effective people and communication skills, you will be instrumental in enabling the Bright Futures' brand to be well respected in the education sector and beyond

Closes: 15 March

A full information pack for both posts, including the job description and person specification are on our website: <http://www.bfet.co.uk/vacancies/>.

Flexible working will be considered.

To apply please email a completed application form (we cannot accept CVs) and the criminal disclosure declaration to vacancies@bfet.uk.

Bright Futures Educational Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment. Any successful applicant will be required to undertake an enhanced DBS check.



Head Teacher Lyngford Park Primary School

Salary: GBP £50,151 - £68,347 per year (Dependant upon experience and background)

This is your opportunity to be the Head Teacher at a well-established school which has recently joined the Huish MAT. We are seeking a passionate, ambitious and inspiring education leader who will recognise and build on the existing strengths within the team and at the same time recognise, implement and lead change with creative solutions where required. This is a great opportunity to make an enduring impact on education in Taunton and contribute to the wider strategic ambitions of Huish. Currently, the Huish education group

consists of a Sixth Form College, a Secondary School and five Primary Schools. There are further plans to expand this consortium of educational institutions to create a high performing organisation which provides outstanding provision in line with Huish's Vision and Values.

We are looking for an exceptional leader who:

- *is dynamic, motivational and has a proven record of delivering high quality teaching and learning,*
- *leads by example and has a track record of high standards and levels of achievement,*
- *is able to inspire and motivate staff,*

· is an excellent, engaging communicator who will develop strong relationships with children, parents and the wider community.

If you would like to have a conversation about the role with the CEO of the Huish Trust before submitting your application, please email stevec@richuish.ac.uk who will be happy to make these arrangements.

We are proposing to interview on site, subject to the Covid 19 situation allowing, across **23 and 24 March 2021**

Closing Date **4th March 2021**

For more details and to apply online please [click here](#)




Chief Executive Officer

September 2021 or earlier
£100k - £130k pa

The Unity Schools Trust is seeking to appoint an outstanding, aspirational, and dynamic leader with a proven track record of sustained school improvement. This is a fantastic opportunity for someone to make their mark in shaping our future journey which will involve both further improvement in performance within our current academies and expansion of our Trust. We have very high aspirations for growth and academic achievement for all students that attend our academies. Our Trust is defined by 'excellence through collaboration'. We firmly believe that with teamwork you can achieve so much more, working together with a common purpose.

We are looking for an experienced, vibrant professional with excellent strategic leadership, financial, communication and people management skills, and a proven track record of success in raising standards.

For more information please see the vacancies section of our website: www.unityschoolstrust.co.uk.




Leeds City Academy
Aspire Together - Achieve Together

AN EXCITING TIME TO BE JOINING A VALUES DRIVEN ACADEMY

Senior Vice Principal



Leeds City Academy is one of the most rapidly improving schools within the area of Leeds, West Yorkshire. The shared mission of all our stakeholders is to work 'In Partnership' to secure the aspirations and ambitions of all members of our school community.

For more information please visit www.whiteroseacademies.org/careers




Saint GREGORY'S Bath

"In Christ we flourish"

Saint Gregory's, Bath
Combe Hay Lane,
Bath, BA2 8PA
T 01225 832873

Deputy Headteacher

We require a forward-thinking and inspirational colleague to join our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) from September 2021. The Deputy Headteacher will be instrumental in the strategic management of our school, helping to lead and develop it as a centre for excellence in Catholic secondary education, whilst ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our young people.

The successful candidate will bring professionalism and academic credibility, balanced with warmth and sensitivity, to work across the school to create a common vision of excellence, helping to make Saint Gregory's a truly exceptional place to learn and work in.

Salary: Leadership Scale L20 - L24
The closing date is midnight on **Sunday 28 February 2021**
Interviews will be held W/C **Monday 8 March 2021**

Visit www.st-gregorys.org.uk to apply

Saint Gregory's is an equal opportunities employer. We are committed to the safeguarding and welfare of our students and expect all staff to share this commitment. An enhanced disclosure from the DBS is required for all successful applicants.



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PRINCIPAL

The Harlow Academy, a member of The Evolve Trust, is an amazing one form entry special school of 80 pupils aged 3-18 offering an innovative 21st century curriculum. The school requires an outstanding Principal who is committed to every child and young person receiving a first class education, one which inspires our schools' communities to achieve more than they thought possible. The school benefits greatly from being part of the Evolve Trust, a highly regarded, values driven, academy trust who are passionate about improving children's life chances through quality education. The school is at the heart of its community and works alongside families to ensure that children can be the very best versions of themselves and develop into responsible citizens of the future.

For more information and how to apply visit <https://www.wildsearch.org/opportunities/evolve> & email to evolve@wildsearch.org

Deadline: **midday Monday 1st March**



Head Teacher

Permanent
L15 – L21 (£59,581 to £69,029 per annum)
Start Date: 23rd August 2021

We are seeking an excellent Head Teacher for Church Hill Infant School who will continue the already great work that is taking place. We would like an individual who is ambitious and someone who will have high expectations for all when leading this school.

This is an exciting time to join our Trust as we move into the next stage of our development where we can offer a wealth of support with collaborative opportunities.

We would encourage candidates to arrange an informal meeting either socially distanced or MS Teams and/or a telephone conversation with the Director of Schools.

These can be arranged by contacting Dean Pomeroy, dean@bepschools.org

To apply for this position please visit:
<https://www.eteach.com/careers/bepschools/>



Principal

Barnsley Academy is part of United Learning, a successful national group of academies and independent schools. Our schools share a mission to bring out 'the best in everyone' and to improve the life chances of the children and young people in their care.

Barnsley Academy is a good school (Ofsted 2020) serving a proud and vibrant Yorkshire community. The school is a place of educational success, with a strong curriculum, good teaching, and effective pupil support and which serves its local area with distinction. The Academy has the confidence of its community – it is now oversubscribed in Year 7 and full in other year groups, with around 900 pupils on roll.

We are looking for a leader with the highest expectations, committed to continuous improvement, who believes that extraordinary success is possible.

If you are looking for an exciting, challenging and highly rewarding role to combine the autonomy of running a secondary school with the benefit of working within a cluster and as part of a national group, and if you have an unshakeable commitment to improving the lives of young people, we encourage you to visit us.

Find out more and apply here 



Academy Principal (Full-time role)

Grade: L11 (£52,643) to L15 (£57,986)

St Mary's Primary, Whitstable, a Catholic primary academy and part of the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership (KCSP) is seeking to appoint an inspirational and dedicated Academy Principal from September 2021.

Reporting to the Executive Principal, the Academy Principal will be responsible for the day-to-day leadership and management of the academy and will lead a team that strive together for children under the academy's values of " Joy, Courage, Honesty, Excellence & Community". The successful applicant will take the lead role in providing inspirational Catholic education to our pupils, and we are therefore seeking to appoint a practicing Catholic to this role.

St Mary's, Whitstable is an inclusive two-form entry academy. Its dedicated staff, helpers and Governors work hard to ensure that every student is supported and challenged to be their very best. Serving the Parish of Our Lady Immaculate, Whitstable and the local area, the school's most recent denominational inspection in November 2016 judged it as 'Good' and its most recent Ofsted inspection in April 2018 also judged the academy to be 'Good' in all areas.



Please visit <https://www.kcsp.org.uk/academy-principal/> to view the full job description.

Please send your letter of application, application form and all other related documents to the Executive Principal at: vohalloran@kcsp.org.uk

Your letter of application should be limited to 1,000 words max. and should outline why you feel you are suited to this role, what you believe you can bring to the academy and also detail your experience to date, skill set and qualifications.

Offers of employment are subject to an enhanced disclosure and barring service check and section 128 check.

Closing date for applications: 05 March 2021 @ 5pm

Interviews will be held on: 19 March 2021

Start date: 01 September 2021



LITTLE LONDON COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

“Helping children and the community succeed in the heart of the city”

Headteacher

Little London Community Primary School, Leeds

L20 – L26 (£67,364 - £78,025) Negotiable with candidate on the basis of current earnings and prior experience.

About our School

Little London is a thriving community primary school very close to Leeds city centre. We are a three form entry school who serve a culturally rich and diverse area of the city and we are very proud of the strong relationships we have made with our children and their families.

Our aim is to provide the very best start for all our children. We are really proud of our school and the community we serve. Ours is a happy school where pupils are encouraged to become considerate and responsible members of society.

We want our children to have the skills and knowledge needed to achieve their ambitions and to lead happy, successful lives. Above all, we want them to enjoy their days at school and to know the joys of learning, perseverance and challenge.

We are looking for an inspiring headteacher who will lead, motivate and develop our highly dedicated staff whilst maintaining the culture and vision of the school.

A message from the governors

Our current headteacher is retiring this year, after many years of dedicated service to the school and its community. She has responded enthusiastically and creatively to many challenges, including a rapid increase of numbers, the increased diversity of our pupils and families, and most recently the Covid pandemic.

The school has been exemplary in caring for pupils during the pandemic, with careful planning to prevent the spread of infection to families. We have recently equipped all pupils with Chromebooks to help their learning in school and at home.

We can offer you:

- a committed and enthusiastic team of staff
- hardworking and happy pupils
- supportive parents who want the best for their children

Our children want a headteacher who:

- is kind and sensitive
- cares about us as children
- inspires us and sets challenging goals

We want a leader who:

- is experienced, creative and innovative
- puts children and the community at the centre of their vision
- is passionate about primary education
- has high expectations of children’s achievements and behaviour
- creates strong and effective working relationships

Do you have the experience to take our school forward? If so, we would very much like to hear from you.

For an application pack and further details, please contact educ.headteacher@leeds.gov.uk

Closing date: 1 March at noon.



www.littlelondonprimaryschool.co.uk



TRUST EDUCATION DIRECTOR

Competitive salary

This is a newly created post to support the Chief Executive in ensuring the children and young people within our schools are given the best start in life, are able to achieve their academic potential, and grow in confidence as they learn about themselves and the world in which they live.

It is an influential, diverse role, and so the ability to think strategically, drive improvement, and have the ability to engage others is essential.

The successful candidate will play a central role in providing strategic leadership for the Trust ensuring its approach to school improvement delivers successful outcomes. Accountable for the quality of education in schools across the Trust and leading the Trust's school improvement programme, they will support and challenge schools to achieve their aspirational targets for pupils and the communities they serve.

Aquinas is a successful, highly collaborative Trust that offers a variety of career and development opportunities to talented individuals who want to make a difference.

This is a full time role that comes with an attractive salary package which reflects the scale and demands of the role. The Trust offers Teachers' Pay and Conditions and membership of the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

Further information is provided in the application pack. Please visit: <https://www.aquinastrust.org/vacancies>

The CEO would also be happy to speak with potential candidates. Please contact Janet Vick, HR Director at janet.vick@aquinastrust.org or telephone 020 3949 7016, to request a call back.

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The 7th Annual Apprenticeship Conference is the not to be missed policy and practise conference dedicated to apprenticeships. Due to the coronavirus pandemic this year's event will take place virtually.

The agenda has been spread across a week, to ensure it is accessible to all colleagues. We have a series of ticket options from solo to large groups, with tickets from as little as £37.50 per person.



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KEYNOTES

Hear from key civil servants and policy experts about the future of apprenticeships.



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Acquire new knowledge & best practice from leading employers & providers.



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Meet with new & catch up with current suppliers within our virtual exhibition.



ON DEMAND

All of our keynotes and workshops will be available to view on demand post-event.



ONLINE PLATFORM

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TICKETS

AAC is a great learning event for teams. We've a range of ticket options for groups.



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