

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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

Charting masks' strangely slow journey to mainstream



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'It's 2021, it's the UK, and children are skipping meals'



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In praise of the 5-term school year



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# FIRST WEEK BACK

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- Anger as pupils sent home just hours after return
- Parents slam DfE's 'illogical' testing policy
- School snubs rules to 'double check' rapid test results
- Poorer pupils more likely to remain off school, data suggests

**MUST DO BETTER**

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# SCHOOLS WEEK

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# Back to school: Anger as pupils sent home just hours after return

**JAMES CARR**

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INVESTIGATES

The government's "nonsensical" policy that pupils tested on-site must self-isolate without taking confirmatory Covid lab tests has seen youngsters needlessly sent back home just hours after returning following months outside the classroom.

Parents warn they will no longer consent to their children being tested due to the disruption, while some schools are ignoring official guidance and offering confirmatory lab tests to "reassure" parents.

Schools opened to all pupils on Monday after being closed to most pupils since January 5.

As part of the return, secondary age pupils are expected to be tested three times on-site by the end of next week, switching to twice-weekly home testing after that.

The Department for Education doubled down this week on its policy that pupils told to self-isolate after a positive rapid test carried out in school should not get this confirmed by a more accurate polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.

Even if a pupil did so, and the PCR came back negative, both the youngster and their close contacts should still self-isolate, guidance states.

However, for rapid tests taken at home, pupils are told to get a confirmatory PCR test.

## 'My child was in floods of tears'

Parent Jo Lubega called the rules "inconsistent and illogical" after her daughter tested positive on Monday at a secondary school in Derbyshire.

Her daughter received a negative PCR result from a test taken less than 90 minutes after the lateral flow device (LFD) test. However, the girl, along with household members including her primary-age sibling, must still self-isolate for ten days.

PCR tests are recognised as the "most reliable Covid-19 tests" by the government, but as they are processed in a laboratory take longer to produce results than LFDs.

Lubega said both daughters had been "in floods of tears" and the lack of on-site schooling since December "is having a huge effect on their mental health as well as their education".

She claimed the policy meant "the psychological impact" on her children was being "disregarded" by the government. Her daughters will have just one week in school before Easter half-term.



Lubega will no longer consent to on-site Covid testing and is considering whether home-testing could cause similar unnecessary disruption.

An ASCL survey of 729 secondary schools and colleges found 54 per cent of leaders reported a take-up of on-site Covid tests between 90 and 100 per cent on Monday. Take-up was between 80 and 89 per cent at around a quarter of the schools, and below 60 per cent in just six per cent.

Dr Rachel Clarke, an NHS doctor and author, said her son and 30 classmates were out of school after one tested positive from an LFD – despite a PCR test later confirming they were negative.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of leaders' union ASCL, said he had already heard of schools where one-third of the year 11 cohort were self-isolating due to a single positive result.

The situation means school leaders who are "already having to do things beyond their remit" have to explain to parents why their children must stay at home, he added.

## DfE rules are 'nonsensical and unscientific'

Professor John Deeks, of the Institute of Applied Health Research at the University of Birmingham, said the differing PCR policies were

"nonsensical and unscientific".

NHS Test and Trace statistics show that between February 25 and March 3, just 297 LFDs taken in secondary schools returned a positive result out of 622,861 tests taken in total.

Original government studies of symptomatic people found around three in 1,000 people received false positives, while a subsequent trial in Liverpool of asymptomatic people found it was around one in 1000.

Deeks told Schools Week you would expect the data to show at least 622 positive tests from last week.

"The low rate is really worrying because as well as saying they're probably false positive, it also says we're missing a large number of cases", he added.

## School vows to 'double check' with PCRs

Uckfield College, in East Sussex, sent an email to parents on Wednesday reassuring them in the event of a positive LFD it will offer "a PCR test to double check, so there won't be any students made to self-isolate for a long period due to a false positive".

The email states the school has taken this approach since January "and will continue with it" so parents are "reassured".

Gwyn Carwardine, whose daughter attends the school, praised the "pragmatic and sensible approach".

The school had been contacted for comment

## Poorer pupils more likely to remain off school

Around 96 per cent of primary school pupils returned on Monday and Tuesday, according to data from Arbor Education, a school management information software (MIS) provider used by more than 1,500 schools and 130 trusts.

In contrast just 42 per cent and 58 per cent of secondary pupils attended on Monday and Tuesday respectively, according to Arbor's data. However, the sample size was smaller for secondaries, with just 112 involved.

Secondaries were given this week to stagger returns in order to facilitate testing. Attendance was mandatory in primaries from Monday.

The Arbor data showed poorer pupils were more likely to stay at home. Just 38 per cent of pupils on free school meals attended the secondary schools on Monday. Meanwhile, across the 921 primary schools sampled, 94 per cent of free school meal pupils attended.

News

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# DfE sneaks in £25m saving with hubs switch

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

The government has quietly saved £25 million by switching to a hub system for teaching schools, a Schools Week investigation can reveal. Special schools are also being squeezed out in the process.

The Department for Education named 81 new teaching school hubs last month. With six already commissioned, it takes the total to 87. Each one will provide professional development in around 250 schools.

The hubs model replaces a network of around 750 teaching schools. They will lose their designation – and their government funding – this year.

The government will spend £65 million on the hubs over a three-year period – working out at around £747,000 each. Although individual teaching schools would have received less – £120,000 each over three years – the numbers involved meant the total funding handed out totalled £90 million.

The DfE has not said what the money saved will be spent on.

With funding drying up, teaching schools are now having to adapt the way they work or face closing down. Derby Teaching Schools Alliance, a charitable incorporated organisation, is rebranding as Developing Teachers Schools and Academies. It will continue to offer teacher training, funding for which will sustain its activities.

Deborah Outhwaite, from the alliance, said teaching schools had “seen the writing on the wall and done different things”. For example, some have merged with school-centred initial teacher training providers.

But Outhwaite told *Schools Week* she feared



that some of the organisations may not be able to adapt: “Maybe some schools will manage to do that, but certainly smaller organisations, with the loss of funding, some places will inevitably go to the wall.”

One of the main differences between teaching school hubs and teaching schools is that they do not have a focus on school improvement. The government has made clear that it expects multi-academy trusts to fulfil the improvement role.

Sir David Carter, director of system leadership at Ambition Institute and a former national schools commissioner, said the hubs would have a “brokering, facilitation and overview role which I think in theory should work better”.

Richard Gill, chair of the Teaching Schools Council, said the role of teaching schools had become “far too broad”. Expansion of academies along with new designations such as research schools and curriculum hubs meant “the school improvement space had become saturated”.

“Having a focused agenda is the right move”, he added.

Although each new hub is linked to an individual school, many are part of larger trusts. Star Academies, ARK Schools, the Harris Federation and United Learning are among the big-hitters

with schools on the list.

Of the 81 teaching school hubs, just five are local authority maintained, while the rest are academies. Five of those chosen are also selective schools.

Hannah Wilson, a leadership consultant and former headteacher who worked closely with a number of teaching schools, fears the government is trying to impose its preferred teaching approaches.

“We’re creating more control and we’re squeezing out what creativity and diversity there perhaps was,” she warned.

Only two special schools and one alternative provision school feature on the list of hubs, making up just 3.4 per cent of the total. Of the 735 teaching schools still in operation as of last December, 77 were special schools and six were AP (11.3 per cent).

Ali Ashley, from the Special Teaching Schools Network, fears that special schools were at a disadvantage during the application process because they were dealing with higher attendance rates than mainstream schools.

The proportion of hubs that are AP is actually slightly higher than it was for teaching schools – 1.1 per cent compared to 0.8 per cent – but concerns remain. Debra Rutley, head of Aspire AP, warned a lack of representation meant mainstream schools would lose “access to the expertise and tailored offer that the AP sector can give”.

A DfE spokesperson said hubs would benefit from a “range of funding” beyond their grant, including money to deliver the early career framework and national professional qualifications.

“Each hub will receive significantly more funding than teaching schools, meaning a far greater impact that will help schools both now and in years to come,” they added.

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## £405m catch-up funding ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’

The government stands accused of “robbing Peter to pay Paul” after finally admitting that a £705 million Covid catch-up package is not all new money.

Ministers announced last month that they would spend an additional £405 million, on top of the £300 million announced in January, for a range of measures to help address lost learning.

But although “over half” of the additional £405 million is new funding, the Department

for Education has finally admitted that the rest will come from elsewhere in its budget.

Shadow schools minister Wes Streeting told *Schools Week*: “Instead of robbing Peter to pay Paul in the education budget, the government needs to produce a long-term plan for school funding to undo a decade of cuts.”

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, confirmed that some of the cash was from existing budgets in a written answer to a question

from Streeting.

On the £405 million announced last month, Gibb said: “While over half of this is new funding, the department has contributed towards the cost of this package through reprioritising funding from within the department’s existing budgets.”

The DfE would not say exactly how much of the funding was recycled, nor where in the department’s budget it was coming from.

# Schools dealing with pandemic, but Ofsted verdict 'limited'

JAMES CARR

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EXCLUSIVE

The first batch of Ofsted letters published following new remote monitoring inspections found that all schools were "taking effective action" to educate pupils during the pandemic.

But the watchdog admits within each of the 41 reports released so far that they provide only "a more limited level of assurance" than usual monitoring inspections.

The admission has prompted criticism that the inspections are a "completely unnecessary distraction".

Ofsted has been conducting remote monitoring inspections of schools graded "inadequate" or "requires improvement" since January 25, after U-turning on plans to conduct inspections in-person.

The inspections are not graded but are focused on how well pupils are being taught remotely. Ofsted previously stated that the inspections were being conducted to reassure parents and support school improvement.

Schools Week takes a look at what the inspectors found ...

## 'Indomitable determination' praised

The first batch of 41 reports has been published – with 20 "inadequate" and 21 "RI" settings inspected. These comprised 28 primary schools, 12 secondaries and one special school.

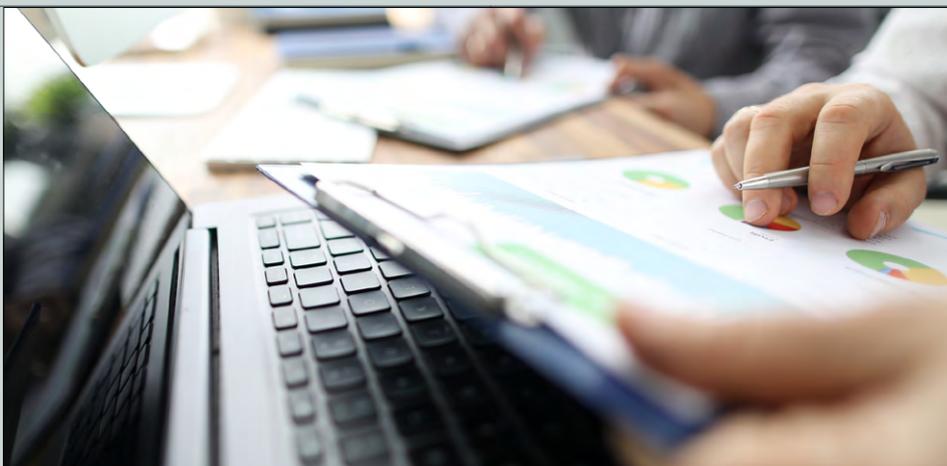
All the reports concluded that schools were taking "effective action". However more critical reports could take longer to be published as schools can complain, which delays the process.

Ofsted would not say whether this was the case with any schools inspected so far that had been found not to be taking effective action.

The reports show that Ofsted regularly noted the lengths that schools went to in order to secure devices for pupils. Staff at Fernhill School in Hampshire were praised for their "indomitable determination" in overcoming the challenges of remote education.

Inspectors also focused on whether content aligned with the schools' curriculums. Copley Academy, in Cheshire, was praised for adapting their subject curriculums "so that they can be delivered in classrooms as well as to those pupils who have to work remotely".

Inspectors also noted that leaders continually reviewed curriculum content to check what



pupils should learn and the order in which they should learn it.

But there were criticisms. At John Smeaton Academy, in West Yorkshire, inspectors said that pupils sometimes felt lessons were "standalone" rather than part of a sequence where knowledge and skills build up over time". However inspectors said steps were already being taken to address this.

Reading was highlighted as a priority for most primaries, with schools noting that pupils were beginning to fall behind.

## Families choosing not to engage in education

Langland Community School in Milton Keynes was told by inspectors that it needed to reduce the number of pupils who were not accessing remote education.

However, Ofsted did note that, while the school had provided laptops to pupils without access and set up weekly calls and visits to help families complete work, "a significant minority of families are still not accessing the remote education provided for them".

A similar problem was found at St Wulstan's and St Edmund's Catholic Primary School in Lancashire. Inspectors said the school "encourages all pupils to engage in remote education, including those families who choose not to access the education that is on offer".

## Heads positive about visits, but usefulness questioned

The letters are primarily published for parents. But Justine Roberts, chief executive and founder of Mumsnet, told *Schools Week* that the increasing demands brought on by the pandemic mean most parents are "far more

interested in whether their child's teachers are OK than they are in what Ofsted inspectors have managed to glean during a highly unrepresentative period".

Dr Mary Bousted, the National Education Union's joint general secretary, said inspections were a "completely unnecessary distraction and extra pressure at a time when it wasn't needed".

She warned that remote inspections were an example of "Ofsted inventing a job for themselves to do". But she said that feedback from members found inspectors were conducting the visits with sensitivity.

Carl Heatley, vice-principal at Copley Academy in Stalybridge, one of the secondary schools remotely inspected, said that the "process and the report itself" were "really useful in terms of our current development".

While the process was "time consuming in a very difficult period" it was useful for leaders and validated their hard work, he added.

Since Heatley's school was inspected, Ofsted has reduced the length of the monitoring inspections from two days to one.

Giselle Lynch, headteacher of St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School, in St Helens, said their visit had been useful. Discussions with inspectors went far beyond what was mentioned in the reports, she added.

An Ofsted spokesperson said it was "reassuring" they had "generally found that schools are taking effective action to deliver education in the current circumstances". But they added that remote education was "no match for the classroom".

The government intends that full graded Ofsted inspections should resume in the summer term. Ofsted is "discussing the form and timing" of these inspections.

## Speed read

# More exam changes likely next year, says Ofqual

Schools minister Nick Gibb and officials from exams regulator Ofqual were questioned this week over plans to replace formal tests with teacher-assessed grades this summer and proposals for future years. Gibb was joined at the education select committee by interim chief regulator Simon Lebus and Ofqual's chair Ian Bauckham. Here's what we learned...

## 1 'ADAPTATIONS' MAY BE NEEDED IN 2022

Although the system to replace exams this summer has been a priority for policymakers, there are also growing concerns about pupils due to sit exams next year.

Lebus revealed that the "thinking at the moment is about adaptations along the lines that had been originally contemplated for this year when exams were still to go ahead".

The government proposed last year that grading for exams in 2021 would be as generous as it was in 2020, and that pupils would get advance notice of topics in certain subjects and be allowed to use exam aids. Those plans were abandoned in January when exams were cancelled.

## 2 'FLEXIBILITY' OVER EVIDENCE AND PUPILS CAN CHALLENGE SCHOOLS

The use of additional assessment materials from exam boards will be optional this year, but MPs asked whether individual pupils would be allowed to request to use them.

Bauckham said that it would be easier for teachers to arrive at "consistent grading" if "broadly the same evidence is used", but said guidance for schools will "admit for exceptions of that".

He said exam boards were being asked to "make clear when they communicate with schools in guidance that there should be flexibility around the edges with pupils for whom it may be appropriate to use different portfolios of evidence".

He added: "That may include more in-class or other kinds of test to leave open the possibility of delivering a nice surprise."

Schools will be expected to tell students the evidence on which their grades are to be based before results are submitted. Lebus said this meant that there would be an "opportunity for a student to say if they think that the evidence that has been used does not accurately reflect the best of their ability".

## 3 NO PLAN TO 'RATION' GRADES AT SCHOOLS WITH LOWER RESULTS HISTORICALLY

Teachers have been told to factor in previous years' results when reaching their judgments. MPs raised concerns that this could lead to "grade suppression" for pupils in schools with historically lower results.

The government has said that external quality assurance checks could be triggered where grades are lower or higher than expected compared to previous years.

But Bauckham said there was "no intention to ration grades or predetermine grades by the kind of school or the area that the school is located in".

## 4 ASSESSMENT PROCESS MUST NOT BE 'MAJOR INDUSTRY'

Asked whether external assessors could provide a "check and balance" service for schools during the grading process, Gibb warned that there would be a "huge resource implication". He added: "We don't want this to become a major industry."

He said the focus between now and June 18, when grades have to be submitted, "should be on teaching and not going through a massive process of assessment with individuals travelling around the country going to schools".

Instead, there will be a sample and risk-based quality assurance process of grades, as well as checks on schools' internal processes. However, the witnesses said it had not yet been decided how many schools would be subject to spot checks.

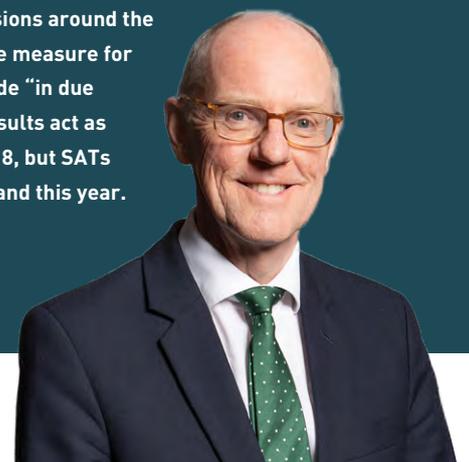
## 5 GIBB REJECTS CALLS FOR GCSEs TO GO

The impact of the pandemic and cancellation of exams two years running has prompted a debate about whether GCSEs are still needed.

But Gibb said exams were the "fairest way of judging" student attainment and he wants to "get back" to them "as soon as possible".

He said: "Those GCSE specifications are well structured. They are a gold-standard qualification in Britain and internationally, and I disagree wholeheartedly with those that say that GCSEs have had their day."

He also said that decisions around the progress 8 performance measure for future years will be made "in due course". Key stage 2 results act as a baseline for progress 8, but SATs were scrapped in 2020 and this year.





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## Long read



# Inside the government's plan to take tutoring mainstream

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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INVESTIGATES

As ministers start the hunt for an organisation to run the National Tutoring Programme for its second year, *Schools Week* takes a look at what schools can expect from the expansion of government's flagship catch-up scheme.

Launched last year, the NTP provides heavily subsidised tutoring for disadvantaged students aged 5 to 16. The tuition arm is run by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), which in November appointed 33 "partners" to deliver the tutoring.

As revealed last week, just 49 per cent of pupils enrolled for tuition so far, in years 3 to 11, are eligible for pupil premium. An Education Policy Institute (EPI) study last month on catch-up plans said "no firm rules exist for which pupils are eligible for subsidised tuition".

## Pupil premium tutoring target expected next year

*Schools Week* understands that the Department for Education did not stipulate a target number of pupil-premium children to be reached this year.

Professor Becky Francis, the EEF's chief executive, told MPs last week that schools had the flexibility to put pupils forward who may have become vulnerable or particularly fallen behind during the pandemic.

But tender documents seen by *Schools Week* reveal that the DfE expects at least 65 per cent of tutoring next year to be provided to pupil-premium children.

That will still leave "flexibility" for schools to use their "professional judgment" to "ensure that support reaches those who need it most", the tender adds.

Jon Andrews, the EPI's head of analysis, supported the approach. "Some pupils may fall outside of this group but may still be considered vulnerable or be seen to have lost a lot of learning over the course of the pandemic, so schools will need this added flexibility," he said.

Lee Elliot Major, professor of social mobility at



the University of Exeter who pitched the idea of a national tutoring service to the government last year, said it was "absolutely crucial" to have targets for the disadvantaged.

## Academic mentor funding to be slashed

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

But, as *Schools Week* revealed last month, the government plans to "taper" subsidies for tuition within three years. This could leave schools having to pay 90 per cent of the costs of sessions by 2023-24.

Research accompanying the tender says that the "most disadvantaged" schools are taking up NTP tuition at a "lower rate than other schools".

It found that NTP providers are reaching 63 to 76 per cent of schools across all deprivation levels, but are "skewed" slightly to less disadvantaged schools.



Professor  
Becky Francis

But documents reveal that schools could also face paying most of the £19,000 salary for academic mentors – a separate strand of the NTP where staff work full-time to provide "intensive support".

Schools only paid on-costs, such as pension contributions and national insurance payments, for the mentors this year – the salary was covered in full by the government.

But, from September, the government intends to pay 95 per cent of their salaries. Documents show this could fall to a maximum of 50 per cent in 2022-23, and then just 10 per cent in 2023-24 – depending on the spending review.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of heads' union the ASCL, said school budgets were under "severe" pressure, so expecting schools to pay more "is obviously going to be problematic".

Furthermore, in NTP research – which only interviewed five schools on mentors – 80 per cent said they would "definitely" not keep their mentor if the salary subsidy was reduced to 75 per cent.

One school quoted in the study said that a decision to keep a mentor at "75 per cent subsidy is entirely dependent on securing charitable funding to pay the excess".

The study acknowledges that a decrease in

Continued on next page

# Investigates



subsidies could “further skew provision away from the most disadvantaged schools across both pillars”.

## Pupil premium cash to be used for tutoring

The documents show a “key objective” of the NTP is to encourage schools to “increasingly use funding from their pupil premium grants to buy in tutoring”.

The NTP will “stimulate” widespread demand for tutoring by also providing “quality and stronger expectations around pupil premium spend”.

The documents add: “The NTP is a key lever in raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and, over time, our ambition is for tuition to become a central option for schools when making decisions about PP spend.”

But Barton warned against “an attempt to leverage take-up through some sort of new condition around pupil premium”.

He added: “It is our firm view that school leaders should decide what works best for their pupils rather than this being directed via convoluted mechanisms dreamt up in Whitehall.”

Another core NTP objective is to “boost” the tutoring market by helping to establish high-quality provision.

A draft NTP report on “multi-year” support accompanying the tender suggests a “sustainable” market would include 30 to 50 per cent of schools purchasing high-quality tutoring, and 25 per cent of pupil premium spent on it.

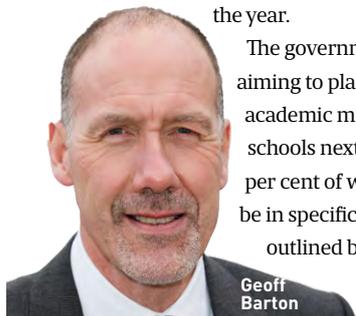
This would constitute a huge shake-up of tutoring, which has historically been used in education by mostly middle-class families.

Tuition targets are due to soar next year when the NTP is looking at teaching 524,000 children, more than double this year’s 250,000 target. This target could rise to 650,000 for the following two years.

But, as *Schools Week* revealed last week, the NTP’s reach is falling behind in northern areas. The organisation said this was partly because private tuition had historically been more prevalent in the south of England. The programme is on track to hit its annual targets by the end of

the year.

The government is aiming to place 3,600 academic mentors in schools next year – 80 per cent of which will be in specific areas outlined by the DfE.



Geoff Barton



Teach First, which currently runs the mentors programme, has placed 1,117 mentors in schools, exceeding its target of 1,000 by the end of February. A Teach First spokesperson said it received 2,791 applications.

## Bulk of tutoring will be one-to-three ratio

Currently, schools can buy one 15-hour subsidised block of tuition per pupil from a tuition partner. The NTP encourages schools that want to buy extra tutoring blocks for the same pupils – such as for other subjects – to instead buy it outside of the subsidised scheme. This is so the NTP can reach as many pupils as possible, its website states.

The lack of flexibility has put some schools off. One secondary school head in Hertfordshire, which did not want to be named, decided to go with one of the approved providers privately, even though it would not get the subsidy.

The head said this offered “much greater flexibility”, including more than one set of tuition for the same student and flexibility over group sizes. “We think it is better value for money.”

Next year’s NTP supplier will be expected to ensure that 80 per cent of all tuition sessions are at a ratio of one-to-three. One-to-one and one-to-two will be 10 per cent each, but predominantly used for children with special educational needs and disabilities and for “exceptional” cases.

John Nichols, president of The Tutors’ Association, claimed the “rigid parameters” of the NTP have had more “negative impacts” on the tuition market than benefits.

He believes that the tutoring market could “collapse” once the subsidies end, as tutoring “hasn’t been an entrenched part of the school system”. A voucher scheme for schools could have worked better, he said.

## Capita among suppliers weighing up NTP bid

Tender documents show the NTP year-two contract will include key performance indicators such as reaching 90 per cent of targets in all regions. It is also expected that 95 per cent of pupils who start tuition or mentoring will complete the package.

The process of recruiting tuition providers will also change. Currently, providers applied for grant funding – with 33 chosen for the scheme.

Next year will be an open-access scheme instead. This means that any provider that reaches accreditation standards during the application round will be added to the NTP list of providers.

Application rounds could also be reopened to help boost provision in “cold spot” areas.

But a source familiar with the process questioned how to run an open-access scheme while also managing regional targets.

Both the EEF and Teach First said this week that they were still looking at the tender documents.

*Schools Week* understands that Capita, which was also recently appointed as an early career framework provider, is also reviewing the opportunity.

The contract is due to begin in May, before starting delivery in September. The DfE did not respond to a detailed list of questions.

A Department for Education spokesperson said they “do not comment on leaks. Information on future programmes is provided through a confidential process to prospective suppliers to help create high-quality services. It is not government policy, and is subject to change as the procurement process continues.”

# School claimed furlough cash then gave £64k payout to head

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

A junior school that claimed nearly £100,000 of furlough cash because of the “dramatic and potentially catastrophic” financial impact of Covid made a £64,000 redundancy payment to its executive headteacher.

Accounts for St Stephen's Junior School, a single-academy trust in Canterbury, Kent, show that executive headteacher Stuart Pywell was made redundant in August, and sent on his way with a £64,000 payout.

The trust claimed £91,000 of taxpayer cash to furlough staff because of a loss of income from its lettings, nursery and after-school clubs during the pandemic. Accounts show an operating deficit of £66,000 in the last financial year, up from £11,000 the previous year.

The payout has drawn criticism from some quarters. Seamus Murphy, chief executive of the Kent-based Turner Schools trust, said: “Excessive executive pay undermines the public trust in the good work that many MAT leaders undertake.

“It's critical that trustees ensure that money is used to improve education for children, rather than disproportionate payments to individuals. Research shows that excessive pay for leaders because ‘they are worth it’ does not bring about excellence.”

But Pywell told *Schools Week* that the sum was what he was entitled to contractually after three decades as head, adding that teachers “should be paid well”, outstanding ones in particular.

Pywell, who has previously spoken out over government funding cutbacks, added that his fundraising efforts had “more than covered” his salary.

Statutory redundancy packages are capped at £16,140.

The disclosure comes as organisations claiming government aid during the pandemic see their finances come under closer scrutiny – particularly those who then paid out shareholders.

Tesco and other supermarkets have repaid business rate relief funds. Retailer IKEA and outsourcing firm Serco have also vowed to repay furlough grants.

In relation to St Stephen's, Micon Metcalfe, a school resource management adviser, said that trust directors “need to consider how use of public funds looks in the public domain”.



Other trusts have made use of the furlough scheme after private income dried up for after-school clubs, nursery, catering or letting staff. United Learning received £282,000, Academies Enterprise Trust received £159,000 and GLF Schools £156,000.

The St Stephen's trustees said in a statement that Pywell's redundancy package was “standard” as he was its most senior and longest serving staff member.

They said that finances had been “hit by the pandemic”, but added: “Separately, we had previously rationalised the senior management structure, resulting in the removal of the post of executive headteacher.”

The role, which saw Pywell paid between £110,000 and £115,000 last year, has been scrapped as part of the cost-cutting drive. Two deputy heads have become co-heads of the school.

The school said that government funding had fallen in the past few years, leading to “less teachers, poorer maintained buildings [and] a more restrictive creative curriculum”.

Jonathan Holden, head of education and employment at Forbes Solicitors, said it would be “good governance” for leaders at cash-strapped schools to consider not taking or deferring their full payouts, but that this was not common.

He also said Pywell's redundancy payout was “not that unusual” given his age and service. “Good redundancy packages help staff retention,” he added.

Pywell had told the Kent Online newspaper in July that he was retiring. The former head, 66, told *Schools Week* that this was because he wanted to “maintain [his] privacy and dignity” around the “nature of the departure”.

He added: “Unfortunately, redundancy continues to carry negative connotations that I wished to avoid.” He said he had agreed with trustees to “simply refer to retiring”.

Accounts also show that Pywell's wife Sally was paid £1,200 last year for HR consultancy, which they said was “less than the actual cost of the service provided”.

The trustees said there had been “no conflicts of interest” over the redundancy and Sally Pywell said that her role had “never been hidden”.

She has never advised on matters involving her husband as it would be “completely inappropriate”.

Accountants also flagged that the trust spent £1,369 on gift hampers, including alcohol, for trustees, and £462 on alcohol for its Christmas party, with only £430 reimbursed.

The Education Skills and Funding Agency has been notified about the instances of “irregularity, impropriety or funding non-compliance”.

Pywell said the hampers were purchased from money raised through business income and were a “thank-you to the unpaid volunteers who give their free time willingly for the benefit of the school”.

He added: “As soon as the concern was identified, it was addressed and, to my knowledge, has not recurred.”

A DfE spokesperson said trusts must ensure value for money and remuneration should be reasonable and justifiable.

“We expect all academy trusts to adhere to high standards of financial management and will not hesitate to intervene if requirements are not met,” he added. “We are in contact with this trust about the issues highlighted.”

News

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RSC says no: academy conversion blocked over local concern

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

INVESTIGATES

A school's bid to academise has been turned down because it was "at odds with the community" as parents, staff and the local council opposed the plans.

The proposal by Fairview Community Primary School, in Kent, to join the Westbrook Trust was rejected by Claire Burton, regional schools commissioner for the south-east and south London.

The move sparked surprise among local education experts and anti-academy campaigners, who say many academisations have been pushed through despite fierce resistance from the local community.

Peter Read, a local education adviser who first reported the decision on his Kent Advice website, said he was "aware of so many cases where parental objections have been ignored. I've never heard of such a case before. I don't understand what makes this one different."

Analysis by Schools Week found the overwhelming majority of voluntary conversions across the country have been approved over the past eight months.

Meeting notes from local headteacher boards, which advise RSCs on conversions, show Fairview was one of just three schools rejected since June.

It was the only rejection where local community and local authority feedback appears to have been a key factor, with finance concerns behind the two other bids turned down.

Notes from the headteacher board meeting relating to Fairview, in December, suggest Burton was swayed by her advisors to block the conversion.

The headteacher board voiced alarm that governors and the school community were "at odds," and noted Medway Council's concerns over the level of "transparency



and community engagement" in decision-making.

Medway council told Schools Week it did not oppose Fairview governors' plan to join the Westbrook Trust per se but had "raised concerns governors hadn't fully considered views given as part of the consultation process."

The school's consultation last September had found 52 per cent of parents and 74 per cent of staff who responded were against the proposal, despite widespread support for academisation in general.

Parents were described as being happy with the school as it was at the time, and both parents and staff were said to be keen for "stability", particularly during the pandemic.

The school had been receiving interim support from another trust, the south London-based Compass Partnership of Schools.

Compass featured on the governors' shortlist, but they instead decided to go for Westbrook in October, in spite of community opposition. The school highlighted its "strong track record" and presence already in schools in Medway in a parental Q&A on its website.

The school had faced questions from parents over potential conflicts of interest, as its former chair of governors is married to the Westbrook Trust's

chief executive.

But Fairview said the RSC was satisfied that she had stepped back from all discussions of the plan and subsequently stood down, though she remained on the board.

The school's future remains up in the air, with parents told "nothing has been decided" in a letter last month. Further meetings are scheduled with Medway and Burton to come up with a solution.

The government dropped plans to force all schools to become academies in 2016, and education secretary Gavin Williamson said last week there were "currently no plans" to force any school to join multi-academy trusts.

But Williamson said he still wanted "far more schools" in wider trusts, and academisation remains a government ambition for schools.

Simon O'Hara, a spokesperson for the Anti Academies Alliance, highlighted a "large number" of controversial academisations in recent years, citing unsuccessful local campaigns at east London's Cumberland School, Barclay school in Hertfordshire and Waltham Holy Cross in Essex.

But he played down the idea the decision could mark a softening in the government's academisation drive. "Williamson's comments last week should put paid to that belief," he added.

Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), said the benefits of schools working together in trusts were "increasingly clear."

"It is important that the long-term benefits of working in a strong and sustainable structure are actively considered in decision making, but also that schools talk to parents, families and communities about this."

Medway Council said it was working with Fairview to address concerns, which the RSC had requested. The school and the

Department for Education did not respond to a request for comment.



Claire Burton



Leora Cruddas

News

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# Government asks Capita for cash back over cancelled SATS

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The government is in talks over its £109 million contract with outsourcing firm Capita to manage primary school tests to see if it can get a reduction following the cancellation of SATs this year.

Under a six-year contract worth just over £18 million a year, Capita manages the administration, processing and support for all primary school national curriculum assessment tests on behalf of the Standards and Testing Agency.

That includes printing, distributing and collating over nine million SATs papers and the phonics screening check each year, as well as administering the marking of four million key stage 2 tests until 2024.

But, with assessments cancelled again this summer, questions have been asked over whether Capita will still get paid despite not having to provide the services.

Asked about it this week, the Department for Education said that Capita and the STA were "in discussion with respect to the impact of the cancellation of the 2021 test cycle and any



resulting impact on payment".

Schools Week asked whether there were any contingencies within the contract for such scenarios to avoid payment, but the department said there was nothing further to add while discussions are ongoing.

Capita would only say that it was working through the implications of the cancellation of SATs.

Last year, the government wrote off £2.7 million as a "constructive loss" after it had to shred papers

for the cancelled tests.

The STA, an executive agency of DfE, said it was concerned about the potential degradation of the papers as well as the costs of storing them for later use.

The government also paid £55,000 to have the papers shredded by Restore Datashred. The cash was paid by the STA, on top of the contract payments to Capita.

Schools Week understands that no SATs papers were printed this academic year, so there have been no shredding costs.

In a normal year, Capita would print, distribute and collate test papers annually for key stage 1 and key stage 2 tests, and the phonics screening check.

Schools were asked to administer a phonics screening check for year 2 pupils last autumn, after the June test was missed because of coronavirus. It is not clear if this will happen this autumn.

The services provided by Capita were previously delivered through different contracts. As Schools Week revealed in 2019, the STA paid out £3m to education giant Pearson to settle a dispute over the Capita contract.

EXCLUSIVE

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## Gibb refuses call to collate grammar entry data

The schools minister has rejected calls to collect grammar school entry test data and link it to the national pupil database. His decision comes as new figures show that fewer poorer pupils passed the test in two of the country's most selective areas.

Schools Week revealed last month that Comprehensive Future and 24 well-known academics and educationalists had called for 11-plus data to be collected nationally so that researchers could assess the performance of disadvantaged pupils, particularly during the pandemic.

But in his response, seen by Schools Week, Nick Gibb said that ministers "do not intend to ask schools and local authorities to collect the data you suggest at this time".

He said data already collected "allows the progress of children within schools to be assessed, including for disadvantaged children".

However, he admitted that the current data "would not allow the ethnic and economic characteristics of children sitting selection tests

to be compared with those passing selection tests".

It comes as data shows the proportion of pupils passing the 11-plus who were disadvantaged fell last year in Medway and in Kent, the two highly selective council areas.

In Medway, the proportion of successful pupils who were eligible for the pupil premium fell by over a quarter – from 10.2 per cent in 2019 to 7.4 per cent in 2020.

In Kent, 8.7 per cent of those who passed or were given places following headteacher panel reviews were eligible for the pupil premium, down from 10.2 per cent the year before, a drop of 16 per cent.

In Redbridge, however, 5.4 per cent of those who passed last year were poorer, up from 1.3 per cent in 2019.

When asked for data on poorer pupil passes, Trafford, Lincolnshire, Bexley, Buckinghamshire, Wirral, Slough and Essex councils said they did not hold it.

A Medway spokesperson said the council was

"reviewing testing arrangements for this year" in light of the impact of the pandemic.

Matt Dunkley, Kent's director for children, young people and education, said its test had been adapted "to include impact statements for each school and referred pupil, so that the individual effect of Covid-19 could be considered".

However, analysis of offer day data "disappointingly shows a reduction in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils securing a grammar school offer".

Dr Nuala Burgess, chair of Comprehensive Future, said it was "scandalous" that the tests went ahead last year and called for tests for 2022 entry, due to take place in the autumn, to be scrapped.

Dr Mark Fenton, from the Grammar School Heads Association, said many schools had made "excellent support provision available online, but only time will tell whether the conditions of the last year have adversely impacted our efforts to increase the number of disadvantaged pupils who can access a grammar school education".

# BTEC AWARDS 2021

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## News

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## Pupils expected to know 1,700 words in MFL reforms

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**  
@FCDWHITTAKER

Pupils will be "expected to know" up to 1,700 different words under proposed reforms to GCSE modern foreign language (MFL) qualifications.

The Department for Education has published revised subject content for French, German and Spanish MFL GCSEs alongside a consultation on the changes. Ofqual, the exams regulator, is also consulting on new assessment objectives for the subjects to reflect the revised content.

The DfE claims the changes will make the qualifications "more accessible and motivating for students". But language teaching experts warned this week that an over-focus on frequent words meant it would have the opposite effect.

The revised subject content document states that students "will be expected to know 1,200 lexical items for foundation tier, and a further 500 lexical items for higher tier".

It goes on to state that "at least 90 per cent of words selected must be from the 2,000 most frequent words occurring in the most widely used standard forms of the language".

Dr Jim Milton, emeritus professor of applied linguistics at Swansea University, said the 1,700 word goal was half of what it needed to be, and warned the 90 per cent rule would make modern foreign languages "incoherent and lacking in almost any discernible content other than the learning of structure".

"The writers of this document have clung on to the idea that the most frequent vocab is important. And it is. But they have taken this to mean you can exclude everything else. And you can't. Or at least you can't if you want a

lexicon that is structured for communication rather than just building list of the most frequent words."

One MFL teacher, who asked to remain anonymous, said the proposal "looks even more prescriptive and limiting".

"It's a very mechanical, technical approach to languages – uncluttered by dynamism, authenticity and passion. It's as if the GCSE has been designed to meet the needs of examiners, not the mindsets of young linguists."

The current subject content document, published in 2015, states that GCSE specifications should enable students to "deepen their knowledge about how language works and enrich their vocabulary", but contains no specific requirement for the number of words pupils must know.

The DfE announced in 2019 that an expert panel would review subject content for the three GCSEs.

It followed a review of MFL teaching by the Teaching Schools Council in 2016, which found that pupils needed to "gain systematic knowledge of the vocabulary, grammar, and sound and spelling systems (phonics) of their new language, and how these are used by speakers of the language".

The DfE said the recommendations of the panel focus "primarily on specificity, particularly in relation to vocabulary and grammar".

"A precise specification of vocabulary and grammar to be taught is critical for those following a language GCSE course."

The review also "sought to reduce volume and make the course less burdensome for teachers and students", the consultation states.

## Details scarce on pledge to speed up schools' mental health support

**SAMANTHA BOOTH**  
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

The government has pledged to accelerate the roll-out of mental health support teams (MHST) for schools – but was unable to provide figures to back up promises the programme will now reach more children.

The NHS Long Term Plan, published in January 2019, said that the MHSTs in schools will be rolled out to between "one-fifth to a quarter" of the country by the end of 2023.

But the government has pledged to bring forward this commitment by at least eight months. It was announced this week that by April 2023, the number of teams in schools and colleges will grow from 59 currently to 400.

In a press release this week, the government also said nearly three million children in England will be supported by the teams in schools. This would be backed by an extra £79 million to support children's mental health, the released stated.

When asked for further information, the Department for Health and Social Care said the extra funding will allow them to reach more children and young people than initially thought, and sooner.

But they could not provide figures to show how many more children would be reached.

First commissioned in 2018, the teams provide early intervention on mental health and emotional wellbeing issues in schools and colleges.

They work in a variety of ways, including children being able to text a team and a health professional responding within an hour during the school day.

The DHSC said that in 2018-19, 59 were commissioned and a further 123 were commissioned in 2019-20. Another 104 teams are in the process of being established in 2020-21.

Teams commissioned in other years may have begun training or not be fully operational yet, the government said.

The £79m will also cover expanding community mental health services to 22,500 more children by 2021-22.

The DHSC said this is on top of a commitment made in the NHS Long Term Plan to reach an additional 345,000 children through these services and MHSTs by 2023-24.

The money will also allow 2,000 more children to access eating disorder services.

The £79 million is part of the £500 million announced for mental health support during the 2020 spending review.

## Speed read



## New Covid contingency measures: the key points

Schools may be asked to restrict attendance to vulnerable and key worker children as well as certain year groups as a “last resort” if cases spike, updated Covid contingency measures have revealed.

The Department for Education has tweaked its contingency framework to reflect wider school reopenings from this week. But just like with the framework published last November, ministers will decide whether the measures are implemented, not school leaders. Here’s what you need to know.

### 1 YOUNGER PUPILS PRIORITISED IN PRIMARIES...

If attendance does need to be limited again, primary schools may be advised either to restrict attendance to vulnerable and key worker children, or to those groups plus pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2 pupils.



This represents a change to the contingency framework issued on December 30, which stated that primary schools would be advised only to open to vulnerable and key worker children if restrictions were needed. This ended up happening nationwide just a few days later.

If attendance is restricted, schools will still be expected to provide “high-quality” remote education for all pupils not attending.

### 2... AND EXAM PUPILS TO STAY IN SECONDARIES

If secondary attendance needs to be limited, schools may be advised to prioritise only vulnerable and key worker children, or those groups plus pupils in years 10, 11, 12 and 13, and “other pupils who were due to take external exams this academic year”.



Middle schools “may need to adopt a combined approach depending on the restrictions in primary and secondary schools in the local area”.

As with primaries, remote education expectations will remain in place for those not in school.

### 3 DFE MUST SIGN OFF ON MEASURES



Schools have been told they must not implement these measures without the “explicit approval” of the DfE.

The restrictions set out should also “not be used to address operational challenges, including staff shortages”.

The guidance states that the “exact nature” of the restrictions will “depend on the scientific and public health advice... Detailed operational guidance will be published when restrictions are advised.”

Government will “endeavour to give as much notice as possible of any need for restrictions in education and childcare”.

### 4 DECISIONS WILL BE ON ‘AREA-BY-AREA BASIS’

Ministerial decisions to restrict attendance will be made “on an area-by-area basis in the light of all available evidence, public health advice and local and national circumstances”, the guidance states.



Schools “should have a contingency plan for how they would operate if any of the approaches for easing and tightening of restrictions become necessary in their local area”, the DfE also said.

### 5 RESTRICTIONS WILL BE ‘LAST RESORT’

The restrictions “may be necessary as a last resort” if there is an “extremely high prevalence of coronavirus (Covid-19) and existing measures have failed to reduce community transmission”.



Guidance also adds that restrictions may be needed to “help minimise the impact from new variants of the virus”.

### 6 SPECIAL SCHOOL EXPECTATIONS ‘IN LINE’ WITH MAINSTREAM AGE GROUPS

Attendance expectations in special schools will “remain in line with the equivalent age groups in mainstream schools”. But the DfE accepts there may be “exceptional circumstances” where they “cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios, or with staff with vital specialist training”.



In these circumstances, they should “seek to resume as close as possible to the specified provision for the child or young person as soon as possible”.

Alternative provision settings “should continue to allow all children or pupils to attend full-time”, the framework states.

However, AP settings that encounter circumstances “where they cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios, or with staff with appropriate specialist training” should “seek to resume as close as possible to full-time provision, as soon as possible”.

# EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Local say in academy switches unlikely to last

The decision by a regional schools commissioner to turn down an academy conversion is quite a thing.

Citing community concerns in the refusal is also surprising, given how similar concerns have been totally ignored in other academy conversions. Parents have protested with placards outside school gates, but it didn't make a difference.

So, is the Fairview case, which we cover this week, a turning point for the academies programme? Will the local voice now be factored into decisions taken by government?

If so, it should be welcomed. Local communities have long felt excluded from the centralised decisions in the world of academies. But it is most likely wishful thinking.

As we move out of the pandemic, and the government returns to its academisation agenda, the odds are stacked towards moving back to a full-steam-ahead approach - whether locals are on board or not.

## Ofsted's makeshift inspections: what's the point?

It's heartening to see all of the schools visited under Ofsted's new monitoring "inspections" were found to be "taking effective action" to educate pupils.

The inspections were introduced as a sort of halfway house during the pandemic before full inspections are reimposed.

Ofsted has had to tread carefully. Unions are furious they are even bothering schools, while politicians such as education select committee chair Robert Halfon are furious they aren't bothering schools enough.

The monitoring inspections were brought in as a compromise. The idea to publish a letter - strongly contested by unions - was to keep parents informed.

But what purpose are the inspections actually serving?

The inspectorate itself admits the letters only provide a "limited level of assurance".

Will they reassure politicians, speaking for their parent constituents, that any school shortcomings will be picked up and addressed? Probably not.

But, surprisingly, headteachers appear to have found them useful. Can Ofsted keep them on board when full inspections resume?

SCHOOLS WEEK



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Stan  
See page 12



**Pupils 'expected to know' up to 1,700 words under reforms to MFL GCSEs**

**Neil Roskilly, @NeilRoskilly**

"Knowing" words rather a superficial measure. Being able to use them is a step further. An MFL is all about communication, so shame Ofqual is not increasing the non-exam assessment beyond 25 per cent. Children should expect a regular diet of vocab tests.

**No 'current' plans to force schools into multi-academy trusts, says Williamson**

**Peter Read**

Here's a thought! Why not create families of schools, strong clusters, able to take advantage of the benefit of schools working together, really driving performance, by grouping them into clusters based on local authority boundaries.

**Mark Watson**

Here's another thought. The current government made very clear in its electioneering that they were strongly in favour of the academies programme. If it wasn't clear enough, Labour and the unions did everything they could to make sure (a) people knew this was the Tory platform, and (b) Labour was standing on the opposing platform of increasing local authority involvement.

And as we all know, the current government won a thumping majority. So if we believe in democracy and accountability – the arguments constantly put forward by opponents of academies – why is the election result ignored?

**Just 0.14 per cent of secondary school Covid tests are positive, but concerns over accuracy**

**Nick Arlington**

The number of positives found has to be compared with the number of people infected in the UK. When you do that using the latest ONS infection survey then the results are actually not that bad.

Lateral flow tests only find infectious people. PCR lab tests find people that are infectious AND people that are NOT infectious,

**REPLY OF THE WEEK** Alex Sands

**Williamson pledges to back teachers 'all the way' on exam grading**

"Back us all the way" with black coffee as we work our bottoms off to meet the very tight deadline we've been given? Is he going to stand there cheering whilst we work through the night? Personally, I'll find that all a little distracting. It may help if he could look after my children for me whilst I do all of this work though?



but still have inactive viral genetic material in their body. If you adjust the ONS infection survey data so that it only includes the people who are infectious by using the CT value data, then the rate at which the lateral flow tests are detecting the infected is anything between 40-100 per cent, depending on the day.

**Charlotte Singh**

None of the positive cases we have had since the start of the year have been detected on lateral flow tests DESPITE these being done on the same day as PCR tests for all of the people who were positive on separate occasions. They should look at the number of positive PCR tests done in schools and compare.

**Some students may need to repeat a year if they can't get a grade, says exam board chief**

**Tom Pender**

Holding back sends a specific message, and if schools aren't willing to do it in normal circumstances why would we punish students with this who may only be behind due to lack of emotional support? In the US we only held students back who had failed/not met the requirements. We are constantly still pushing students through, even when they haven't met all the standards.

This also assumes that schools don't recap, or require that the work in the previous year had to be mastered to move on. Most of us recap and reteach all year, knowing we need to keep things fresh in their minds.

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# Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ

## 'It's 2021, this is the UK, and children are skipping meals'

The shadow children's minister hails from a political dynasty – and met Mandela and Mother Teresa when she was a child. She tells Jess Staufenberg of her impatience to get into power

Tulip Siddiq is practically engulfed by her sofa. At 4ft 11in, the shadow children's minister is small in stature but perhaps it's exactly this – as well as being the middle child – that means she talks with force and volume, like a powerhouse.

Siddiq stares hard and long while you ask a question, and then responds with a

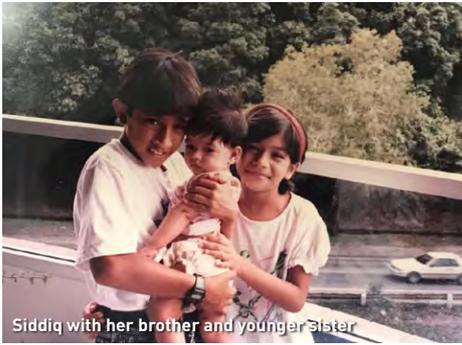
forthrightness and candour one wouldn't expect from someone who has spent their whole life in politics, navigating council cabinets as well as Westminster.

If shadow education secretary Kate Green's strength is in spotting "stupid policy", then Siddiq is who you would want to go and tell the person in charge why it's so stupid.

The look on her face in such an

encounter would, I expect, be similar to her deeply unimpressed and distressed expression in 2019 when she made national headlines for having to postpone her caesarean to attend a key Brexit deal vote. Parliament's arcane processes wouldn't allow Siddiq a proxy vote, despite being heavily pregnant. There's a picture of her sat in a wheelchair in the House with colleague

# Profile: Tulip Siddiq



Siddiq with her brother and younger sister



A young Siddiq with her father, mother and brother on the beach



Siddiq visiting a nursery

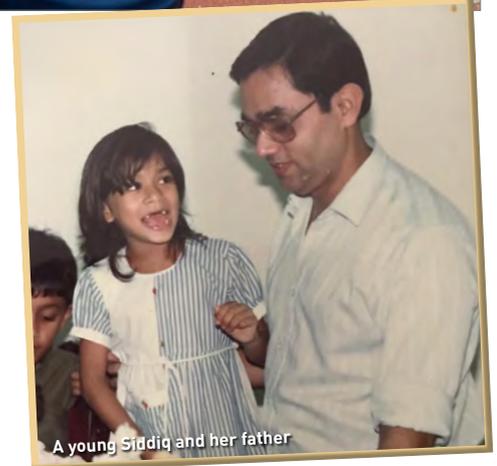
**“I would just look at the prime minister thinking, which world is he living in?”**

food during the pandemic. About 200,000 children were skipping meals during the first lockdown. “It’s 2021, this is the UK, and children are skipping meals,” says Siddiq with contempt.

Fighting for a cause is in Siddiq’s DNA. Her mother arrived in the 1970s as a political asylum seeker in the very constituency she now represents, after 19 members of the family had been killed in Bangladesh. Her mum only escaped because she was in Germany.

“She was on holiday and she was literally told her world had turned upside down. You can imagine her association with politics was not positive after that.”

Her mother’s family is part of a leading political dynasty in Bangladesh: her aunt, Sheikh Hasina, is the country’s prime minister and was the leader of the



A young Siddiq and her father

opposition during Siddiq’s childhood, while her grandfather, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had been the country’s first president and was later assassinated. When Siddiq was nine years old her father, a university professor, moved the family back to Bangladesh for a few years. It made for some unusual moments during a childhood otherwise filled with cricket and homework.

“Nelson Mandela came to Bangladesh and I was invited to meet him! It was like meeting someone who wasn’t human,” says Siddiq, eyes widening. “You just stand there looking at this towering figure. I couldn’t believe he was there.”

The young Siddiq also met Mother Teresa,

Clive Lewis standing protectively at the handles. It’s an image you could imagine in future politics textbooks on parliamentary reform.

But we’re not here to talk about Siddiq’s children, rather the nation’s children, policy for whom she would be responsible if Labour come to power. The brief covers everything from high-needs funding to special educational needs, children’s mental health and free school meals – the latter of which has exploded into the public eye during the pandemic.

“Every time I asked the prime minister, he would keep saying, ‘no child will go hungry in this pandemic,’” says Siddiq in disbelief. “And I would just look at him thinking, I mean, which world is he living in? It’s just divorced from reality. Because if he looks at the statistics...”

Siddiq did so and says she found Johnson’s constituency – Uxbridge and South Ruislip – has more children on free school meals than Siddiq’s own, Hampstead and Kilburn. She was part of a group who sent the findings around parliament to “try to shame the Conservatives into voting” for free school meals in the holidays, she tells me, reeling off the stats. Almost two million children have been in households short of

# Profile: Tulip Siddiq



Siddiq at a food bank



Siddiq sits in a wheelchair after the vote on the prime minister Theresa May's Brexit deal, in London, January 15, 2019

whose work just over the border in Kolkata was world famous. "It was a bit like meeting an angel."

But it wasn't these otherworldly figures who inspired her into politics. Her family moved to Bangladesh's warmer climate to help her father recover from a huge stroke. "The NHS saved my father's life. It's why I joined the Labour Party," says Siddiq. Aged 16, she told her dismayed mother she would be entering politics, following her relatives before her.

Siddiq's parents were also key influences. She laughs as she describes her mother ruling "with an iron fist", setting disciplinary standards Siddiq says she can't possibly maintain with her own two young children. "The emphasis on education was intense. My parents were always breathing down our necks at every opportunity about grades – there was a lot of pressure." It seems to have worked: her brother works for the United Nations and her sister for the Children's Society. It's also why Siddiq is not one to be drowned out. "I've got an older brother and a younger sister! That's why I wanted attention. Why I'm shouting all the time."

That determination got Siddiq into positions of responsibility early in her career. Aged just 22 she was working for Philip Gould, a key architect of New Labour. "It was really high-paced, very intensive, and you realise then that you either like the world of politics or you don't," explains Siddiq. "It was very exciting – the transition of Blair to Brown. I got to listen to that

## "Why do we even need free school meals in a country like this?"

conversation." By her mid-20s she was a cabinet member on Camden Council responsible for a £22 million budget. It's also where she learnt to hold her own. Turning up to meetings were Labour Party peer Joan Bakewell, "Ed Miliband's mum", presenter Victoria Coren Mitchell and "that guy from Only Fools and Horses". With such high-profile locals, Siddiq learnt early: "You can't just make a decision and hide from the public."

It's why the government's denial over their actions during the pandemic infuriates her.

Siddiq praises her opposite number Vicky Ford for "always keeping the door open" to her. But she is critical that Ford and so many other Conservative MPs have "toed the party line", including voting down extending free school meals in October last year. "Loads of Conservative MPs came up to me, whispering in corridors, saying 'oh we really don't want to,'" she says. Siddiq can at least speak from a position of consistency: she resigned from her current role in 2017 over Jeremy Corbyn's order to vote for triggering article 50, before being reappointed by Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer last year. "The government have been shamed into action

last-minute" on child poverty time and again, she grimaces.

As children's minister, child poverty would be her focus. Then, with increased force, she adds: "Why do we even need free school meals in a country like this? It's a sticking plaster. In an ideal world we'd be in a situation where no one needs free school meals." Her other focus would be ensuring there is "coordinated action" on mental health services for children, after a decade of funding cuts have decimated Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Siddiq would have the advantage of being able to keep her ear to the ground. Her husband is an education consultant and formerly a governor at Swiss Cottage School, a leading special needs school in Camden. She herself is a governor at nearby Emmanuel C of E primary school. "All the cabinet ministers, they're all constituency MPs at the end of the day. They must realise there is a need for a new package of social security reforms," Siddiq shakes her head. "Or are they just overlooking it?" She's finished with criticising, she says. "I'd like us to be in government now. I'm done with chuntering from a sedentary position."

# Opinion

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## SIR DAVID CARTER

Executive director, Ambition Institute

### Why a five-term year works so well (as long as we all do it)

**There are many reasons to support reform of the school calendar. But there's one important caveat, writes Sir David Carter**

In 2004, I was appointed principal of John Cabot City Technology College (CTC) in Bristol, my second headship. One of the most curious aspects of the college I was about to lead was the structure of its academic year, which was completely different to any I had seen before.

As I grew to understand it and started to relate the structure to my vision for the school, it became a model that is still in my view the best at linking the academic calendar to the learning of children. So I welcome the fact that ministers and department officials are talking about this model. With a caveat.

What made the five-term year at John Cabot such a good model was, first and foremost, that a term was nearly always eight weeks long. This gave a consistent structure to the modular curriculum delivery that I believed was so important. Each term had the same sequence:

- Weeks 1 to 4 were teacher delivery weeks, teaching the knowledge and content for each specific module on the curriculum;
- Week 5 was revision and

retrieval week;

- Week 6 was assessment week, with the precise nature of the assessment determined by each subject;
- Week 7 was a week of teaching that deliberately focused on making the connections between the last module and the next. It was also a week for teachers to complete their assessments;
- Week 8 saw teachers feedback to children assessment outcomes and distribute termly written report to parents.

If that structure was beneficial to teaching and learning, a two-week holiday after each eight-week term was equally good for workload and wellbeing. It gave teachers the chance to catch up on the work that they would normally do in a half-term break but also take some down-time.

While it would be too simple to state that the five-term year alone made for a better work-life balance, it certainly created a different rhythm to the academic year. When the Easter weekend fell in term time, a long weekend was included in the term structure to ensure that there was ample time to celebrate. When the exam season started in the mid-May holiday, staff were



“ The structure is as beneficial to teaching and learning as workload and wellbeing

invited to become invigilators and receive additional payment for doing so. It was so much easier to manage 300 children sitting exams in a building that was otherwise empty.

The shorter four-week summer holiday was the payback for having four two-week breaks at other points in the year. The benefit to children (and that is what this is about) was a better balance between a needed break with families, carers and friends and reducing summer learning loss.

There were additional benefits too. The new academic year started between the publication of A-level and GCSE results, which meant staff were back working when children most needed support in preparing for life in or after sixth-form. I also enjoyed seeing the faces of year 9 and 10 children as they watched the full range of emotions from year 11 students opening their envelopes.

In spite of these many advantages, though, there was one logistical challenge I could not overcome on my own. Being the only secondary school in Bristol working a five-term year created challenges for families who had to manage siblings on a different academic year cycle. It was all the harder for parents working in schools, who had different holidays to their children.

So the only way I can see this working in 2021 is if the model is adopted across the system or at least in geographical locations where a majority of families will experience the same structure. I can't see that it would work if it just became an option for some schools to adopt and others to reject.

As the five-term year enters the education conversation once again, it's clear to me it has a transformative potential. If we all pull together in the same direction, the gains could be substantial.

# Opinion

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## CHIAKA AMADI

Independent consultant in language, literacy and diversity



## Ofsted's restructure puts EAL and GRT students' recovery at risk

**The reported redistribution of responsibilities inside Ofsted for EAL and GRT pupils threatens to dilute accountability for their progress, writes Chiaka Amadi**

Last Wednesday, Teachers Talk Radio reported confirmation from Ofsted that there would no longer be a specialist national lead for pupils learning English as an additional language (EAL) or for pupils from a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) background. In concurrence with a message received recently by the EAL Research Network proffering a new point of contact at Her Majesty's Inspectorate, the post has been deleted.

The functions of the deleted post are too many to list. However, they include being the national reference point for what reasonable progress looks like for all types of EAL, ESOL and GRT learners. Its remit covers several groups of pupils who experience the worst outcomes in the British education system, so its reported loss should be of grave concern.

The number of children who use English as an additional language in our schools has been rising consistently for the past 60 years. Data from the 2020 school census

show that this trend continues. There are currently 1.6 million pupils with EAL in our schools, and they are not a homogenous group. Some manage well in the system and achieve results in line with or better than their peers. But despite good news headlines based on aggregated figures, there are many for whom lack of proficiency impacts progress. Over time, we see them fall further behind.

With regard to GRT pupils, data tells us that they are the lowest performers in almost every measure. Their attainment gap is as wide now as it was 20 years ago, despite the fact that most GRT learners do, in fact, speak English as their first language. This is a group for whom rates of progress have not just stagnated, but whose attainment trajectories are actually going backwards.

The deleted post also provided a source of CPD for other inspectors, whose ability to provide informed feedback and to elicit from schools their understanding and expectations

regarding progress for EAL and GRT pupils requires explicit and specialist knowledge. Many have incomplete pupil-level data and their under-attainment often hovers beneath the radar, unaddressed. An HMI post with this specialist knowledge can address common misconceptions, particularly where intersectionalities add greater complexity, demanding deeper interrogation into nuance and the avoidance of potential bias.

our news in these days of home schooling because of concerns that they are not thriving. They are the ones with least access to the laptops needed for home learning. Those with the least secure access to broadband. And those with the least regular attendance and access to public services. They are, in short, those whose wellbeing is the most vulnerable.

What these pupils really deserve is an expansion of the current post. Accountability for their progress should not be devolved as a shared and generic responsibility.

It's bleakly ironic to have heard this news days before the much vaunted wider reopening of schools. The country is rightfully concerned about the progress, attainment and wellbeing of some of our most vulnerable students. Yet while the Covid recovery slogan shouts 'build back better', the schools regulator is risking a potentially dangerous watering down of the substantial knowledge base needed to deliver it.

Those of us who are committed to working with GRT students and those with EAL are gravely concerned. A transparent consultation is desperately needed to ensure our fears don't come to pass. It won't be good enough to say that nobody could have predicted the consequences. We did.

**“ Their under-attainment often hovers beneath the radar ”**

Ofsted claims that it now has 'Special Advisers' who will address all policy areas, including equalities and disadvantaged pupils. However, it remains unclear how the specific expertise of such a wide-ranging post as the National Lead for EAL, GTR and ESOL is to be replicated. Schools are expected to identify their own groups of under-achieving learners and act accordingly. But how do they do that if they lack the expertise? And how do inspectors provide challenge to schools if they also lack expertise?

The pupils directly affected by this structural policy change are the same who have so often filled

# Opinion

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## IAN HARTWIGHT

Senior policy advisor, NAHT

### Teacher and leadership pay can no longer be ignored

**The government has tried everything to distract from its failure to deal with the profession's pay. They have run out of excuses, writes Ian Hartwight**

A member recently contacted me to ask: Does the government actually listen to the School Teachers' Review Body?

He had a point. This year, government again announced its decisions on pay in advance of setting the STRB's remit, further undermining its statutory role and purpose.

In recent years, government had avoided the political bluntness of outright pay freezes and caps. Instead, it sought more inventive ways to avoid acknowledging and addressing the issues that the review body has repeatedly highlighted.

These ruses have included attaching notions of 'affordability' to the review body's remit, even as schools have struggled through a crippling funding crisis. Another wheeze was to give instructions to 'target' often paltry pay uplifts on specific groups of teachers in the hope that no one would spot the elephant in the room.

This year, with predictable inevitability, the pandemic has been used as a pretext to abandon (or

'pause') progress towards a manifesto commitment. Raising starting salaries to £30,000 by 2022/23 has been deferred indefinitely.

The fundamental issue is that the department refuses to engage appropriately or seriously with the review body process. It treats its analysis and recommendations with disdain. It is perhaps not surprising

then that this year's government evidence is so thin and lacking in relevance to the issues that the STRB has repeatedly raised.

For the past five years the review body's reports have followed a consistent theme: a significant pay uplift is required to increase the competitiveness of teaching in relation to other professional occupations. Those seeking and exercising leadership roles, it adds, must be fairly remunerated for the additional pressure and responsibilities they take on.

Of course, starting salaries in teaching must rise in order to attract high-quality graduates and career-changers. This year's uptick in ITT applications offers no



room for complacency. It's worth remembering that the new entrants sheltering in the profession from the economic storm of 2008 soon melted away as matters improved.

But the greatest complacency is towards experienced teachers and school leaders. Government simply refuses to recognise or act upon the crisis in leadership supply. Not only is substantive discussion of leadership pay entirely absent from the DfE's evidence, it still offers no credible

remit for it to review the leadership pay structure.

That invitation fell on deaf ears. Government asserts that there is evidence that high-quality CPD improves teacher retention (although no specific evidence is referenced), pinning its hopes on a so-called 'golden thread' linking the soon-to-be-launched early career framework (ECF) and revised NPQs.

NAHT agrees that professional support and development is critical. But the now endemic problems of teacher and leadership supply will not be resolved by the ECF and some reformed NPQs alone.

The unresolved issues of teacher and leadership pay, high-stakes accountability and unsustainable workload are of greater importance. Professional development is complementary to a pay system that rewards professional experience, expertise and responsibility.

So, the short answer to my member's question was no, not really. Unlike for those working in, say, finance and investment, too often government and officials see pay as tangential to the vocational commitment of a life in public service, even though that is accompanied by high-stakes accountability and enormous workload.

It really is time to for government to allow the STRB to properly fulfil its role.

**“ The greatest complacency is towards experienced teachers and school leaders ”**

data on leadership attrition.

NAHT has asked repeatedly for an update to the department's 2016 workforce data on wastage rates for assistants, deputies and heads. If the data is still collected, why is it not published? And if it is not collected, why not?

Government's evidence ignores the STRB's increasingly stark warnings that differentiated pay uplifts undermine the pay of experienced teachers and chip away at remuneration for the weighty responsibilities of school leadership. Last year, the review body called for a significant real-terms pay uplift to reward and incentivise experienced teachers and school leaders, and invited government to set a specific

# Opinion

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## HANNAH MOLONEY

SENCO and SEND researcher,  
Bath Spa University and nasen

### Reopening: SENCOs and students with SEND face multiple challenges

**Not all students will be able to return to school in the coming weeks. SENCOs will be crucial to supporting those who can't, writes Hannah Moloney**

As most pupils returned to school this week, it is important to remember that not all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are back full-time. Just last week, Ofsted released analysis and findings on how remote education is working for children and young people with SEND. The regulator recognised that some pupils with SEND are clinically vulnerable and some may continue to experience disruption to learning as schools close bubbles over the coming weeks.

Moreover, due to lack of availability of specialist placements, a significant number of pupils with SEND may not even have a setting to return to. The reality is that children and young people with SEND may continue to experience ongoing disruption to learning and require remote education or blended learning for some time to come.

In our 2020 SENCO survey of a thousand SENCOs about their experiences of SEND provision during the first lockdown, almost three quarters (73 per cent) of

SENCOs stated their school experienced challenges with providing virtual support for children with SEND. In particular, they noted that differentiation was a significant challenge, especially at secondary.

The narrative of a 'full return' and the shift of focus on to face-to-face teaching has the potential to make that even more challenging for those

at school and at home alike. To avoid that, it's important to remember the basics still apply. SENCOs and teachers should be working together to think deeply about 'accessibility'.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for teachers and pupils with virtual learning is the clarity of communication required. Communication challenges will affect all pupils at times, but it is arguably more likely for those with SEND. While some pupils may really struggle with turning their camera on, anecdotally at least, it does seem to help with levels of engagement in learning, due to the increased connection with peers and teaching staff.

Regular, personalised



communication is vital to overcoming many of the obstacles of online education. Schools are doing excellent work by making regular phone calls to families; others are buddying up SEND and inclusion staff with nominated students. Encouragingly, given that co-production with parents and carers is such an important aspect of SEND provision, 84 per cent of SENCOs said

any easier by risk assessments and changing local authority and government guidance throughout the pandemic. Our 2020 data also showed the pandemic further increased workload challenges, with many drawn away from their SENCO role to prioritise increased responsibilities in terms of safeguarding.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, however, and all staff should be active in their safeguarding responsibilities of pupils with SEND. In addition to the opportunities to monitor pupil wellbeing through online live lessons, tutors and class teachers could be calling home regularly to check on pupils and their families.

Our research consistently shows that providing enough protected time is crucial to ensuring meaningful SEND provision. That's why nasen and Whole School SEND have produced their 'Effective SENCO Deployment' guide.

The key is to create the conditions for SENCOs to use their expertise to support others. Schools that enable their SENCOs to better prioritise the strategic development of SEND provision will undoubtedly find their pupils with SEND come through this pandemic the stronger for it, whether they're learning at home or in school.

**“ A significant number may not even have a setting to return to**

their focus on communicating with families became more important during the first lockdown.

Greater time spent building relationships with families to support children and young people's school experiences could be a positive lasting legacy of our response to this crisis if schools choose to continue with this approach. But we should not be naive to the very real and continued challenges to SENCO time and workload.

Over the past three years, our surveys have highlighted significant limitations to the efficacy of the SENCO role because of the demands of ever-increasing paperwork, as well as often decreasing time and teams. This has not been made

# Reviews

## BOOK REVIEW



### Back on Track. Fewer things, greater depth

**Author:** Mary Myatt

**Publisher:** John Catt Educational

**Reviewer:** Sarah Watkins, year 5 and 6 teacher, Peppard C of E Primary School

I've always felt like there is just too much stuff involved in the process of teaching and learning. I have always been the person to question it. Is there a point to this? How does this help move learning forward? During the latest lockdown, these questions once again whirled around my mind. Surely, we can do better. Surely that doesn't have to mean doing more.

*Back on Track. Fewer things, greater depth* is a thought-provoking, non-judgmental look at just how complicated we have made the process of teaching and learning. Written during the pandemic, it looks at what we currently do in schools and how we can strip it back. As its author explains in the introduction, it "poses the idea of doing fewer things really well".

There is no blame from Myatt. She understands that teachers' and senior leaders' intentions and actions come from a well-meaning place. However, she starts from the idea that there is much to improve. The result is a quick and accessible read that offers both the science behind Myatt's thinking and practical ways to change things in schools and classrooms.

For me, one of the appealing features of this book is that it is broken down into short, purposeful chapters. As a busy classroom teacher, my mind is always full of ideas. I read many books on education, but I can sometimes falter because the content is too heavy or too scientific. Here, Myatt has taken her expertise and research and provided it in succinct, thought-provoking chunks.

It is easily digestible for any tired-yet-committed teacher or leader trying to do the best for their children.

A chapter that particularly caught my eye was 'The curse of content coverage', a topic on which she has also blogged. I often feel that I go slower than other teachers, that my coverage is less or that I simply cannot keep up. In this chapter, Myatt explains that too often teachers go straight for the details when planning, often forgetting the bigger picture. This, she says, can lead to a bitty, fragmented curriculum. In order to help children to "know more, understand more and do more" she suggests looking at the big ideas, actually going back to the national curriculum and reading each subject's purpose statements before diving straight into an off-the-peg unit of work that races through content.

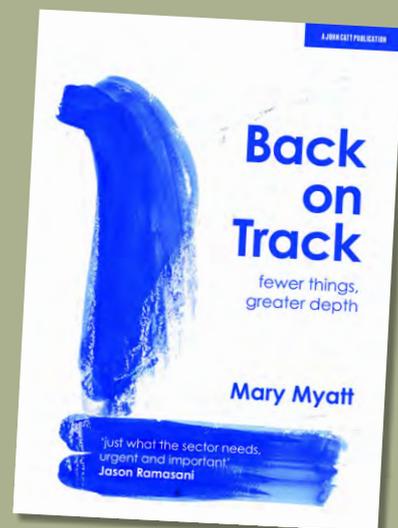
A later chapter entitled 'Concepts' unpicks this further. When children are taught new material, Myatt argues we need children to link their learning through concepts. Have they met this idea before? How can they use this in the future? Myatt is really suggesting that unless we look at the big ideas across the school, we will fail to really capitalise on the opportunity to make learning purposeful. As someone who is guilty (for want of a better word) of only really understanding what is going on within my year group, this chapter really spurred me to action.

Each short chapter of the book is part of a wider section. Under the heading 'School systems' Myatt unpicks some of the many drivers schools have become

beholden to – assessment, data, marking and feedback. Her message throughout is that more is not always better. For her, big picture assessment is better served through high-quality feedback conversations with pupils and parents than filling in spreadsheets with often meaningless progress data.

Myatt ends the book with a short, sharp look at each subject and an overview of its purpose as part of a curriculum whole. She concludes each one by listing a selection of well-researched resources and links that can help schools to build a curriculum to better suit their pupils' needs.

Ironically perhaps, if *Back on Track* has a weakness it is that some of the topics are not covered in enough depth. However, for a quick, easy read, its concepts and ideas are far-reaching. And at a time when schools are stretched to their limits, a punchy reminder to do fewer things better is surely a message that will serve them well.



# Reviews



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

@son1bun

### Words and Feelings

@one\_to\_read

When Ben Harris recommends a book, I know I will need to seek it out. This discerning teacher reader and writer always tunes into a diverse range of authors and themes, offering his readers a delicious peek inside their pages. This blog is dedicated to Elle McNicoll's new book, *Show Us Who You Are*. In it, Harris deftly takes us through this Scottish writer's second offering. He is honest and raw, describing the difficulties he faces in fully expressing how he feels about the book. Words fail him, he says, but fortunately for us, he tries nonetheless.

This is the best kind of book blog – one that leaves you thirsty for a drink at the literary fountain. As a certified Tsundoku, if my 'to be read' pile tumbles and hypothetically crushes me, I will know which blogger to come looking for, Mr Harris!

### Stepping up... Advice

@jillberry102

When Jill Berry and Mary Myatt join forces, you know you're witnessing an education dream team. Only magic can

ensue! Myatt invited Berry to contribute to her new website, which the latter calls "the place to inspire our professional imagination".

In this storming blog, Berry takes us through interviews with aspiring leaders offering advice and support about making the move into leadership. She goes on to pull together some of the chat comments and questions and to respond to the ones the interviews don't cover. Through a series of questions and answers, Berry discusses leadership roles, applying for them, and "the shelf life of a head", which I read with particular interest. Her years of experience ooze through every response and leave you with a deep sense of appreciation for having such generous people in our profession.

### Time to get Knitting

@greeborunner

Zoe Enser is a prolific blogger. She just talks sense, and I appreciate that. In this blog, while celebrating the vibrancy of the educational landscape, she shares her

concerns about the direction of travel. She praises current pedagogical choices but questions whether in some schools their foundations are firm enough.

I don't know how she finds the time, but it appears she is also a prolific knitter, and her hobby provides the metaphor for this post. Enser commends us "to knit together all these wonderful threads that have been explored right into the curriculum". If we don't, she warns us, we may be left with "hanging threads and holes". We may need to unravel some of our work to pick up missed stitches, but that process ensures that "what is being learnt is meaningful". This is a blog full of purls of wisdom, if you'll pardon the pun.

### Why 'Unpacking?'

@InspiredLearn\_

As the director of an EEF Research School, it is always interesting to read other educators' perspectives on the role of evidence in education. In this post, Mr Gill Singh – whose new blog, *Unpacking Education*, follows his research for a book in John Catt Educational's 'In Action' series – sets out to unpack the word 'unpacking' itself. To do this, he uses the analogy of building a flat-pack desk to reflect on why evidence needs to be handled with care.

The metaphor will be familiar to *Schools Week* readers, as will the warning that context is king. In order for research to have relevance, we need to be acquainted with its methods, as that will influence its transference into classroom practice. The nuances of our own classrooms often mean that the best-laid plans go awry but, Singh advises, that doesn't mean we should abandon research. Instead, we should approach it pragmatically. As the EEF suggests, 'best bets' trump no research at all. Given the quality of this blog so far, I can't wait to read the book.

# Research

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

## Face masks in schools: how have opinions changed over time?

Eve Debbage, project assistant, Teacher Tapp

News reports at the onset of the pandemic led many of us to feel unsure about what precautions to take against Covid-19. One day, children were said to run a lower risk of infection; the next, pregnant women and children were the most susceptible. Then it was announced that face masks were unnecessary or even detrimental to health. It was a guessing game.

Wearing masks in schools was so out of the question this time last year that we didn't even think to ask about it in our daily Teacher Tapp surveys as schools hurtled towards their first closures. Fast forward to now and we know masks are essential – or, at least, there's a lot of evidence to support saying so. Our latest surveying, in January, shows that teachers are overwhelmingly in favour of the idea – a change from when we last wrote on this issue in *Schools Week* last September.

How did it take so long to reach this point? In June of last year, when the WHO began to advise mask wearing in public spaces, our surveys showed that more teachers thought the downsides of masks outweighed the benefits. Few staff wore them at the time, and practically no children did, with Teacher Tapp figures showing that only three per cent of primary schools were mandating usage when they returned in June.

It wasn't until the end of August that the Department for Education reversed its guidance and introduced masks in corridors for secondary schools. By the time we surveyed again, a few weeks later, a small majority of teachers (57 per cent) thought the advantages of masks outweighed the drawbacks. A month



later, in October, this had significantly risen (73 per cent). By this point, almost half of schools required teachers to wear masks in at least some circumstances.

Then the second wave hit and another lockdown followed. When rumours circulated that the government was due to reopen schools in March, we surveyed ahead of the official announcements to see how teachers felt about the idea. Overall, 64 per cent of teachers felt it would still be unsafe. Secondary teachers were more concerned than those in primary schools – which may be why, when the announcement came, the government brought in two key safety measures: mass testing and face masks.

DfE guidance is that face masks are now 'recommended' for secondary pupils indoors in all circumstances, including throughout lessons, if social distancing can't be maintained. School leaders are left to determine their specific school's policy. But compulsion to wear masks is not possible – even if expulsion is the route you choose to go down.

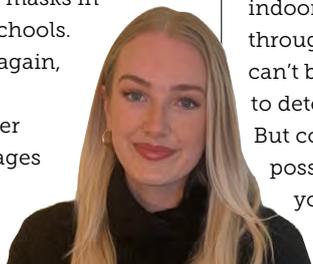
For children aged below 11, the

guidance states that while primary staff should wear a face covering, it's not a requirement for their pupils. We found that primary teachers mainly agreed with this, though heads are the most enthusiastic in their support. When we look by age, we can also see that teachers in their 20s are most supportive of the approach, which is logical since they have the lowest risk of complications from Covid-19.

There are other effective strategies to lower the risk of transmission. A recent study shows that fresh air is crucial to safer classrooms. Additionally, we have the speedy vaccine roll-out now, and more testing, so things are starting to feel optimistic.

While masks aren't the be all and end all, it is encouraging that most parents, students and teachers are now expressing a good level of support for the guidance.

If we want to keep children in school – for good this time – and masks can help with that, then it's a fair compromise. The biggest mystery, perhaps, is why it took such a long time for many of us to change our minds.



# WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

## MONDAY

Amid all the bluster about schools being "safe", the government has at least now admitted several times that infections will undoubtedly rise as a result of wider reopening from this week.

PM Boris Johnson said as much during Monday's Downing Street briefing, but the really interesting comments actually came from Dr Jenny Harries, the government's deputy chief medical officer.

Harries said she expected to see an impact on transmission rates as pupils return to school, but that the testing programme was likely to "diminish the number of community transmission cases which could come into schools".

Asked whether she anticipated schools would have to close again if transmission rates increased, Harries said testing in schools "should mean that the likelihood of a case going into the school and the numbers of children having to come out of education to isolate should be very significantly reduced".

However, she warned that there "may be a very short period at the start of this programme where everybody gets used to it and a larger number of children come out of school and then it will settle down".

Many leaders will, we suspect, accuse Harries of stating the obvious. But it's good to have the huge task ahead of schools acknowledged.

## TUESDAY

The government has taken a lot of flak for the pace of its efforts to get devices out to disadvantaged children who need them, and rightly so. The scheme was slow to launch and has taken the best part of a year to deliver.

We suspect the news that the DfE was still around 50,000 devices short of its pledge for 1.3 million as of the end of last week will have been infuriating for school leaders desperately trying to keep children learning at home, and worse still for those pupils left without a device for a year.

The irony that the government didn't even get all 1.3 million devices out by the time schools reopened won't be lost on those affected, and is a pretty decent metaphor for the way ministers have responded to the pandemic – often far later than they should have and still coming up short.

## WEDNESDAY

Good news for all those schools in the poorest areas who, as we already know, are more likely to be told by Ofsted they are crap than their counterparts in more affluent areas.

Chief inspector Amanda Spielman said this is all OK because, actually, poorer schools are "quite a lot more likely to have Ofsted rate their leadership and management more highly than their overall effectiveness.

"That shows how their relative strength is recognised in more difficult circumstances," she claimed.

What a load of bunkum.

## THURSDAY

Much hay has been made of the government's decision to put its "trust in teachers" when it comes to exam grading this year. But school leaders fear the narrative may well prove unhelpful.

On the eve of ASCL's virtual annual conference, being held over the coming weeks, its president Richard Sheriff voiced serious concerns about pressure to adjust grades from parents with "pointy elbows and lawyer friends".

In his academy trust, the headteacher of a school in a deprived area is much less concerned about the issue than the leader of a school with a more privileged intake. Sheriff fears that if middle-class parents' endeavours are successful, it could further increase the attainment gap.

But schools will be damned if they do and damned if they don't, with the external quality assurance process likely to pick up whether teachers have been over-generous at the behest of pushy parents.

Worryingly, ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton reports that the union has already "seen examples where parents have been emailing teachers, individual teachers, saying 'my daughter wants to be a doctor in the future, she needs to get a grade 9 in chemistry at GCSE' or whatever it is".

More evidence the government's "trust in teachers" rhetoric is just a poisoned chalice.



**Our Vision**

Camden is a place where everyone has a chance to thrive and where nobody gets left behind.

# CPD Support Officer Camden Learning £30,000 circa

Camden Learning is a local education partnership established in 2017 and jointly owned by and Camden’s schools and Camden Council. It was created for the benefit of all our children and schools, with a core focus on school improvement.

We have made good progress in building Camden Learning and developing greater capacity locally for a school-led system. We have a strong relationship with schools and have worked closely with leaders to put the architecture in place to provide stronger and more creative connections between them. Working with and through our school members, Camden Learning has made significant progress and all Camden’s schools are currently graded Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

We are looking to appoint a CPD Support Officer to support the delivery of Camden Learning’s continuous professional development (CPD) offer to Camden’s schools and other customers and stakeholders. The post holder will proactively assist with the implementation, planning and delivery of the Camden Learning CPD offer.

The role will require contributing fully to service improvements and developments, policy and best practice, and support quality assurance processes for the CPD offer. The successful applicant will work collaboratively with the Managing Director, all members of the Business Development Team, School Improvement Team, STEAM and Partnerships Team, Camden’s schools, Camden Council’s school facing

teams, and all other stakeholders. We are a small organisation so would expect the CPD Support Officer to work flexibly and proactively within our team.

We are looking for someone with the ability to operate independently, making decisions and judgements in the context of a complex school’s landscape, generating innovative ideas and practical solutions for service initiatives, improvement, and partnership opportunities. To make a success in the role you should have effective personal management skills, acting proactively, flexibly, and constructively, bringing energy and focus to the work of the team.

Our member schools are committed to working together for the good of all Camden children and young people, and Camden Learning is the glue that binds them together locally. They have a strong sense of belonging and pride in Camden and its communities, and you would enjoy working with them.

For further details of the role or to discuss any aspect of the job opportunity please contact Camden learning via [customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk](mailto:customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk)

The closing date for submission of applications will be **Wednesday 31st March**. To apply, please send your CV accompanied by a statement of application which should be no more than two pages of A4. Please send [to customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk](mailto:customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk)

This role will be subject to an enhanced DBS check



# Chief Finance and Business Officer

An exciting opportunity has arisen to join our successful and ambitious Trust, due to retirement of the current postholder following a long and successful career. We would like to recruit an outstanding individual who can share the Trust's ambition and aspirations. The successful candidate will ideally know how schools operate and will have the ability to further develop the financial systems across the Trust, working closely with the Executive Team to support the operational and strategic objectives of Connect.

Reporting to the CEO, the CFBO is responsible for overseeing the successful and highly effective delivery of financial and business management across the Trust, leading a highly efficient service. In addition, the CFBO will help shape the strategic development of the Trust and add value at the Trust board level. The post-holder will play a leading role operationally across the organisation and manage all commercial decision making and third-party negotiations, delivering high quality outcomes. Ideally, you will have also managed financial and business strategies, as well as experience of leading a team in a fast-paced environment.

Working alongside senior leaders, you will ideally be ACCA/CCAB/AAT4 qualified, although this is not essential and have experience of working with school/Trust budgets. In addition, you will take a keen interest in the financial viability of projects and advising as necessary to all levels of leadership and Trustees. If you are a solution focussed, ambitious person, who likes the mix of both hands on and strategic challenges, then this could be the role for you. The key priority is to find the right person for the post who will help shape the future direction of the Trust.

**The CFBO role includes:**

- Exciting opportunity to support the development of the central structure and systems
- Overseeing all financial management and reporting
- Overseeing HR, Estates Management, Health and Safety and other Trust Business
- Completing all DfE and ESFA returns on time
- Working closely with the Trustees, CEO, Trust ELT and Trust SLT

Salary Range £43857 - £54956, depending on experience, skills and qualifications. This is a full time, permanent position, based at Leigham Primary School, although frequent visits to other schools and meetings will be required.

If this sounds like a position you could thrive in, then we would love to hear from you! If you are keen to find out more, then please contact us via [admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk](mailto:admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk) to arrange for an informal discussion and hopefully the opportunity to look around our schools, bearing in mind the current national lockdown we are in.

The deadline for applications is **Monday 19th April (midday)** with interviews planned for Tuesday 27/4/21, to be confirmed. All applications must be submitted using the Connect application form that is available here, and emailed to [admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk](mailto:admin@connectacademytrust.co.uk). CVs or similar will not be considered. Anticipated start date: June to September 2021, depending on experience and availability. Actual start date and induction programme to be agreed.

*Connect is fully committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. The successful applicant will be required to undertake an enhanced DBS criminal record check.*

# CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER WITH HEADTEACHER



**SALARY:** CIRCA £125,000 DEPENDENT UPON EXPERIENCE

**REQUIRED SEPTEMBER 2021**

**WE ARE LOOKING FOR A LEADER WHO BELIEVES THEY COULD DO MORE**

Southmoor Multi Academy Trust have an exciting opportunity to appoint an ambitious Chief Executive Officer who will also hold the responsibility of Headteacher of Southmoor Academy and Sixth Form, a school which is a local success story with national recognition.

This exciting, career-defining, opportunity has arisen for a visionary leader. We're looking for an innovative individual who will provide the strategic direction and educational leadership needed in shaping the future of the Academy Trust and the success of Southmoor Academy and Sixth Form.

The candidate will have:

- proven leadership and management skills within complex organisations;
- a commitment to social justice through the power of education;
- a proven track record of raising standards;
- at least two years of successful headship.

In this role you will have the freedom to set a success culture. Despite significant levels of deprivation, Southmoor has become one of the highest achieving schools in the area. These challenges remain but we have many positive fundamentals to build on and we want someone who can take us further and make us great.

Southmoor Multi Academy Trust consists of two secondary Academies, Southmoor and Sandhill View. Our academies enjoy true partnership in terms of staff development, working practices and student experiences. A Trust Board is responsible for the Trust's strategic direction and performance.

We welcome visits to the Trust, to arrange this please contact Sara Barwick, tel. 07860929403.

Application packs are available from Emma Duffy, tel. 07585919241 email. [emma.duffy@avec-partnership.com](mailto:emma.duffy@avec-partnership.com).

**Closing Date: 19th March 2021 at 12pm**

**Interview Date(s): 14th and 15th April 2021**

*The Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment. An enhanced DBS disclosure will be required for the successful candidate.*



Let your light shine (Matt. 5.14)



## Wichelstowe Trinity Learning Campus Executive Headteacher – September 2021

Leadership Scale L24 – 28

(£74,293 - £81,940)

Full time and Permanent

The Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust (DBAT) and Academy Council are looking to appoint an Executive Headteacher across the Wichelstowe Trinity Learning Campus from September 2021.

The campus is the heart of learning and community engagement in the new Wichelstowe development in Swindon. Kingfisher CE Academy and The Deanery CE Academy is an all-through school, focussing on the provision of the highest quality

education and underpinned by our Christian foundation and vision for education.

We are looking for a leader who is wholly aligned to our ethos and values and has a passion and vision for Christian education for the whole community.

To apply and for more information, please visit [www.dbat.org.uk/vacancies](http://www.dbat.org.uk/vacancies)

**Closing Date**  
Friday 19th March



**Great Yarmouth Charter Academy**

### Curriculum Leader Design Technology

**Salary: MPR/UPR + TLR2**  
**Full time, Permanent**  
**Starting September 2021**

We are seeking to appoint an enthusiastic, inspiring and ambitious Head of Technology. You will need to be an outstanding Technology Teacher, with a commitment and passion for our vision of excellence and championing aspirational educational standards for all young people. We are presently oversubscribed at Year 7 and are opening a sixth form in September 2022 where Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics will form the basis of our options.

The successful candidate will have an outstanding opportunity to shape and develop a Technology department at Great Yarmouth Charter Academy. To build the department, recruit their team as the department grows over the coming years.

If you require any further information about this role and the technology department, please contact Julie Collins, PA to the Principal, at [juliecollins@inspirationtrust.org](mailto:juliecollins@inspirationtrust.org)



## Director of Teaching School Hub

LEADERSHIP POINT 18-25 (£64,143-£76,141)  
FULL-TIME, PERMANENT  
SEPTEMBER 2021

The Redhill Trust is looking to appoint a Director to lead its recently designated Teaching School Hub, which will serve over 200 schools and operate over an area covering Gedling, Sherwood, Newark and Bassetlaw. We will be working closely with the lead school, Carlton Junior Academy, and our three strategic partners; the Flying High Partnership, Minster Trust for Education and Diverse Academies Trust.

The successful candidate will be ambitious for all students in the locality and be passionate about the importance of the highest quality training and professional development. Experience of successful strategic leadership at a senior level is essential, as is the ability to network and form highly productive, professional relationships with a wide range of stakeholders.

For application information or to arrange a conversation with Redhill's CEO, Andrew Burns, please contact [S.McNeill@theredhillacademy.org.uk](mailto:S.McNeill@theredhillacademy.org.uk)

Closing date: 12 noon Monday 22nd March

Great Yarmouth Charter Academy

## Head of Physics/Teacher of Physics

Salary: MPR/UPR + TLR2  
Full time, Permanent  
Starting September 2021

We are seeking to appoint an enthusiastic, inspiring and ambitious Head of Physics/Teacher of Physics. You will need to be an outstanding Teacher, with a commitment for our vision of excellence and championing aspirational educational standards for all young people. We are presently oversubscribed at Year 7 and are opening a sixth form in September 2022 where Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics will form the basis of our options.

The successful candidate will be required to lead an ambitious team of talented teachers to refine and implement our Science curriculum. They will monitor and improve student progress to make sure that every child is achieving their literary potential. If you require any further information about role and the science department, please contact Julie Collins, PA to the Principal, at [juliecollins@inspirationtrust.org](mailto:juliecollins@inspirationtrust.org)

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# THE FLAGSHIP NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP CONFERENCE FOR EMPLOYERS & PROVIDERS

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# AAC 2021

## ANNUAL APPRENTICESHIP CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION

# AAC IS ONLINE FOR 2021

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.



### CONFERENCE

The flagship conference for apprenticeship providers and employers established in 2015.



### KEYNOTES

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



### WORKSHOPS

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



### EXHIBITION

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

We'll be using a state of the art platform, to ensure an engaging & rewarding experience for all.



### TICKETS

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



### NETWORKING

Easily connect with other attendees with one-on-one conversations via live video.

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