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## Cash-strapped council gives school staff £10 each as Covid thank you

- Devon council gifts £65,000 as 'token of appreciation' for Covid effort
- Thank you comes despite council's £50 million school funding deficit
- But gesture is 'slap in the face' for left-out academies who pitched in

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# School staff in Devon get £10 each as thank-you gesture

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

EXCLUSIVE

A council with a £50 million deficit has given its schools around £65,000 to spend on staff as a “token of appreciation” for their hard work and resilience during the pandemic.

Devon County Council (DCC) has awarded its schools £10 per employee to spend “in whatever way they think best to thank teaching and support staff”.

A letter to governing bodies of its maintained schools, seen by Schools Week, said this could be spent on “something for the staff room, a thank-you event, or used for several smaller gestures” over the coming year.

The letter asked schools to “pass on” the council’s “thanks for their hard work and resilience during this difficult time”.

The money was issued to schools yesterday, the day after National Thank a Teacher Day.

The council is believed to be the first to have given school staff a “thank-you” payment. While some have praised the gesture, it has also been criticised given the council’s funding struggles.

The payment has also created divisions within the education community, with staff at academy trusts feeling snubbed. But DCC said the gesture was designed to thank those unable to take the extra day’s leave offered to other council employees in response to Covid.

## ‘It’s a brave set of councillors who decide to do that’

A finance update to Devon Education Forum this month reported that the council had a cumulative dedicated schools grant (DSG) deficit of just under £49 million, including a high-needs funding deficit of £29.6 million.

Matthew Clements-Wheeler, former chair of the Institute of School Business Leadership, said that while it was a “lovely gesture”, the money would have been better spent elsewhere.

“The first rule if you have a deficit is to balance your budget ... in a council with a hole in the DSG and a problem with high-needs funding – it’s a brave set of councillors who decide to do that when they’re accountable at the ballot box,” he added.

School workforce data from 2019 indicates that DCC has around 6,500 staff in its maintained schools – meaning the payments will total



Dear Chair of Governors/Headteachers

### Schools COVID 19 Token of Appreciation Gift Message

On behalf of Phil Norrey and the Leadership Group of Devon County Council, we want to thank the thousands staff employed in maintained schools for all they have done during the Pandemic. We know how difficult it has been for schools to deliver teaching and learning to young people and are very appreciative of the way schools have adapted to the many changes, and the different demands placed upon them. In recognition of this, and as a token of appreciation, we are giving all our schools a small sum of money which we hope can be spent on something all your staff will enjoy and appreciate.

We would like Governing Bodies to use this money in whatever way they think best to thank teaching and support staff. It can be used to purchase or contribute towards something for the staff room, a thank you event or used for several smaller gestures to staff over the coming year. Schools may contribute to these funds from other sources if they wish and are able to do so.

The amount we transfer to your school account will be made on 24<sup>th</sup> June via Class and will represent £10 per employee, based on your current staff headcount. Please make your Governing Bodies and finance staff aware of this. You can then make decisions on how you would like to use the ‘thank you’ gesture for your staff and pass on Devon County Council’s thanks for their hard work and resilience during this difficult time.

£65,000. The cash came from the council’s central fund, rather than the dedicated schools budget.

Between 2015 and 2018, the council skimmed £6.5 million from funding for its schools and early years to make up the high-needs block shortfall. No funding has been transferred in the past three years.

An executive headteacher at a Devon academy trust, who wished to remain anonymous, told Schools Week it would have been better to put the money towards the “struggling SEND services. That would have been a better gesture for the children of Devon.”

### ‘Slap in the face’ for academies

Education lawyer Antony Power warned that the move could “be perceived as divisive” as it was “a slap in the face for all those academies that helped their maintained colleagues without thought for themselves”.

The executive head said trusts had worked alongside maintained schools during the pandemic, by staying open during holidays and taking on children from schools that had closed, “because it was the right thing to do”.

The head said academy staff were “disappointed

that they haven’t been recognised locally”. The move had come across as a “very divisive act”, they added.

Alex Walmsley, chair of the Devon Association of Governance, said the group would be “disappointed to see any initiatives becoming a source of division. [We] would hope and expect that the contribution made by all Devon schools – both academies and maintained – is recognised.”

### ‘We are extremely grateful to all schools’

A spokesperson for DCC said it was “extremely grateful to all schools for their tireless commitment” during the pandemic.

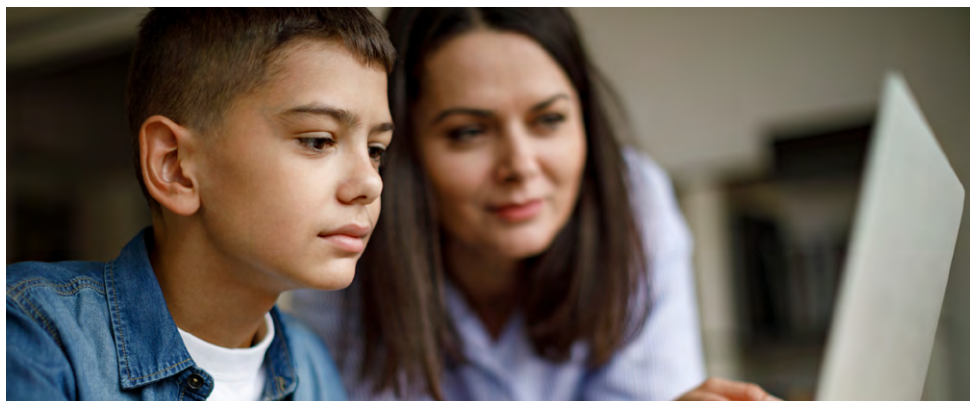
Like other councils and the NHS, they had given staff working directly for the council an extra day’s leave as a thank you. However, “this wasn’t practical for school-based employees, as it would mean closing schools”.

Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said it was a “lovely gesture” and more than the “empty words” from the government.

Mark Lehair, director of the Campaign for Common Sense, said it was not a “budget-busting sum of money”, and was a “lovely way to recognise and thank people for their efforts”.



## News



## DfE contradicts its own minister's claims on tutor scheme scale

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education has contradicted its own education secretary's claim that six million pupils will benefit from the rollout of tutoring, raising the question of whether Gavin Williamson misled parliament.

Williamson told parliament on Monday he had "outlined a clear plan to roll out tutoring to six million children up and down the country" over the next three years.

The government's education recovery plan included £1 billion to provide six million, 15-hour tutoring courses for disadvantaged school children.

Shadow education secretary Kate Green raised a point of order, saying Williamson had made an error.

But Williamson responded: "To be absolutely clear, we aim to roll out tutoring for six million pupils across the country."

That would mean about 75 per cent of 8.3 million state school pupils in England would have tutoring over the next three years, despite it being aimed predominantly at the most disadvantaged.

When approached by *Schools Week*, the DfE confirmed the pledge is for "six million courses of tutoring".

DfE said there would be no cap of one tuition block per pupil. They said it was possible pupils could receive multiple tutoring blocks as "schools are best placed to decide who needs help and how much, and will be given the flexibility".

This means it is highly likely the most disadvantaged pupils will get repeated tutoring across the three years – meaning the pledge will not reach six million children.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of school leaders' union ASCL, said: "What children and young people really need from the government is a much more ambitious and better-funded package of education recovery measures rather

than weak attempts to hype up the current meagre offering."

It is understood that Green's office is now exploring whether to raise a second point of order on Williamson's claim.

Green said Williamson "must come clean once and for all about how many children will get support from the national tutoring programme."

"Parents, teachers and pupils need straight answers, but the education secretary seems more focused on obscuring the limited reach of tutoring, than on securing the investment needed in children's futures."

A key element of the government's recovery package is the extension of the national tutoring programme (NTP) for a further three years, run by the Dutch outsourcing giant Randstad. Schools will also receive £579 million to develop "local tutoring provision".

Prime minister Boris Johnson made the first inflated claim at prime minister's questions on June 9. He said that "six million children will have access to tuition, thanks to this programme".

The reach of the NTP, across both the tuition partners and academic mentors, is expected to be 776,000 next year, and then 825,000 for each of the following two years.

There was further confusion this week after some providers were told in a meeting with Randstad that pupils who had support this academic year will not be able to access the NTP next year.

But the DfE emphasised that they were "both of the same understanding that students could benefit from more than one package [across the three years], given it's up to schools to decide who to offer the packages of support to".

However, rules on multiple tuition for the same pupil in the same year are not known.

This year, schools are advised to purchase only one 15-hour subsidised block of tuition per pupil from a tuition partner.

The NTP's website says this is "so that we can reach as many pupils as possible".

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

## Randstad to pay Teach First for tutoring advice

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH EXCLUSIVE

Teach First is to be paid by Randstad, the new national tutoring provider, for advice on how best to support schools serving disadvantaged communities as part of a government agreement.

*Schools Week* can also reveal that Liverpool Hope University is expected to provide the training for the academic mentors arm of the National Tutoring Programme next year.

This year, Teach First ran academic mentors as part of a £6.4 million contract, providing all the training in-house. The Department for Education paid the mentors' salaries.

The charity was listed as a subcontractor on the unsuccessful bid for the second year of the NTP by the National Tutoring Foundation, sources said.

But a DfE press release said Randstad would be "supported" by Teach First to "ensure the programme is successfully set up for effective delivery and continuous improvement" in the next academic year.

Teach First told *Schools Week* that it was "well placed" to provide advice on setting up the next phase of the programme until at least Christmas. But it will "continue to provide advice and guidance when needed beyond this date, as part of the agreement".

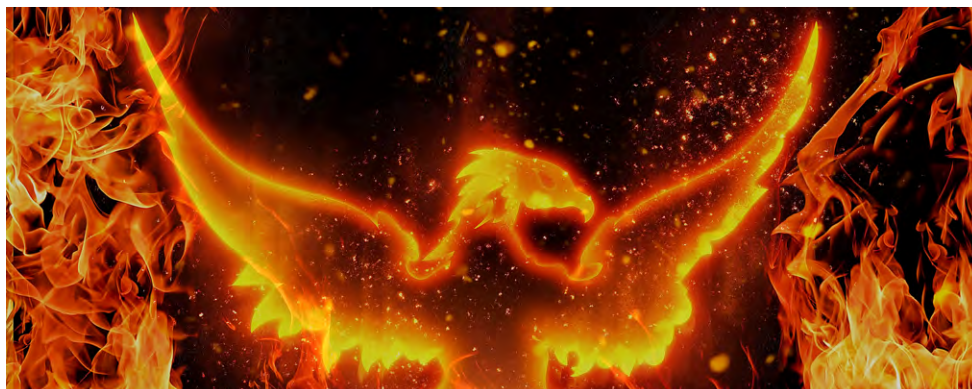
A contract is still to be signed. Teach First said it would receive "a fee from Randstad to cover the time and resource the charity is providing" but did not reveal its amount, citing commercial sensitivities.

The Education Endowment Foundation, which is currently running the tuition partners arm, confirmed it is providing transition support but will not receive a fee.

Randstad, a multinational HR firm which won a £25 million government contract to run the NTP next year, did not respond to a request for comment. A Liverpool Hope spokesperson was "unable to respond at this time as we are not yet under contract for this work".

A Teach First spokesperson said: "We absolutely want this programme to succeed and are providing transitional advice and guidance to Randstad for a short period of time around how to best support schools serving disadvantaged communities."

## News



## 'Phoenix' free schools should replace 'stubborn' underperformers, report says

**TOM BELGER**  
@TOM\_BELGER

The government should replace "stubbornly" underperforming schools with new "phoenix" free schools, rank multi-academy trusts on improvement and buy out PFI contracts to level up education, according to a new report.

Research by the conservative think-tank Onward and the charity New Schools Network, which supports free schools, found that 200,000 children lived in areas with no schools that are rated at least 'good'.

A DfE spokesperson said the government wanted to "move decisively" to a system built on strong MATs, and would consult on plans to bring consistently under-performing schools into such trusts.

### 'Phoenix' schools

Unity Howard, NSN's director, told *Schools Week* underperforming schools should be replaced by a new wave of "phoenix" free schools as a last resort, "run by people with a proven track record".

The report proposes initial sponsorship by the DfE-backed Falcon Education Trust, which was founded to transform "orphan" schools.

However, Leora Cruddas, CEO of the Confederation of School Trusts, noted there was "already a route for regulators to intervene in failing schools", by bringing in strong trusts to support improvement.

The government's free schools' initiative has flagged in recent years, with just 21 schools confirmed in each of the two most recent waves, compared to the 77 announced in 2016.

### MAT rankings

The report recommends inspecting MATs and ranking them on school improvement measures, including attainment, behaviour and teacher retention.

But Michael Pain, from MAT support firm Forum Strategy, said pitching trusts against each other was "unhelpful and unsophisticated", and threatened to undermine collaboration and willingness to help struggling schools.

"It doesn't matter if you're top if you have

miserable children who don't understand anything other than sitting exams," added Jeff Marshall of academy advisers J&G Marshall.

### Carrot and stick for trusts

MATs should be "aggressively" used to boost standards, with more generous funding to take on under-performing schools but the lowest-ranked MATs banned from doing so.

Cruddas agreed that strong trusts must be "funded properly" to complete the government's vision of a fully academised system, but noted that RSCs already "have conversations with trusts where there needs to be a pause in growth".

The report also argues schools should be allowed to choose to leave MATs in certain circumstances.

### Extra teacher cash

The authors said top teachers should receive an extra £10,000 to work in struggling schools, and schools in deprived areas should get "teacher premium" cash for professional development.

Sir Hamid Patel, CEO of Star Academies, said he supported "incentivisation for great teachers", as well as empowering strong MATs.

Timo Hannay, founder of education data firm SchoolDash, also welcomed the proposals. He highlighted limited incentives for teachers to work in poorer and lower-performing schools, which typically have less experienced staff.

Professor John Howson, chair of jobs site TeachVac, said the call for extra funding raised a "fundamental question" about the national funding formula, however, as it is based on "a view of equality providing equal shares of the cake to all, based upon pupil numbers".

### PFI buyouts

One radical proposal is for "wholesale renegotiation" of PFI deals by central government to stop deals deterring sponsors of struggling schools.

The authors back buying out contracts at a discount, despite the high cost.

Ian Denison, director of Inscyte, which advises schools on PFI, warned the Treasury may not agree, as buyouts risked "letting PFI contractors off their obligations" to invest in sites before handing them over.

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## First exam board offers 42% entry fee discount

**SAMANTHA BOOTH**  
@SAMANTHAJBOTH

WJEC Eduqas will reduce exam entry fees by 42 per cent this summer, making it the first board to confirm the level of savings for schools.

The amount is unlikely to go down well in the sector, however, where the majority of headteachers are expecting 75 per cent of entry fees back this year.

The exam board, which has entries from 3,800 English centres, said the discount will put around £9 million back into schools and colleges in England.

WJEC Eduqas had yet to invoice for fees, but will do so in the coming weeks with the discount applied.

Schools are still waiting for news on entry rebates from AQA, OCR and Pearson, the largest exam boards. These have mostly charged schools already this year, and will instead provide rebates.

Ian Morgan, chief executive at WJEC Eduqas, said it had developed a "range of new systems" this year and "invested significantly in a new and extensive package of support" to help schools.

He added: "As a charity, we would never seek to take advantage of the current circumstances and are committed to re-investing in continuously improving the support we provide to schools, colleges and learners, as we do every year."

The Welsh government has committed to providing an additional £1.6 million of support to centres, meaning the overall discount will be 50 per cent.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson has said he is expecting exam boards to deliver a rebate.

Last year, just a quarter of exam fees were refunded to schools by AQA, Pearson and OCR. All have said they would again pass on savings.

But Geoff Barton, ASCL's general secretary, has previously said there was "real strength of feeling for something more significant".

A *Schools Week* investigation revealed how three exam boards had increased their fees this year, despite exams being cancelled.

AQA later opted to ask schools for just 50 per cent of fees upfront, OCR delayed invoicing for three weeks while Pearson extended the payment deadline to the end of June.

The Joint Council for Qualifications has said that exam boards are working harder than normal this year.





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# Festival of Education



## Spielman: It's not unfair deprived school get lower grades

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

Ofsted's chief inspector has denied it is "unfair" that deprived schools are more likely to receive lower grades than those in more affluent areas.

Amanda Spielman (pictured) appeared at the Festival of Education yesterday and was quizzed over the controversial issue.

She had previously stated the problem was offset as poorer schools often out-performed their richer counterparts in the 'leadership and management' judgements.

However this has been dismissed by many within the sector, with Stephen Tierney, former chair of the Headteachers' Roundtable, stating the overall judgement was "ultimately what schools live and die by".

Addressing the issue yesterday, Spielman said she didn't "accept that it is unfair because the premise buried in that is that schools are equally good everywhere despite the circumstances in which they operate".

The chief inspector explained Ofsted has to be consistent with its assessments and "can't tell a parent a school is pretty good considering the town it's in, but we'd be expecting more from that judgement if the school was in London".

"It's not a perfect parallel but it's a little bit like the distinction between an effort grade and an attainment grade", she added – with the leadership judgement being "the best assessment of the quality of the team".

Spielman said she struggled with the idea standards in a "posher neighbourhood" would be higher than elsewhere and there was a distinction in Ofsted's reporting between judgements on what schools can control and those outside of its control.

Elsewhere, Spielman was quizzed on progress made under the government's plans to increase Ofsted's inspection powers.

In 2019, the Conservatives pledged to extend

section 5 inspections for secondary schools and large primaries from two to three days. "No notice" inspections would also be trialled.

While indicating Covid disruption had contributed to delays, she admitted she "can't remember" the last time Ofsted discussed the promises with government.

The pledge to remove the inspection exemption from outstanding schools, however, was fulfilled in October. Spielman said this is the "biggest single thing" Ofsted will be picking up when inspections resume in October.

During her keynote speech, Spielman also warned that "teachers should not be policed by "self-appointed moral guardians" or be forced to change the way they teach in the face of "militant activism".

While she explained activism which broadens debate is welcome, the "newer phenomenon" of a "particularly confrontational brand of activism" is "problematic" for schools.

She stated it was "completely unacceptable" that situations arose where pupils and teachers suffered abuse and violence "for being who they are: for being the wrong religion, or race, or ethnicity".

"Let's not have teachers policed by self-appointed 'moral guardians' who refuse to tolerate an alternative viewpoint. Or harried on social media into apologising for what they've said, or into changing the way they teach, in the face of militant activism."

Spielman was later asked whether Ofsted should cap schools' grades when there is a lack of diverse leadership.

Alluding to her earlier speech, she explained with "every hot topic, one of the first things that happens is that people say we should make that a limiting judgement in inspection".

But if such things were constantly added, inspections would become a "tick list of hot topics" rather than a "holistic assessment", she said.

She explained Ofsted does not "have a role to monitor the diversity of schools' staffing".

## Oak ready to share database to improve online learning

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

Oak National Academy will look to open up its vast database for researchers to interrogate what does and does not work in online learning.

Principal Matt Hood was asked at the Festival of Education on Monday whether the online school will measure what is most effective for online lessons. He revealed that Oak had recently allowed quantitative researchers access to its data warehouse of more than 2.5 billion data points.

He said the online school was now "trying to open up some of that data ... albeit with the right protections and anonymities in place, to help answer some of those questions".

Hood told *Schools Week* that a "small number of researchers" have so far accessed the database.

One finding was that pupils using a mobile phone stick with lessons for about half as long as those using a laptop or desktop computer. Hood also said that Oak was getting an early insight into where bubbles have burst as they see a spike in log-ons in certain areas.

Oak said it was keen to do more work with the research community but only "where that insight is then published to benefit teachers and pupils' education, or to support its own development and improvement".

It will not charge for access to the data and, while there are currently no plans for a wider licensing scheme to access the data, Oak is exploring how it shares insights with teachers.

Oak does not collect personally identifiable information about pupils using its online classroom.

Elsewhere, Hood said that Oak could still play a role after the pandemic by helping to reduce the workload for teachers, for instance by providing ready-packaged lessons that could be used to inform cover lessons. This would save a teacher who was off having to provide resources.

Lessons could also be used for continuing professional development (CPD) in a "passive and general sense" as teachers can watch their counterparts teach the same lessons, Hood said. This would help teachers to develop their own teaching, he added.



## Investigation

# Death of the single academy? Leaked documents reveal DfE vision

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

Standalone and small multi-academy trusts will wither away as mergers fuel the growth of larger trusts, according to leaked Department for Education documents seen by *Schools Week*.

The news comes as a *Schools Week* analysis suggests a merger was approved every five days over the past year, and lays bare the scale of growth in large MATs and the decline in single-academy trusts in recent years.

All academies would be in MATs by 2027 if the pace of expansion seen last year were to be sustained, our analysis suggests.

Education leaders and experts say evidence that bigger means better is limited, and that many schools fear losing their autonomy in larger trusts.

### DfE 'expectation more SATs will transfer into MATs'

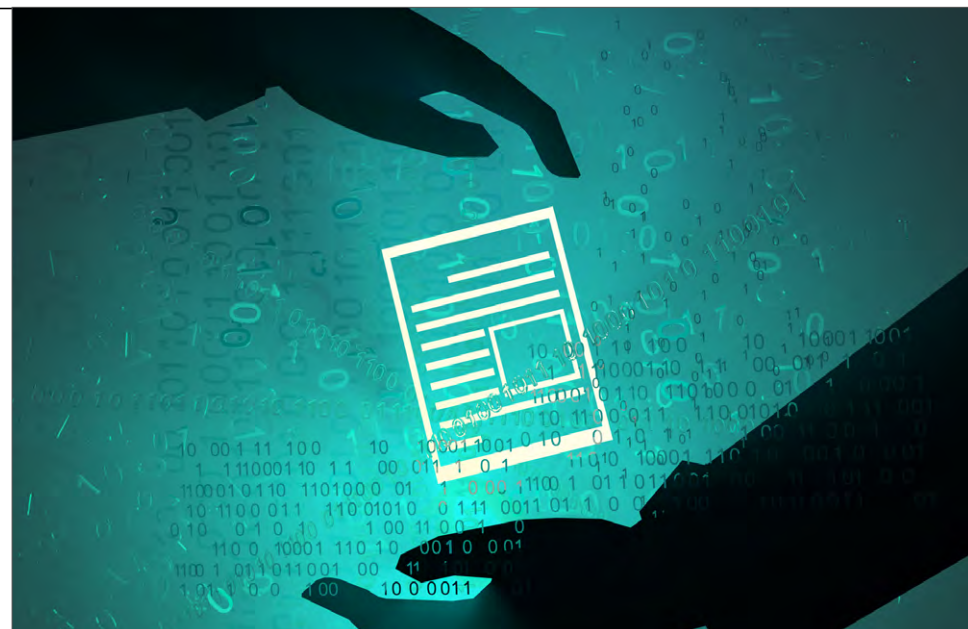
Education secretary Gavin Williamson announced a new drive to get every school into a MAT in April. Regional schools commissioners have begun organising trust roundtables to push his vision.

One RSC presentation seen by *Schools Week* highlights an "expectation more SATs will transfer into MATs and more small MATs will amalgamate into larger MATs".

It says mergers are increasing, and a growing number involve trusts aligning their "ethos and processes as a partnership" rather than takeovers following DfE intervention. The presentation was sent to trust leaders this month.

"We are seeing a trend that tends towards some consolidation," said Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said.

Jeff Marshall, managing director of conversion advisers J&G Marshall, said he has been "inundated" with SATs, small MATs and maintained schools asking how to "stay



on board with this national landscape".

None wished to join large MATs, he said, as most fear becoming "carbon copies" of other schools, or an "afterthought" in a bigger organisation as well as losing their autonomy and current leaders.

### SATs disappear at an increasing rate

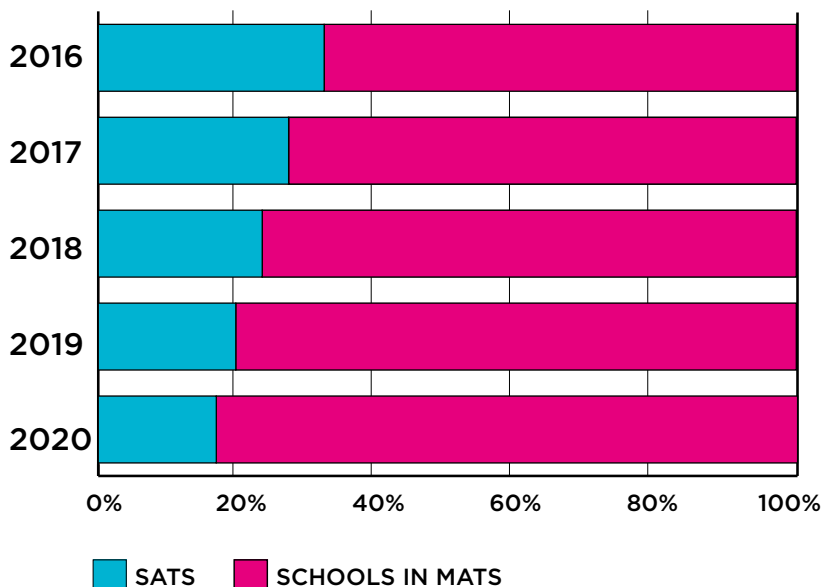
Around one in six SATs operating four years ago no longer exists. 118 disappeared between 2019 and 2020, leaving 1,428 trusts,

new analysis of the Kreston Academies Benchmark Report data shows..

By contrast, academy and MAT numbers have kept rising. The number of schools within MATs has gone up even faster – suggesting they are absorbing SATs.

The Kreston data suggests 71 per cent of academies were in MATs in 2016, but DfE figures show that proportion now stands at 87 per cent. If expansion keeps outpacing

### SATs decline as MATs expand



# Investigation

conversions at the rate seen last year, all academies would be in MATs by 2027.

Analysis of RSC data provides more concrete evidence, with at least 71 mergers approved in the past year.

Almost two-thirds saw SATs fold into larger trusts, but small MATs have also faced a squeeze. Most of the remainder involved MATs with fewer than 10 schools each.

Some MAT-to-MAT mergers followed DfE pressure over financial or academic problems, but others reflected partnerships strengthened during the pandemic.

Separate DfE figures also show a 3.7 per cent decline in MATs with five or fewer schools in 2019, before Covid hit. It marks a stark contrast to the 22 per cent rise in trusts with between six and 40 schools.

Yet the academy sector's overall growth has been slowing since 2016, sparking the latest drive.

## Big MATs 'pressured to expand'

Ashid Ali, principal of the standalone London Enterprise Academy, accused the DfE of trying to "force" a MAT merger after the RSC issued a termination warning notice last month. The RSC's wide-ranging concerns included a "failure to adequately explore discussions with other MATs".

Ali said the trust did not want a takeover, but had begun looking at "collaboration and partnership" options. "Sadly I've seen a number of schools transfer into bigger MATs, then get re-brokered as progress wasn't fast enough," he said.

Emma Knights, CEO of the National Governance Association, said some high-performing MATs reported RSC "pressure" to expand too.

But not all large trusts relish expansion. DfE data suggests the 55 MATs with 20 or more schools added 72 schools between them last year, but 23 of these trusts added none or even lost schools.

Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the NEU, said large chains meant "less freedom, accountability and choice" as schools cannot leave MATs.

Knights noted that it was harder for large or dispersed trusts to understand communities. Marshall said they risked becoming like distant local authorities.

## The changing academy landscape: Narrative shift



- Shifting the narrative from encouraging every school that wants to convert to academy status – towards every school ideally being part of a family of schools in a strong multi academy trust.
- Moving on from a dual system towards a single model of all schools within a trust. A challenge to local authorities
- **Collaboration not autonomy.** Academy trusts have shared accountability for standards across the trust; all schools within the trust support each other and the trust is accountable for them all.
- **No fixed trajectory – no hard target,** nor legislation to compel schools to convert to academies or join MATs.
- **Support for vulnerable schools to work alongside MATs and proposal to require intervention measures to 3RI schools**
- **Implications for maintained schools, diocesan schools and SATs to consider joining or forming a MAT**

## The changing academy landscape: key implications

- Clarity of vision for the sector, coupled with the policy incentives, is likely to lead to an **increased pace of academisation**. A tipping point?
- Continued focus on strong trusts, with **capacity to improve all schools and in the best interest of pupils** as a key factor for considering growth
- **New MATs or consolidation?** some new MATs but in general expectation that more SATs will transfer into MATs and more small MATs will amalgamate into larger MATs with capacity to bring improvement
- Some **trusts will grow beyond their area**, forming 'hubs' or groups of schools working together but as part of the wider trust systems
- Suggestion that **diocesan maintained schools** to work together to join or form MATs serving the local community working with the Dioceses
- Question about **capacity in the special/AP sector?**
- Shift for **SATs** to consolidate with MATs locally or to join together and form a MAT if one is needed
- Being clear about the **role of the LA in a more fully academised sector**

Slides from an RSC presentation to school leaders this month

United Learning recently blamed the distance from other schools for giving up a Leeds academy.

## Fewer CEOs with more schools 'easier for RSCs'

Marshall also noted that it was easier for RSCs to deal with 15 CEOs with 300 schools than 300 SATs. "The minute we change schools to fit RSC templates is the minute we take something away from schools," he added.

Evidence is also limited of often-cited economies of scale when SATs join MATs, according to Dr Thomas Perry, a University of Birmingham academic. Meanwhile data on pupil outcomes at different-sized MATs shows "mixed results".

The DfE's annual academy accounts admit to "no clear relationship" between size and Key Stage 2 progress. MAT Progress 8 scores are mainly below average, which officials attribute to high numbers of sponsored

academies that were historically performing poorly before conversion.

But research by the Education Policy Institute found fewer in-year deficit schools in large MATs, suggesting funding can be rerouted where needed. Senior researcher Bobbie Mills also noted greater potential for staff development within large trusts.

A DfE spokesperson said MATs were "the best way to enable schools and teachers to deliver consistently good outcomes", allowing strong leaders to support more schools and staff to focus on learning.

Schools Week understands that DfE officials are scoping out a white paper for later this year setting out their academy vision. They are now looking into whether they want more, smaller trusts, or to allow bigger trusts to get bigger.

Schools Week was told there was "some scepticism" within the department over larger MATs.



# Pupil premium switch will cost schools £90m, DfE admits

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

Schools will miss out on around £90 million in pupil premium funding, the government has finally admitted, despite previously insisting they would not suffer from a change to the way it is calculated.

The Department for Education released updated guidance on the effective use and accountability of the pupil premium yesterday. Last December, ministers changed the system to base the funding on free school meals (FSM) eligibility in October, rather than in January as in previous years.

The move meant thousands of pupils who became eligible between the two census dates did not count towards this year's funding.

Guidance published yesterday states the overall impact was "approximately £90 million", but insisted pupil premium funding was still increasing "compared to the previous year". The DfE said there were 62,216 fewer pupil premium recipients as a result of the change.

Schools minister Nick Gibb told MPs in April that individual schools would not lose out "as a direct consequence of the change".



He added: "Whether a school gets more or less pupil premium will depend on its own circumstances but, if you take a typical school, an average school, they will see their pupil premium increase from last year to this year."

Gibb claimed that figures being "bandied around" by newspapers and campaigns did not take into account those pupils who had become eligible for free school meals again having been eligible at another point in the past six years.

Schools Week previously reported the loss could be up to £125 million following analysis of freedom of information requests sent to local authorities.

The DfE said £280 million in funding allocated via the recovery premium "far outweighs the impact of moving the pupil premium census date from January to October". It said that 87 per cent of local authorities would see an increase in pupil premium funding.

The pupil premium is worth between £955 and £2,345 per pupil but earlier this year schools were told they would receive just £145 per pupil premium-eligible child under the recovery premium.

A DfE spokesperson said pupil premium funding had "risen for the majority of schools, to more than £2.5 billion overall this year – an increase of £60 million compared to last year".

They added: "In addition to the pupil premium, pupils who are eligible for FSM, or have been at any point in the last 6 years (FSM6), also attract funding through the schools national funding formula (NFF)."

The DfE said it was moving to use the October census for the NFF rather than the January census which will "increase the amount of funding allocated through the FSM6 factor in the 2022 to 2023 financial year, as FSM eligibility increased significantly between January and October last year".

EXCLUSIVE

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## Schools warned Brexit driver shortages threaten meal supplies

School meals could face disruption and caterers have begun stockpiling as a driver shortage fuelled by Brexit and Covid puts deliveries at risk, a local council has warned.

Sheffield City Council said cooks would be given two days' "emergency stand-by menu items" from this week in case the national driver shortage threatens frozen and dry goods supplies.

The stockpiled ingredients include dried food like pasta and fish fingers.

Catering firm Taylor Shaw, which has a contract to supply schools in the city, has seen some deliveries from wholesaler Bidfood arrive late and others not at all in recent weeks, according to a council letter seen by *Schools Week*.

The letter to schools said it had not yet led to service disruption and most issues had affected London and south-west England. Meat, poultry, fresh fruit and veg, provided by other suppliers, are also "not affected at the moment".

But the council's update and apology in advance has been issued "in case there is a problem in the next few weeks". Schools have been told there could be some "amendments" to menus, with purchasing staff having to look at alternative supply routes.

The letter points to nationwide problems affecting the distribution and haulage sector, including Brexit resulting in "many European drivers leaving the UK".

Covid has also seen many drivers who previously supplied catering firms move into other jobs, including delivering for online retail, according to officials.

Tim Adams, director of corporate sales at Bidfood, told *Schools Week* it and other wholesale distributors had urged the government to step in urgently before Covid restrictions ease further, increasing the strain.

"We're asking the government to relax drivers' hours, as well as add drivers to the list of skilled workers to enable recruitment

of drivers from the EU talent pool," he said.

The Road Haulage Association has also warned long-standing recruitment challenges are "hitting crisis level".

Warnings over nationwide delivery disruption have been growing in recent weeks. The CEO of Britain's biggest retailer Tesco said it had been "working really hard" to address HGV driver shortages earlier this month, according to Reuters.

Councillor Jayne Dunn, Sheffield council's elected member for education, children and families said: "We are aware of the challenges Taylor Shaw are facing to some areas of its supply chain.

"The issues have not yet directly affected our schools, but as a precautionary measure, we have been working hard to put contingency plans in place to mitigate the impact any delays may have."

Taylor Shaw and the government have also been approached for comment.



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# Ofqual's independence questioned as Williamson policy adviser set for top job

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Gavin Williamson has put forward his own policy adviser to be the next chief regulator of Ofqual, prompting warnings over the body's supposed independence.

The Department for Education announced last week that Dr Jo Saxton, who founded and ran the Turner Schools academy trust before moving to her current job, was the education secretary's preferred candidate to take up the role from September.

The appointment comes at a time of crisis for the regulator, which has been without a permanent head since Sally Collier resigned last year in the wake of the exam grading fiasco.

Former chief Dame Glenys Stacey initially returned for three months, and ex-exam board boss Simon Lebus has been interim head since January. Ian Bauckham, another adviser to the government, is its interim chair.

The proposed appointment of another close government ally to an independent position has raised eyebrows across the education sector. It follows the appointment of Dame Rachel de Souza, a close friend of former academies minister Lord Agnew, as children's commissioner last year.

Saxton has links to another former academies minister – Lord Nash – who appointed her as chief executive of his Future Academies chain in 2012. She had previously been working as an academic, curriculum consultant and teacher.

Dennis Sherwood, an exams expert and vocal Ofqual critic, said the appointment of a government adviser to the role "sends shivers down my spine". He has warned that the regulator is not fit for purpose and should be "disbanded".

He added: "Appointing someone close to [Williamson] seems to me to signal a fast reversion to the status quo ... when what we really need is a new broom."

Because the appointment of Saxton would be a permanent one, she must first appear in front of the Parliamentary education committee on July 6.

Federation of Awarding Bodies chief executive Tom Bewick said the committee would "want to assure itself that the chief regulator can restore

**"She is whip-smart and doesn't suffer fools. If anyone can sort out this mess, Jo can"**



Jo Saxton

Ofqual's status to being a strong independent body, capable of inspiring public confidence in all forms of qualifications and examinations".

He added: "In the past, being a close confidante and policy adviser to the secretary of state for education would be seen as a straightforward disqualification for a non-ministerial departmental role like this, but clearly the civil service recruitment panel and Gavin Williamson has taken a different view."

Former colleagues speak highly of Saxton. Mike Buchanan, chair of Turner Schools, described her as "inspiring", and said she had been "fearless in tackling low expectations and underperformance".

He added: "I'm sure she will bring similar rigour, clarity and drive in her challenging new role."

Another Saxton ally, who did not want to be named, said she was "absolutely singleminded about doing everything possible for the most disadvantaged kids".

"She is whip-smart and doesn't suffer fools. If anyone can sort out this mess, Jo can."

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the ASCL school leaders' union, said his organisation had a "very positive relationship" with Saxton "and our experience is that she listens to the views of school and college leaders".

"This is a crucial appointment at any time but particularly given the challenges ahead with next year's public exams following the disruption caused by coronavirus. We will need Ofqual to be responsive to circumstances, clear in its communications, and to maintain a good

dialogue with the sector. We think that is what Jo will deliver."

Saxton's time at Turner Schools was not without controversy. Set up in 2016, the trust is now made up of five schools, including two that were stripped from the failed Lilac Sky academy trust.

Despite the trust's size, Saxton was paid almost £150,000 a year.

Writing on the Kent Independent Education Advice website, former headteacher Peter Read claimed there was a "chasm" between Saxton's "rhetoric" and the outcomes at Turner Schools.

Only two of the trust's five schools have been inspected since joining. Morehall Primary school was rated "good" by Ofsted in 2019. Martello Primary received a "requires improvement" grade in 2018, though the report did rate leadership as "good" and praised Saxton's "passion to ensure the highest standards".

At Martello, 41 per cent of pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2019, compared with 65 per cent nationwide. Folkestone Academy's progress 8 score was -0.61, well below the national average.

Read also pointed to high exclusion rates at the schools in 2017-18. But a trust spokesperson said fixed-term exclusions had fallen from 790 at Folkestone Academy and 21 at Martello in 2017-18 to 106 and three respectively in 2019-20.

A spokesperson said: "Turning around schools that have been struggling for years takes time and, in the early days when expectations on behaviour were being reset, exclusions were high."



## Speed read



# Prepare plans for future outbreaks, DfE tells schools

The Department for Education (DfE) has told schools to draw up "outbreak management plans" in its updated Covid contingency framework.

It states that councils, directors of public health and Public Health England health protection teams can recommend certain measures for

individual schools or clusters of settings in areas with outbreaks.

If there is a need to address more widespread issues across an area, "ministers will take decisions on an area-by-area basis", the guidance says.

Here's what you need to know:

## 1 PLAN FOR ATTENDANCE LIMITS

Plans should cover the "possibility they are advised to limit attendance", though such restrictions "should only ever be considered as a last resort".

As with other periods of restricted attendance, schools should provide "high quality remote education" for all pupils or those not attending.

If restrictions on pupil attendance are needed, school leaders "will be best placed to determine the workforce required onsite and if it is appropriate for some staff to work remotely".



## 2 PRIORITISE CERTAIN YEAR GROUPS

Early years and primary settings should be "prioritised to continue to operate as normal", the DfE says, although it may advise otherwise.

If some attendance restrictions are needed at primary level, vulnerable children, children of critical workers, children in reception, year 1 and year 2 should still be allowed to attend.

At secondary level, vulnerable and critical worker children, along with pupils in year 10, 11, 12 and 13 should be allowed to attend.

Vulnerable and key worker children should still attend school if strict lockdown-style closures are implemented.

Alternative provision "should continue to allow all children or pupils to attend full time".

## 3 PLAN FOR ON-SITE TESTING (AGAIN)

On-site asymptomatic testing was introduced in secondary schools when pupils returned in March, but youngsters were then asked to switch to twice weekly testing at home.

Future outbreak plans should "cover the possibility" that on-site testing is "advised in their area" again.

This may be advised by local directors of public health for individual settings or small clusters, or in settings across areas where an "enhanced response package" has been deemed appropriate.

Last week the Department of Health and Social Care announced further support including supervised in-school testing and discretion to reintroduce face coverings in a number of local authority areas.



## 4 FACE COVERINGS COULD BE BROUGHT BACK

A national recommendation that face coverings be worn in classrooms and by pupils in communal areas was lifted on May 17, although some schools in areas hard-hit by the Delta variant have kept the requirement in place.

The DfE says outbreak plans should cover reintroduction of the rule, which would be advised by local directors of public health. But "any educational drawbacks in the recommended use of face coverings should be balanced with the benefits in managing transmission".



## 5 MINISTERS MAY REINTRODUCE SHIELDING

Shielding for the clinically extremely vulnerable was paused earlier this year. But ministers could agree to reintroduce it "in the event of a major outbreak or variant of concern that poses a significant risk to individuals on the shielded patient list".

Schools should "make sure their outbreak management plans cover this possibility", but the guidance states that shielding "can only be reintroduced by the national government".



## 6 LIMITS ON TRIPS AND PERFORMANCES MAY BE NEEDED

Schools could be asked to limit residential trips, open days, transition or taster days, parental attendance in settings and performances.

The guidance states that in "most circumstances", children should be allowed to attend summer schools "as planned", but the academic element of the programme "may need to be delivered remotely".

Children should still also be allowed to attend holiday activities and food programme provision "in most circumstances".

However, if a local authority decides not to hold face-to-face holiday clubs as a result of Covid, for example if they are cancelled following government advice, they should "operate flexibly to ensure that eligible children still receive support that meets the aims of the programme".

## News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## DfE has plan for a winter Covid wave (but you can't see it)

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Gavin Williamson has confirmed he has a plan for responding to a potential winter wave of Covid or a flu outbreak, but dodged calls to publish it in advance.

The education secretary also insisted that the government's understanding of how to run schools safely while providing "high-quality" education had "evolved so dramatically", amid concerns about further disruption this year.

Chief medical officer Professor Chris Whitty warned last week that he expected "a further winter surge – a late autumn-winter surge" in Covid.

But Professor Anthony Harnden, deputy chair of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, has also warned that flu could be "potentially a bigger problem this winter than Covid".

Asked by Labour MP Fleur Anderson in parliament this week to reassure teachers that his department had a "big red file or the equivalent for the winter plans, for the

year ahead", Williamson responded: "Yes. I'm desperately hoping never to have to touch it."

But, when challenged to publish his winter contingency plans so they could be "validated" by the education sector, Williamson referred to the government's existing contingency framework, which he said was published "broadly".

The framework was updated last week to set out what schools must include in Covid "outbreak management plans".

"If there is an outbreak in your constituency or mine, there is an immediate resource that schools go to in order to be able to deal with an outbreak and a pandemic," Williamson said.

Asked about readiness for another pandemic, the education secretary suggested the response in schools would be similar.

"If you think about if we were actually in another pandemic ... the types of controls and restrictions

that would be in place would be very similar to the types of controls and restrictions that are currently in place."

It comes after the DfE was criticised by the National Audit Office for failing to adequately plan for the pandemic.

Williamson claimed the DfE "worked at incredibly high speed" to respond to the Covid-19 crisis.

He said he had commissioned "some of the first work I think back on January 13 of last year asking the department to look at some of the challenges of what was then a little-talked-about strain in Wuhan in China".

He added: "But obviously the impact and the speed of spread was far greater than I think any of us could have predicted, or certainly it was much more lasting consequences than there was any expectation it would have."



Gavin Williamson

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# In Parliament

## The week in Westminster: what you need to know

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

**Speeding up Ofsted inspections, tweaking exam rules for next year and admissions reform were all discussed in parliament this week. Here are the key things you need to know.**

### DfE considers 2022 exam adaptations

The government is looking at a “similar set of measures” for the 2022 exams as those proposed for this summer’s series before formal tests were cancelled.

The education secretary told the education select committee on Wednesday that they “very much hope and intend” for exams and vocational and technical qualifications to go ahead next year.

Last December, ministers proposed contingency measures for this year’s exams. These included that grades would be as generous as those in 2020 and that pupils would get advance notice of topics in certain subjects and be allowed to use exam aids. But the measures were ditched in January when exams were cancelled.

Gavin Williamson confirmed that the government was considering such measures again “to ensure that there is fairness and there is the right level of support for pupils ... I think that’s the right approach”. Plans are due to be published “very shortly”.

### ‘Accelerated’ Ofsted inspections on table

Williamson is looking to speed up the timetable for Ofsted inspections to address the backlog of schools due a visit.

He was questioned by MPs on Wednesday about schools still waiting for inspections that were suspended when Covid hit last year.

David Johnston, the Conservative MP for Wantage, said some schools in his constituency were “living on an old Ofsted judgment where they know they have improved and it would help their admissions if they could show that improvement”.



Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman (pictured) also warned last week about the length of time between inspections for “outstanding” schools. She said Ofsted could accelerate inspections if asked to by the government.

Williamson said this week he “would certainly be looking at a whole range of different options, including accelerated inspection”. He said Johnston was “right to highlight” the need for schools to progress out of lower grades.

### Inspectors will always check on Baker Clause now

Ofsted inspectors will “always” report where a school fails to comply with the Baker Clause and “consider” how it affects their grade, the watchdog has clarified following mounting pressure.

A report this week from the education select committee demanded that a school’s Ofsted grade should be limited to “requires improvement” if they are not allowing training providers to access their pupils to provide careers advice. The stipulation is mandated by the Baker Clause.

Ofsted has now said it will update the inspection handbooks to “clarify inspectors will always report where schools fall short of the requirements of the Baker Clause, as well as considering how it affects a school’s grade”.

Ofsted is planning to carry out a thematic review of careers advice in schools, under orders from the Department for Education (DfE).

The watchdog’s spokesperson said that “good quality” careers advice is “really important” and the clause already forms part of the “personal

development” grade in an Ofsted report.

### DfE to rush through university admission reform

The government wants to rush through its plans for a post-qualifications admissions (PQA) system for universities “without legislation”.

Williamson told the House of Commons on Monday that “we really want to bring PQA forward as rapidly as possible”. He wants to do it “without legislation and in cooperation with the sector”, but the government will still drive the reforms even “if we aren’t able to have that cooperation”.

The DfE launched a consultation in January on proposals to allow pupils to receive offers from universities based on their actual grades, rather than predictions.

The consultation set out two proposed models, one which would see pupils apply to university after receiving their A-level results and another where pupils would make “pre-qualification” applications, but only receive offers after results are announced.

Williamson said evidence was clear that PQA “goes to help children from the most disadvantaged families more than any other. That’s why we will make it happen.”

### Criticised report sounds ‘white privilege’ use warning

Schools should consider whether promoting “politically controversial terminology” such as “white privilege” is in line with their duties under the Equality Act, the education select committee has said.

The cross-party committee of MPs published its report on left-behind white working class pupils this week.

In 2019, 17.7 per cent of white British pupils eligible for free school meals achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths, compared with 22.5 per cent of all FSM-eligible pupils.

The committee said disadvantaged white pupils “do not have ‘white privilege’ in the education system and we are concerned about the impact that hearing terms like that presented as fact will have on those children”.

But union head Geoff Barton said the recommendation “does not seem helpful and is likely to divert attention from the rest of the report”.

It is thought that Labour MPs on the committee did not support the report.



# Explainer



## 'Great nation' anthem: what all the fuss is about

The Department for Education has been mocked for encouraging schools to take part in a campaign that involves children singing an "anthem" that ends with them repeating the line "strong Britain, great nation". One Britain One Nation (OBON), which aims to create a "strong, fair, harmonious and a proud British Nation", was set up by former police officer Kash Singh, but has close links to Conservative MPs. OBON day 2021, an event celebrating "pride and unity", is due to take place today. So why is the government promoting a previously little-known event, and why has it angered so many people? Or are people just making a fuss about nothing? Here's what you need to know:

### DfE tweeted campaign support after Tory MP request

On Monday, Conservative MP Philip Davies asked the education secretary if he would "encourage all schools to take part in OBON day on Friday"?

Gavin Williamson called the project "amazing" and said it was "incredibly important that schools take part".

The parliamentary session ended just after 3.30pm and the DfE tweeted its support out at 4pm.

### Pupils 'must' sing 'We are Britain' anthem

The DfE encouraged schools to take part in the event. The campaign's website asks for the "support of your school to celebrate the day in the spirit it is intended".

Schools are urged to "do the following as a MUST please", including singing the "OBON Day 2021 anthem".

The song was written by children at St John's CE Primary School, in Bradford.

### Why is it being mocked?

As of yesterday, the DfE tweet had nearly 7,000 retweets and another 11,200 comments on Twitter.

The OBON anthem came in for particular ridicule. The song includes the lines "we are Britain and we have one dream, to unite all people in one great team" and ends with children repeatedly singing "Strong Britain, great na-ation".

Former NHS trust boss Adrian Bull tweeted the song "would not be out of place in North Korea".

Most Scottish schools will have broken up for the summer holidays by today. Scotland's First Minister Nicole Sturgeon (pictured) said "people would be – and rightly so – up in arms" if the Scottish government asked schools to "sing some song about how great Scotland is".

The DfE said it had "not asked people to sing songs or censored any specific materials for One Britain One Nation day". The department supports the



Department for Education @e... · 2d

We're encouraging schools across the UK to celebrate One Britain One Nation Day on 25 June, when children can learn about our shared values of tolerance, kindness, pride and respect.

#OBONDAY21 @1Britain1Nation

For more information:

[onebritainonenation.com](http://onebritainonenation.com)

campaign's "aims to help children learn about equality, kindness and pride, and it is for schools to decide how they teach these important values".

### Former police officer founded campaign for nation to 'showcase pride...

Kash Singh, a former police inspector in Bradford with West Yorkshire Police, set up OBON when he retired in 2013 because of a "personal desire to put back into the country that has given him so much".

The campaign has a vision of creating "a strong, fair, harmonious and a proud British nation, celebrating patriotism and respect for all our people", according to its website.

He told Times Radio: "I came to this country as a six-year-old kid who couldn't speak a word of English... One of the things that was missing for me was what we need to do, we need an organisation that the people of this country can align themselves to, to showcase their passion, pride and love for this great nation."

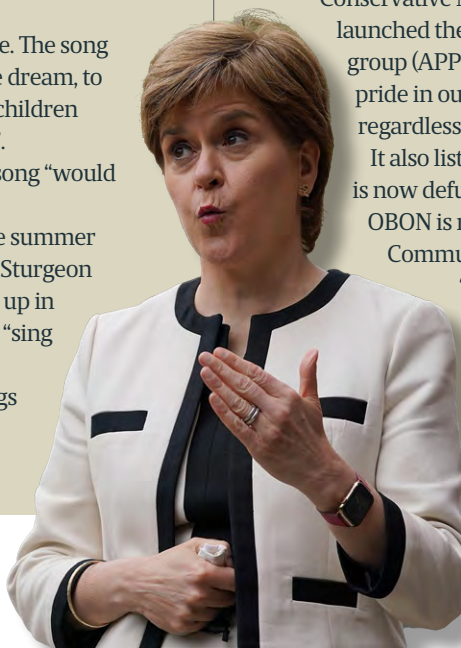
### ... but campaign is closely linked to Tory MPs

The group has some high-profile Conservative politician backers, including prime minister Boris Johnson who praised the group this year.

Conservative MPs Andrea Jenkyns and Andrew Rosindell launched the One Britain One Nation all-party parliament group (APPG) in 2018 to "work with schools to promote pride in our country, and respect, tolerance and inclusion regardless of one's background".

It also listed then Labour MP John Grogan as an officer. It is now defunct.

OBON is registered with Companies House as a Community Interest Company. The accounts state that "all moneys [sic] used to progress the Vision of OBON has been the Directors [sic] own money".





# EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)

## Time to come clean on tutoring confusion

The government has made a habit of over-hyping and under-delivering on its promises.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson this week promised six million children would benefit from the expanded tutoring programme. We've already shown this claim (made previously by Boris Johnson, too) is bogus: the government has committed to six million *sessions* of tutoring over three years.

Alas, we checked with the Department for Education again whether the sessions would be rationed to one per kid. And, again, the department confirmed there would be no cap. They admitted students can benefit from more than one package and, as it's up to schools to decide, it's out of their hands anyway.

So, the DfE has contradicted its own secretary of state – not a great look. Williamson should correct his statement. Misleading parliament (not once, but twice) is a serious matter.

## Show us your Covid plans, Gav

The government doesn't have a good track record with providing timely and non-chaotic guidance for schools – particularly around closures.

Gavin Williamson said this week he has a plan for responding to a potential winter wave of Covid. He insisted the government's understanding of how to run schools safely while providing top-notch education had "evolved dramatically".

But, he dodged questions about sharing his plans with the sector.

Williamson essentially wants you to know he's done his homework, but he just doesn't have it with him, so unfortunately you can't see it.

Such secrecy won't pan out well if there are further problems down the line.

It's better to be open with the sector. Publishing contingency plans so they can be validated by the education sector – with potential problems spotted early – is a much better strategy.

**SCHOOLS  
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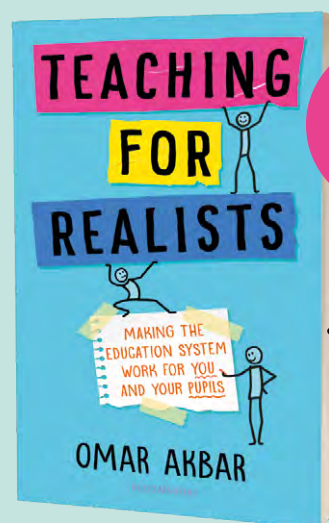


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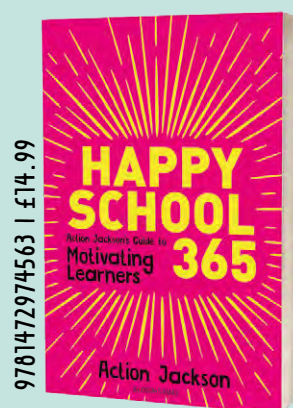


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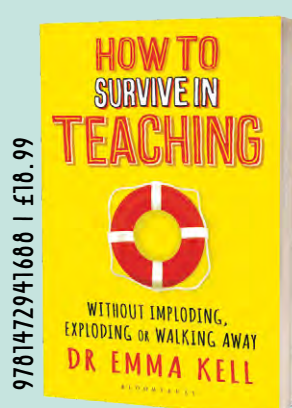
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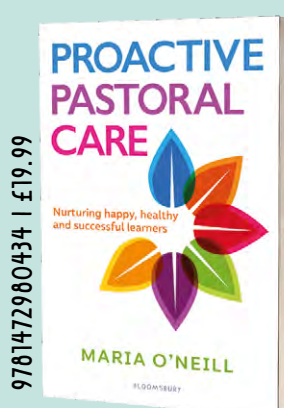
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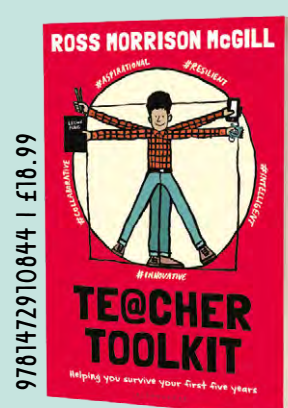
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# Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



**‘It was painful personally to me to have been involved’**

**The former chair of Ofqual has spent much of his life thinking and writing about transparency and data. Here he says why no algorithm would have worked - and why Ofqual didn't share it**

**Roger Taylor, former chair, Ofqual**

**A**n unsolvable problem." That is how Roger Taylor, former chair of Ofqual, describes what the regulator was

tasked with in 2020. To devise a statistical model for awarding grades when nobody was sitting exams that was accurate, did not cause inflation and was acceptable to the public. "An unsolvable problem," he repeats.

Since resigning at the end of last year, Taylor has kept quiet. But since last week he has been talking. Because he was not an employee, he is not forbidden by contract from speaking out – a rare privilege among

# Profile: Roger Taylor

ex-top decision-makers.

It's a power Taylor has wielded before. He publicly demanded that the education secretary Gavin Williamson stop taking credit for Ofqual's decision to switch to teacher-moderated grades (which worked). Taylor also published the non-disclosure agreement Ofqual was asking algorithm experts to sign, after being criticised for its contents. In contrast to ex-chief regulator Sally Collier, who has been almost silent, Taylor has been free to speak up, and even call people's bluff.

But why speak now? It's six months since Taylor resigned. No one has been blaming him much for last year's grading fiasco: despite trying to wriggle out of it, Williamson has taken a lot of the blame.

Yet Taylor has taken the rather unusual step of publishing an essay last week with the Centre for Progressive Policy, titled: "Is the algorithm working for us?". Chapter One looks at "The 2020 exam debacle: how did it happen?". Of course, by producing a defence, Taylor risks bringing criticism back on to his head. It's a bold move.

When we meet virtually this week, Taylor is sitting at a desk behind which hangs a tasteful impressionist painting and with two shelves packed with vinyl records. He has a lively, intelligent face and unpacks his ideas rapidly. He's a PPE graduate from Oxford, with an MSc in economics, and is a former *Financial Times* journalist who reported on tech before moving into data technology businesses.

"It was very, very intense," he says of the period when Ofqual started to design a grading model. "There was an incredible effort made by everyone to try to make something that was workable."

But here is Taylor's point. He believes it was never workable. "The point in my paper was, the constraints set at the beginning [...] necessarily involve telling people who would have passed their exams, that they haven't. And that was the issue that was not adequately considered."

He points out that Ofqual "is constitutionally obliged under law to prevent grades from inflating". It's also widely known that education ministers, particularly Nick Gibb, were adamant: no grade inflation.

But Taylor writes: "From the point of view of the individual citizen, the problem looks different. They see that the government has



**"I do feel it was possible to work out earlier on that this wasn't going to work"**

denied them the chance to demonstrate that they deserve a university place [...] It has put their future at risk."

Policymakers assumed they should offer the same number of university places as normal, and fill them as accurately as possible. Instead, Taylor argues that inflation (inaccuracy) should have been allowed, and more university places offered.

His argument is about the difference between accuracy and legitimacy. "People are not willing to accept their lives being affected by a decision-making process driven by predictive algorithms," says Taylor. "We risk missing this very basic lesson, if we comfort ourselves with the idea that the algorithm malfunctioned."

In a way, Taylor is saying the mistake was basically a PR one; a failure to understand human psychology. "In terms of what you might call outcomes-based fairness, the algorithm is the appropriate approach. But the point is, that was never going to fly."

"Teacher-assessed grades are in many ways more biased than the moderated grades," he continues. "Their advantage is not that they are less biased, the advantage is that they allow for a significant amount of inflation."

So why didn't Ofqual spot the PR problem sooner?

"I do feel it was possible to work out earlier on that this wasn't going to work," Taylor

says. "That is something everyone involved needs to reflect on." He points out Ofqual's consultation showed a degree of consensus. When asked about "the relative weight that the model should place on historical evidence of centre performance" (a bone of contention for many improving schools) 54 per cent agreed, with fewer (33 per cent) against.

Yet even if Ofqual didn't spot the problem earlier, they were told about it later. After Ofqual's consultation response in April, dissident voices became more insistent: the education select committee published a strongly worded warning in July and school leaders echoed it. Still Ofqual persisted. Why not drop the model?

Taylor has a curious answer to this. "My view on that is you very quickly risk the regulator getting involved in what are properly political decisions. My own stance on that is quite conservative: politics is for politicians." The answer is a tricky one, as Ofqual is an independent body, accountable to parliament – not a blind executioner of DfE will.

Just before the decision to axe the algorithm last year, Williamson also forced Ofqual to pull its guidance on the proposed triple-lock appeals policy. So is Ofqual really independent? Taylor points me to meeting minutes that show both he and Collier



## Profile: Roger Taylor



Taylor on the BBC discussing death rates in hospitals as part of his work with Dr Foster

"advised against the board changing its position", declining to answer whether the DfE's intervention was a problem.

The question of independence continues, as just this week Williamson appointed his own policy adviser to become chief regulator. Meanwhile, the government's go-to person to lead expert reviews, Ian Bauckham, has taken over from Taylor as chair.

Another big criticism levied at Ofqual during this whole process was a lack of transparency. If Taylor draws a line on how "political" Ofqual should have been, he also draws a line on how transparent.

He himself is an author of a book on transparency, of which he self-deprecatingly says "about three people have read it". Published in 2016, it is called *Transparency and the Open Society*. It makes the case, says Taylor, for transparency with certain limits. In a sense, it's the same approach Taylor took with the algorithm itself.

Why didn't Ofqual share the algorithm model?

"If you tell everyone about it, there is a risk of it leading to gaming," responds Taylor. But surely sharing it with a group of expert statisticians is not the same as sharing it with "everyone". Yet Taylor is unconcerned by this decision, because he holds that no algorithm would have worked. They are simply too

unpalatable to the individual.

He is frank, meanwhile, about the focus on GCSEs and A-levels rather than vocational qualifications, such as BTECs. He notes that general qualifications were Ofqual's remit when the regulator was set up in 2010, although he says since then, expertise in vocational qualifications has improved. "However, he adds that "primarily because of the consequences around university admissions" there was "a lot more focus on general qualifications [...] at a political level."

Overall, Taylor deserves real credit for trying to make us think about the possibilities and limitations of algorithms, and the difference between accuracy and legitimacy. He cares about digital technology in public services. He previously founded a company, Dr Foster, which drew data together about hospitals, and he has worked for the Careers and Enterprise Company. He becomes passionately frustrated as he explains the DfE should urgently ensure every student has a "digitised record" of themselves, their achievements and qualifications.

It would allow students to keep all their qualifications in one place (the biggest request from students to Ofqual are for copies of exam certificates, he says) while others who see the record "don't just look at grades, but look at them in context". It could

### "If you tell everyone about the algorithm, there is a risk of it leading to gaming"

particularly help disadvantaged pupils, who often have a "thinner file".

Such records might even help alleviate the 2020 situations of the future, says Taylor. "In a great many years' time, if people had richer individual education records and realised their fate didn't hang on a single grade, but a more nuanced judgment, it might be a less pressurised situation."

His belief in the smart use of data in public services made the grading fiasco "quite painful", Taylor reflects.

"I've spent most of my life looking at [...] how do we use data that is fair to people and particularly in ways that empower individuals." Instead the debacle was "an example of the government using data in a way that was deeply and massively insensitive to individuals. It was quite painful to me personally to have been involved." The son of a philosophy academic, it seems Taylor has been genuinely mulling the philosophical problems – and opportunities – of statistical modelling in education since he departed.

There are some holes in his answers. There is also a hole in his solution: just this week, schools are warning that students with top grades have received no university offers, because universities awarded too many places last year. In a way it goes to show, algorithm or no algorithm, every solution was deeply flawed.

I ask Taylor why he stepped down.

"Whatever you think about 2020, my view is that Ofqual is a world-class organisation. There's not many organisations that understand assessment." He laughs. "2021 is going to be a difficult year. It wasn't going to help Ofqual's case to have the same grey, old bloke in place."

Perhaps, however, Ofqual has lost one of its most open communicators.



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# Opinion

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**The limited definition of cultural capital endorsed by Ofsted risks stopping us from dealing with the root causes of inequity in our schools, writes Jeffery Quaye**

Amid the ongoing discourse about how we want to restyle our nation post-pandemic, education is well and truly in the barber's chair. After two years of cancelled examinations, for example, questions are being raised about the role and shape of assessment. But chief among the concerns of teachers, parents, policymakers and commentators is the long-troublesome achievement gap.

The government has responded by committing to making education central to our economic recovery from the Covid-19 disruption. Yet there's sadly little sense from the recovery plan that it will do anything to confront intergenerational inequality directly, so it looks like education leaders are going to have to be the ones to wield the scissors.

We must look the histories that contribute to the reproduction of that inequality in the face and create something new; and faith in our existing model to guide us there is misplaced. In part, that's because Ofsted's focus on "cultural capital" (though a welcome change) is too limited and is actually likely to reinforce the problem.

When French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu first coined the term, he did so as a way of explaining how people maintain power and status. By his definition, cultural capital works to consolidate stratification and can be a great source of inequality. To understand the challenge we face as educators, we must understand that.

In an attempt to head off early criticism, Ofsted provided its own working definition of cultural capital



DR JEFFERY QUAYE

National director of education and standards, Aspirations Academies Trust

## Cultural capital is hairspray. What our system needs is a new 'do'

as "the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement". That definition conveniently allowed the inspectorate to operationalise cultural

But whose? Bourdieu suggested that cultural capital has three forms: the embodied state (accumulated from childhood in the form of attitudes, language, tastes), the objective state (such as paintings and instruments) and the institutionalised state (such as credentials and qualifications).

**"The danger we face is that Ofsted has inadvertently created a new buzzword"**

capital for school inspections and simultaneously absolved it from its critics' charge of elitism.

Yet it wasn't enough. Ofsted then added that "inspectors aren't inspecting 'cultural capital'; they're looking at whether the school provides a rich and broad curriculum. A great curriculum builds cultural capital."

The fact is that by any definition of cultural capital, every pupil already possesses some, and brings it to school with them. A second and important fact is that schools have been promoting cultural capital by their very existence. A third and more uncomfortable one is that middle-class and upper-class versions of cultural



capital are consistently more valued by schools – and inspectorates. That's the very point Bourdieu was making by inventing the phrase in the first place.

Meanwhile, disadvantaged and/or minority pupils bring cultural capital to the classroom that teachers may continue not to recognise or value, arguably compromising the notion of inclusive education.

And it's not just about class any more either. Intergenerational gaps are such that we must also ask ourselves whether our current indicators of cultural capital are reflective of the world our students inhabit. The viral YouTube video that warned about "preparing kids for jobs that don't exist yet" is 13 years old! Shift has happened.

The danger we face is that Ofsted's education inspection framework has inadvertently created a new buzzword, and that schools simply have a new brand of hairspray with which to coiffe their activities for presentation to inspectors. Our focus is ineluctably and unconsciously drawn to the objective and embodied forms of cultural capital – what we can prove students know and how we can get them to behave.

Meanwhile, institutional cultural capital faces neglect. That's about quality teaching towards worthwhile qualifications. And those, in the end, are what will close the achievement gap in the short term and the socioeconomic gaps that reproduce it in the long term.

If we are going to re-style our education system post-Covid, then we will have to tackle our problems at the root. We have to reduce the variability in teaching quality across schools and ensure our qualification system is fit for purpose.

Anything else is just hairspray.

# Opinion

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**Edurio's new report highlights how much work still needs to be done to break down barriers to equity, writes Leora Cruddas, and leaders should step up to the challenge**

Edurio's latest report provides an important overview of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues across the school system, and it has been a thought-provoking endeavour for me as a female educator and chief executive. This is an important step on a journey that we've been on for some time, and I hope it will help to bring about widespread and lasting change in the sector.

There were several elements that really stood out from the report's findings. Overall, the results seem promising. Reassuringly, eight in ten school staff believe that their workplace is committed to promoting EDI. But what is important is how this differs between different groups.

For example, only 69 per cent of minority-ethnic staff feel that their workplace is committed to it, compared to 83 per cent of white British/Irish staff. If lived experience between key groups can differ so heavily, can we really claim that we as school and trust leaders are creating an equal, diverse and inclusive workplace?

I was also struck by the gap in perception between school leaders and staff who do not hold a leadership position within their school. More leaders reported feeling confident that their workplace is committed to promoting EDI than the wider staff body. This gap is not altogether surprising, especially when we consider the demographics of leadership staff within schools. Indeed, Edurio's study found that just 28 per cent of staff felt that their leadership team is diverse.



LEORA CRUDDAS

CEO, Confederation of School Trusts

## The road to equality, diversity and inclusion in schools is still a long one

There is also a difference in how confident people feel that all staff are treated equally. An overwhelming nine in ten leadership staff feel this is the case, compared to seven in ten non-leaders. Leaders, by definition, lead the way in creating the culture

extent to which staff are experiencing offensive comments, jokes or behaviours. Again, the overall finding is reassuring: just three per cent of staff reported that they have experienced these events quite often or very often.

**“I was struck by the gap in perception between school leaders and their staff**

of their workforce. It is vital that their understanding matches that of their staff. It is hard to solve a problem that you aren't aware exists.

Lastly, Edurio's report reveals the

But again, this experience differs among staff with protected characteristics. We found that nine per cent of disabled staff, eight per cent of staff with a faith other



than Christianity and seven per cent of minority-ethnic staff had experienced an event they perceived as offensive. And a single such event is one too many. So, to see three times as many disabled staff find themselves in that position as their non-disabled colleagues is yet another sign that the road ahead to equality is still a long one.

The issue of offensive comments, jokes or behaviours is also reflected in the most recent Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. It is concerning that the report finds that for some children, incidents are so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them. We need to create school cultures where offensive comments, jokes or behaviours are directly addressed – and that has to be modelled by the adults.

An organisation's culture defines the way we behave in that organisation, from “the way we do things around here” to the underlying values, beliefs and principles that govern processes and behaviours. For me, equality, diversity and inclusion stem from that culture, which allows everyone to develop a sense of common purpose.

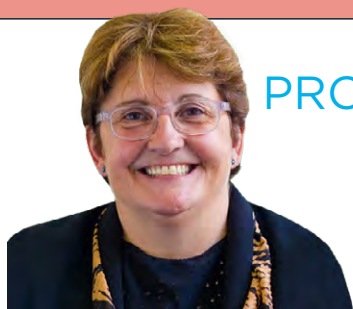
I see this report as a vital step towards creating a system-wide culture of equality, diversity and inclusion – one that will reach all staff and all pupils and in all of our schools. There are uncomfortable findings, and we must have the courage as leaders to face them head-on.

Edurio's full *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Among School Staff* report can be read here [home.edurio.com/edi-report](https://home.edurio.com/edi-report)



# Opinion: SEND

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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PROFESSOR SONIA  
BLANDFORD

Director, Achievement for All

## Our defences are not ready for this tsunami of SEND referrals

**Government's focus on learning is ignoring a worrying rise in SEND and CAHMS referrals that we are simply not prepared for, writes Sonia Blandford**

Strange. Challenging. Unprecedented. Just a few of the words we have all used to describe the period since Covid-19 has impacted on all of our lives. But while it's been difficult enough to understand from the position of a secure family home with no prior needs or experience of disadvantage, there are many for whom it has been simply devastating.

In our work with education settings all over the country, we are detecting a major seismic event: a tsunami of referrals to SEND teams and CAMHS provision that will overtop the flood defences.

Let me talk you through some of the situations students we work with have found themselves in. (All names have been changed.)

Kadija is 18 and shares a bedroom with her mum, a single parent who survives by working and claiming benefits. Her older sister has had mental health and drug problems, so living at home is a trial.

Kadija was to have taken A-levels.

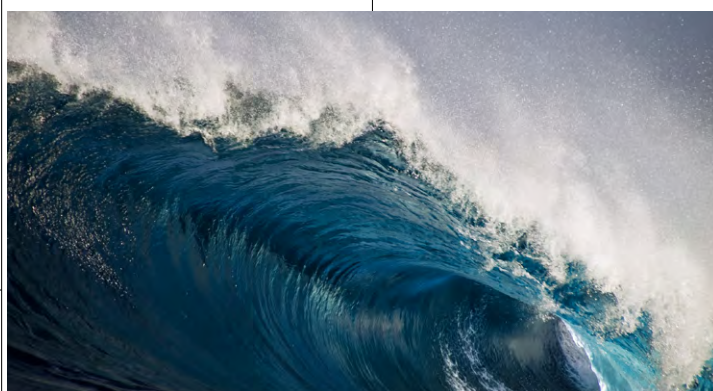
But her mocks, disrupted by family trauma, resulted in a C, E and U, against predicted grades of A\*, C and C.

She is getting little additional income through occasional shifts in the pub near her house, and she has little or no motivation to continue with her ambition to go to university to study medicine. Kadija

is vulnerable and disadvantaged but does not fall within educational, health and care plan (EHCP) or free school meals support or subsidies.

Then there is Tess. She is 16, with high-end physical and cognitive disabilities, and significant emotional needs. Tess is disabled and vulnerable, but she lives in a rural area and her support system – including specialist teaching and learning services – located 90 miles away. They take over two hours to get to her.

Luke is ten, a looked-after child, fostered by a single parent and living in an overcrowded home. The family are reliant on benefits and regular support from social services. Luke's key worker has



been self-isolating for ten days, and Luke has had no contact with him.

Kadija, Tess and Luke share a common situation, which makes them vulnerable and disadvantaged – they do not have the normal points of reference shared by so many of their peers. Their world is different, needing significant structure and support.

For all children and young

disadvantaged young people over the past 16 months. Teachers have provided daily one-to-one support, checked meal vouchers had arrived and that there is somewhere to sleep, clothes to wear.

In the meantime, government's key focus has been on learning. But in truth Kadija, Tess and Luke have a long way to go before this is their priority. Their teachers, carers and support networks face the challenge of providing new stable reference points before any form of learning can take place.

Physical and emotional security, love and belonging are their priority, so our key question must be this: how will we get them the highly specialised and urgent support they need to overcome the social, emotion and mental health issues caused by lockdown?

Some of these young people would have been on a road towards more positive life outcomes, overcoming ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) through the care and support of their school communities.

But many have been re-traumatised. And for them, specialist help is not a luxury, but an absolute and immediate necessity.

And supporting that ought to be the government's priority.

**“Specialist help is not a luxury, but an absolute and immediate necessity**

people, it is home that provides the benchmark for their lives. The pandemic has caused us all to re-evaluate the meaning of home and the importance of the quality of shelter, food, safety, personal growth, health and love that it holds. We know that 'home' is where we develop and nurture our core strength.

So have Kadija, Tess and Luke. But for them and thousands like them, watching the news or scrolling social media, trying to seek support when the structure of their lives has disappeared has been traumatic.

Education institutions and third-sector organisations have stepped in to care for vulnerable and

# Opinion: SEND

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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WHITNEY CRENNAJENNINGS

Associate director (mental health, wellbeing and inclusion),  
Education Policy Institute

## The SEND system needs urgent and substantive reform

**The SEND system has been waiting two years for promised reform and it can't afford to wait any longer, writes Whitney Crenna-Jennings**

It's been two years since the publication of Edward Timpson's review of exclusions, the launch of a review of special educational needs and disabilities provision, and proposed legislation to track children who are not in mainstream schools.

Two years in which the government has only implemented six of the 30 Timpson recommendations it accepted in principle. Two years, and the SEND review findings are only due this month. Two years during which there's been no movement on the promised register to track off-rolled pupils.

Delays due to the pandemic are understandable, but the simple truth is that if the government had prioritised the needs of vulnerable children much sooner, the education system would have been more resilient to Covid's unequal impact. Instead, the number of children at risk of poor outcomes has only increased in the last year.

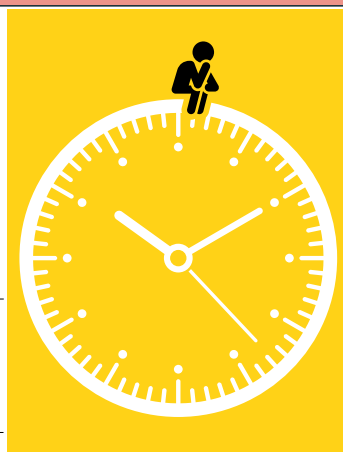
All children have been dealt a bad hand by Covid, but some more

than others. A substantial number of young people report feeling that their career aspirations have been destroyed. We are seeing a widespread rise in mental health issues too – these are starker among children who spent more time out of school and those in families who fell into debt as a result of the pandemic.

Many children with SEND were unable to access needed support during the shutdowns and lost important opportunities in their development. Children from vulnerable backgrounds had less access to IT and study space, and experienced greater disengagement from education. Some research shows an increase in absenteeism concentrated amongst disadvantaged pupils.

And now, there is real concern that the government's paltry education recovery package will fail to offer these students the support they need, leaving many at increased risk of exclusion and poor outcomes.

Previous EPI research found that



approximately one in ten pupils experience an 'unexplained exit' from secondary school. These pupils are much more likely than their peers to have an additional need, including a mental health issue or experiences of neglect or abuse at home.

Worryingly, more recent EPI research using data on all schools

**“ Government must issue guidance to avoid exclusions during the recovery ”**

in England confirms troubling inequities in identifying and supporting children with additional needs – flaws and inconsistencies in the system that families have been highlighting for years.

What we've found is that, far above individual characteristics and circumstances, the most influential factor in the quality of support students receive is the school they attend. Type of school, where children live, and level of vulnerability can also spell the difference between being able to access needed support or facing disciplinary action, including a possible exclusion.

Children in academies, those with severe SEND in disadvantaged

areas, and those with less stable lives – who have moved schools in early primary, experienced frequent absences, or have experienced abuse or neglect – are all less likely to be identified as needing support.

Worse, our research shows that children who miss substantial amounts of school due to absence are at risk of slipping under the radar for SEND assessment. Those whose SEND needs had already been identified in education, health and care plans (EHCPs) temporarily lost the legal enforceability of their agreed SEND support when schools closed. But how many more have not been identified at all due to the pandemic?

The good news is that we know schools make the difference, so we need to ensure they all do.

To achieve that, we need a national framework of minimum standards of support for children with SEND in mainstream schools and increased specialist training and support for teachers and school leaders. Assessments to identify SEND in schools must improve, as must our capacity to identify and reach highly vulnerable children who require specialised learning support.

The government must also issue clear guidance to avoid exclusions as far as possible during the recovery phase and closely monitor pupil movement at local and national levels.

But none of this can happen without a SEND funding system that is responsive to children's needs.

The system was failing before the pandemic. It needs substantive reform, and it can't wait another two years for it.





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## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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**Disgruntled parents won't like hearing they can't easily appeal their children's grades, writes Dennis Sherwood, but there's an easy answer to that**

It's August 10. A-level results have just been announced and a stressed-out parent is making a more-than-considerable fuss about a grade they think is unfair.

What to do? Naturally, you feel exposed and vulnerable. You want to defend your school's hard-fought, robust and well-evidenced protocol. You have a duty to defend your staff, too.

And besides, this complaint can go nowhere. You know (but the parent doesn't) that appeals against "academic judgment" can only be made if that judgment was "unreasonable". Which, of course, your judgment was not.

What may not come to mind (but which I'm convinced is the only right way to de-escalate this situation) is to acquiesce in the weakness of the system. Suppose you start by acknowledging the anger and disappointment, which are more than likely justified. Suppose you go on to admit openly that the grade is the result of an honest and professional opinion, and that another teacher or another school might have given a different one.

Before you call me crazy, consider what happens next.

Your hands are tied: Ofqual will not allow an appeal on these grounds. But you can quote the regulator's own words to the now-disarmed parent: "It is possible for two examiners to give different but appropriate marks to the same answer. There is nothing wrong or unusual about that."

The quote dates back to 2016, and at the time it raised few eyebrows. But in the case of this year's TAGs, there



DENNIS  
SHERWOOD

Managing director, Silver Bullet

## TAG appeals are Ofqual's mess. Let them own it

are three implications: the marks you've given might have been different had the same scripts been marked by a different teacher, perhaps at a different school; students might have been awarded different TAGs had the grade boundaries been drawn in slightly different places; and the TAGs

judgments, all taken with great care and in good faith, but judgments none the less – more so, perhaps, than any normal year's exams, but only as a matter of scale, not in their essence.

As Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman states in a recent book: "Unwanted variability in judgments that should

**“The denial of access to a second opinion is downright unfair**

might be different had a different protocol been used, with a different mix of components, or with different weightings.

TAGs are the result of a series of

ideally be identical can create rampant injustice, high economic costs and errors of many kinds." Well, that unwanted variability is not new to our exams system, and it's time we



woke up to that fact.

Professional judgments are proffered in many fields, most notably medical diagnoses and legal advice. In both these examples, a concerned person can seek a second opinion with relative ease.

For school exams, however, since Ofqual changed its rules in 2016 to make it harder to appeal, a second opinion is allowed only under very limited circumstances.

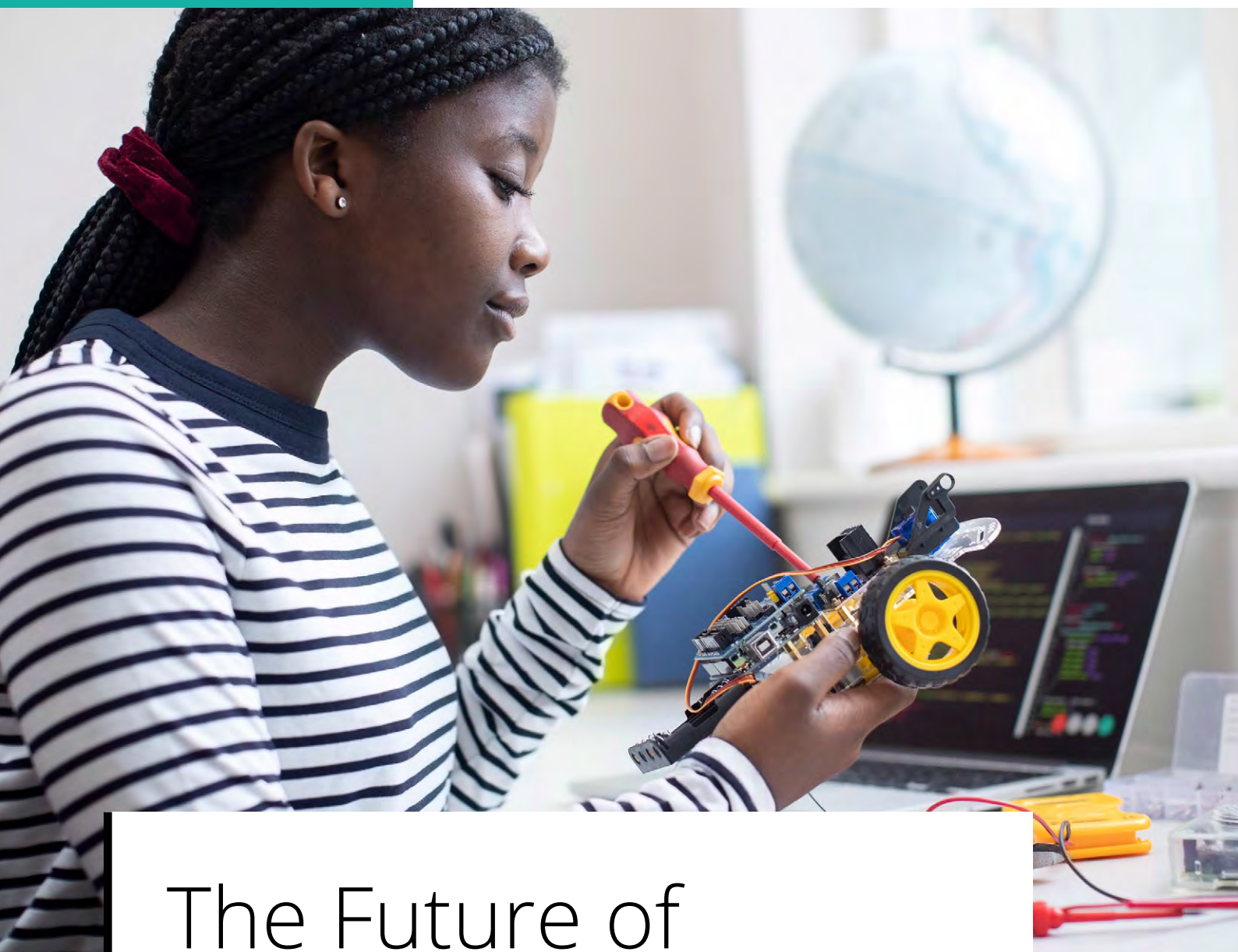
A doctor whose diagnosis is subject to a second opinion might well feel threatened or aggrieved, but ultimately will recognise that their professional opinion is just that. A different expert can give a different one. The matter is not one of rightness or wrongness, but about legitimate difference.

So too with the possibility that another equally expert teacher might have given a different mark, or that another equally conscientious school might have used a different protocol. Our hypothetical parent's concern about that is perfectly legitimate.

The problem, then, is that there is nowhere to redirect that parent's concern, and countering that academic judgment can't be challenged is unlikely to quell their anger. Ofqual might get away with that, but the friendly, neighbourhood school won't. The idea that they might is wilful blindness from those who have had over a year to prepare for this eventuality.

It is the denial of access to a second opinion that is downright unfair. Many parents and students will come to see that in a few short weeks. Schools should be ready for that, and rather than taking a reputational and emotional hit to maintain Ofqual's status quo, they should be prepared to admit their judgments are flawed, and direct parents' ire where it belongs.





# The Future of Assessment

As we go into the final week of the Festival of Education, we hope you've managed to catch some of the excellent sessions so far! If not, don't worry, there are still some brilliant keynotes coming up, including our final Keynote Panel on the Future of Qualifications and Assessment, where we'll be sharing the interim findings of our research with over 6,000 educationalists.

Join us online on Tuesday 29th June at 2.30pm

Register free at **[educationfest.co.uk](https://educationfest.co.uk)**

## Reviews

## BOOK REVIEW



## Addressing Educational Disadvantage in Schools and Colleges: The Essex Way

**Author:** Marc Rowland

**Publisher:** John Catt Educational

**Reviewer:** John Bryant, headteacher, Arthur Bugler School

As an Essex headteacher, saying this book is a gem opens me up to accusations of bias. But anyone who's met me knows that endorsing my local education authority is far from a given. So having said that, this book – put together by Essex County Council and Unity Schools Partnership – is precisely that: a gem.

For a start, it couldn't be timelier. Its aim is to "support efforts to address the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on learning". Given the impact of Covid and the very limited recovery package on offer from government, there's a desperate need for good advice for how to achieve that. Then, its overall message is powerfully positive; no reader will be left in any doubt that what happens in our schools and classrooms really matters.

But most importantly, *The Essex Way* really delivers. It's full of excellent examples from schools doing great things, and a wealth of practical take-aways for busy school leaders. The overarching message is "do fewer things well", and it is perfectly complemented by a clear, succinct format that breaks interventions down into small, manageable steps.

And whatever it is you're thinking about tackling as a leader in your school, there's something here for you. I struggle to think of a single aspect of a child's educational journey that isn't covered by it, all driven throughout by best practice by real teachers and leaders in real schools who are having real impact. It's a curated list of learning

experiences that have brought about significant improvements in long-term opportunity for disadvantaged learners (and their better-off peers), coupled with insightful commentary on how others might adapt them for their settings and contexts.

Throughout, the book's focus is relentlessly on equity. But while the contributors are unequivocal that supporting disadvantaged learners is everybody's responsibility, they are also very clear that doing so will, in fact, improve outcomes for all learners.

It is important to note that the strategies and ideas explored here really aren't rocket science. In fact, it's likely many won't be new to you at all. But in our age of evidence-based education, there is real power in presenting these schools' experiences so clearly. Examples of implementation have their own value as an evidence base, which we shouldn't underestimate. So while I found that the book supported a lot of what I already knew, I was delighted by how much it made me think about what we already do.

The reason it did that so well is that all of the strategies therein are presented by people currently working in schools. So not only are they tried-and-tested, but the comments from the staff who implemented them really give a sense of the context,

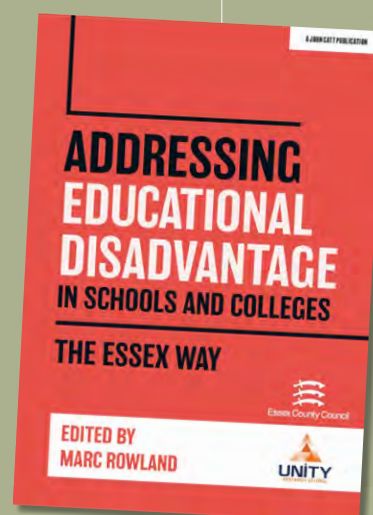
the challenges and the key questions to consider before following in their footsteps.

Refreshingly, in fact, every contributor offers an honest reflection of their specific improvement experience, and none shies away from those factors with the potential to hinder a positive impact. And because each chapter consistently refers back to the teaching and learning experience with a refrain of visible consistency, it's clear that the intention is always to ensure that the positive impact is felt by all, disadvantaged or not.

Another theme that runs through the book is the need for the whole community to be at the heart of any implementation plans. Any strategy or intervention can work anywhere. Equally, it can fail anywhere. The key to success is buy-in from parents and other stakeholders, and there are plenty of examples here of how that can be achieved, and the importance of flexibility, adaptation and a listening ear.

The book had me reflecting that it's one thing to know what gaps need to be closed, but that closing them very much depends on understanding how they appeared in the first place.

So while our focus is on the national recovery we need, the answers will be local. In that regard, the only way isn't Essex – the book's authors would agree – but *The Essex Way* can certainly be an inspiration.





# Reviews



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

@5Naureen

## What is school leadership?

@TomRees\_77 and @Barker\_J

This is the first in a series of blogs in which Tom Rees and Jennifer Barker will explore school leadership. Here, they start by giving us some statistics for context: 200,000 people work in school leadership positions in England, but by 2022 almost one in four schools will be facing a shortage of school leaders.

When people talk of school leaders, they often focus on CEOs and heads, but the large majority are actually middle leaders. And because their responsibilities and the contexts in which they work vary hugely, knowing how best to support them to develop is not easy.

Rees and Barker make the point that although classroom teaching is increasingly becoming an evidence-informed profession, more needs to be done as far as school leadership is concerned. They go on to offer three models of leadership: transformational, instructional and distributed. I'm already looking forward to reading examples and exploring the pros and cons of each.

## TOP BLOGS of the week



### Papering over the reading gap

@HoratioSpeaks

This is an important blog by James Murphy, in which he sets out his concerns about the use of coloured overlays as an intervention strategy for pupils with reading difficulties. First, he says, there is no scientific evidence for this practice. Then there is the fact that many teachers seem unaware of the research. And lastly, there's the question of using limited resources on a poorly (or indeed un-) evidenced intervention.

Murphy goes on to tackle the "even if it doesn't work, it doesn't do any harm" defence. He counters, convincingly, that the harm is in medicalising a reading problem, which labels pupils and makes it appear unsolvable by teachers. Instead, Murphy would like us to concentrate on teaching, rather than using this "sticking plaster".

As a governor, I will definitely be applying Murphy's approach to other intervention strategies to ensure that all our resources – including teachers' time – is deployed as effectively as possible.

### What are we doing? Are we all doing it?

@BenNewmark

This blog is aimed at school leaders, but reading it I was struck by how much

governors and trustees could benefit from it too. Here, Ben Newmark writes about lesson visits and what they can and can't tell us.

The purpose of lesson visits, he argues, is not to judge whether progress is being made or if pupils have learned anything. Learning is invisible and happens over time. Instead, Newmark proposes that lesson visits should be used as temperature checks to see if the environment is calm and orderly. He also describes using these visits to gauge whether pupils know what they are meant to be doing and if they are doing what the teacher wants them to do.

A calm, orderly classroom, where pupils are on task and understand what is expected of them, doesn't necessarily mean learning is taking place. But without those conditions, it almost certainly won't. That's an argument I'll be keeping in mind when I next visit classrooms.

### Enunciate darling!

@dogspaws23

When the country went into lockdown, governors and trustee meetings went online. In this blog, Fee Stagg looks to the future and asks about plans for meetings in a post-lockdown world. Will governors and trustees go back to all meetings being face-to-face, or will some opt for a hybrid model?

Assuming the latter, Stagg then gives her top tips for effective hybrid meetings. She would like people to remember that even if someone is participating via a video link, they are still in the meeting. Equally important to remember is to speak facing the screen as that makes it easier for people joining in virtually to follow the conversation. Stagg also urges boards to consider investing in technology to support their decision to hold at least some meetings virtually.

Stagg's other tips are standard meeting fare, but easy to forget in the context of a hybrid meeting. Which makes it altogether a very useful reminder for all involved.



# A wellbeing focus with genuine impact

We're embedding a culture of wellbeing that truly lives and breathes across our schools. Discover our resources for educators and families, created with leading wellbeing experts, at [cognita.com](https://cognita.com)

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An inspiring world of education



# Research

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

## What is self-efficacy, and how does it affect job satisfaction and retention?

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

Published in 2014, the Why Teach report found that two of the main reasons people go into teaching are to make a difference, and because they think they'll be good at it. It's worthwhile, therefore, making sure we explicitly ensure teachers have the chance to feel successful in their roles.

An incredibly challenging 15 months have certainly highlighted what a difference teachers and schools make to children's lives. But that narrative has been too easily negated by some journalists and politicians choosing to create an unfounded rhetoric of teachers 'failing' their pupils. So the last few weeks of term present an ideal time to let our teachers know we recognise what an amazing job they've done.

### Building self-efficacy

Interestingly, teachers with higher self-efficacy - their sense of competence in their role - tend also to be more effective. Of course, it might be that this is simply a case of teachers being self-aware; perhaps those who are more effective just know that they are!

But research suggests that it is more of a two-way relationship than that. There is an argument that teachers who are more confident feel better able to make decisions based on what is most effective for their pupils, rather than what they think is expected of them.

This applies at a whole-school level, too. Schools with higher levels of collective teacher efficacy - where teachers believe that they and their colleagues are doing a good job - also have better pupil outcomes.

Knowing we make a difference is what makes teaching such a rewarding career, but



it can also make it easy to feel there is always more to do. With ever-growing demands on teachers' time and personal resources (looking at you, TAGs!), workload can spiral out of control.

In that context, being able to recognise the limits of what you can be held responsible for can be difficult, but being able to self-regulate and maintain work-life boundaries is vital to avoiding burnout.

As school leaders, maintaining teacher job satisfaction and retaining staff requires us to ensure colleagues' workloads are manageable as well as genuinely contributing to improved outcomes. Ultimately, doing what is right for students involves both.

### Supporting retention of early career teachers

Early career teachers face a particular challenge. We know there is an incredibly steep learning curve in the first three years of a teaching career. Effectiveness in terms of impact on pupil outcomes

increases rapidly during this time, before slowing later in teachers' careers.

Unsurprisingly, given the link between self-efficacy, job satisfaction and retention, this is also a time when retention is poor. Too many teachers leave before they have a chance to develop and really feel good at their jobs. Interrupting the vicious cycle that leads to this exodus is both a moral and a practical imperative, and is likely to involve providing a great deal more support for new teachers.

The Early Career Framework is not yet well understood, but once rolled out it has the potential to play a big part by ensuring that all teachers are entitled to time, support and opportunities for development. But the role of mentors will continue to be key, not just as 'instructional coaches', but as sounding boards, commiserators, celebrators and champions, supporting not just their charges' effectiveness, but their job satisfaction too.

### Celebrating and championing our teachers

Making sure teachers feel confident in their practice, and celebrating and championing both individual teachers and the profession as a whole, is more powerful than we often realise. Talking them down is too, which makes it particularly irresponsible on the part of politicians and journalists, who should know better.

A growing list of expert teaching qualifications is encouraging, and this week's National Thank a Teacher Day is important too. But retaining teachers and continually improving our schools relies on the everyday recognition of what our colleagues do and the difference that makes - and we all play a part in that.



# WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

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

## MONDAY

It's fair to say that tensions are running high between schools and exam boards at the moment, and technical issues with the grade submission process last week compounded things further.

Given this tension, one would hope exam boards would go out of their way to avoid accusations of having made the lives of school staff any harder than they already are this year. But AQA clearly didn't get the memo.

Anger erupted on Twitter as heads and exams officers received late-night emails demanding sampling evidence, and giving them until 10am on Wednesday to comply.

As several frustrated leaders pointed out, this would have left them with just one full working day to compile the evidence, not the 48 hours Ofqual had told boards to give them.

AQA eventually apologised and said the deadline had been set in error.

Pearson Edexcel, which it's fair to say has had an easier couple of weeks and fewer technical hitches, couldn't resist a dig at its competitor on Twitter.

"From tomorrow at 8am, centres will have details of the sample they must send to us. The 48 hours starts from when the email is sent, which is why we're sending emails first thing and not overnight." Savage.

\*\*\*

Select committees are supposed to be models of bipartisanship, with parties working together to hold government departments to account and ensure effective government.

But a split in the education committee

along party lines became even more fractious this week, following the release of a controversial report on left-behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The report recommended that schools should "consider whether the promotion of politically controversial terminology, including white privilege, is consistent with their duties" under the Equality Act 2010 – although they do not pinpoint which specific duties.

But minutes in the report show the committee was far from united on that issue and many others, with the four Labour MPs voting against the line on white privilege, and eventually voting to disown the report entirely.

## TUESDAY

Pastor Berridge continued to preach the MAT gospel this week as she addressed the Sixth Form Colleges Association annual conference.

The academies minister told the event that multi-academy trusts were "contracted to advance education in the public benefit, to act for the benefit of the wider community, and not just those under their roof".

The Tory peer has been on a mission to remind academy trusts to be more outward-looking. We suspect this has something to do with her boss Gavin Williamson wanting more schools to be in "families".

She even admitted academy conversion remains for some schools a "frustrating" and "complex" process. But it remains to be seen what, if anything, the government will do to make things easier.

## WEDNESDAY

Gavin Williamson has been in the job for almost two years now, but he's still struggling to tell his Ofsted from his Ofqual.

The ed sec inadvertently mentioned the exams regulator instead of the schools inspectorate during a grilling by the Parliamentary education committee.

## FRIDAY

We would like to take this opportunity to wish the education secretary a very happy birthday.

How will Gav be celebrating reaching the grand age of 45? He told a conference this week that he would "probably be doing some constituency work", adding: "It's never glamorous".

Williamson also revealed that he thinks people "cease to celebrate birthdays" when they get to 45, which will come as huge and terrifying news to the greetings cards industry.

## THURSDAY

Schools now know which snack to stock up on ahead of the return to inspections.

Asked at the Festival of Education which biscuit she was most excited to be offered on an inspection, Amanda Spielman confessed she enjoyed a "ginger nut tingle".





# Chief Executive Officer

Salary: L28-L35 (£79,748 – £94,669)

Start Date: from January 2022 or earlier if possible



The Skylark Partnership (TSP) is seeking to appoint an exceptional leader, with a strong track record of school improvement, in a setting that includes SEND and/or alternative provision, to join us as our new Chief Executive Officer (CEO). We currently have two medical alternative provision academies in our Trust, Hospital and Outreach Education AP Academy in Northamptonshire and the Cherry Tree Learning Centre in Dudley, rated outstanding and good respectively by Ofsted, prior to conversion.

We are very aspirational for our young people and do not allow their medical or mental health difficulties to limit their potential. We are passionate about making a difference to them and their families, giving hope for the future. We are keen to grow the Trust and encourage other alternative provisions for young people with medical needs to join us.

Our Trust is defined by our core values of resilience, respect, co-operation, compassion, honesty, trust, and hope, along with our ethical leadership. This is a rare leadership opportunity for someone to make their mark and contribute to ensuring that TSP continues as an educational influencer both regionally and nationally.

As an experienced professional, you will be able to demonstrate strategic leadership and excellent people management skills. You will lead and promote the Trust and be a driving force for innovation. You will be able to demonstrate extensive staff development experience and expertise. Most importantly, you will have a passion for education for young people with medical needs, ensuring that they have equal rights to and in line with their peers. You will need the determination to make a positive difference and commitment to continuous improvement across the Trust.

As an exceptional leader, you will be able to deliver and lead on the TSP vision and strategy. You will have the support of a committed Trust Board for your own professional development which will include mentoring and induction. You will be leading a passionate team of senior leaders across both academies to secure the best outcomes for our young people.

You will be an excellent ambassador with a proven ability to form productive partnerships, particularly with health colleagues that support the long-term future of our highly ambitious MAT. We are looking for an outstanding individual to lead us into the next phase of our development. Emphasis on staff wellbeing is an integral part of our culture and we provide a highly supportive working environment.

If you are inspired by what you read in this pack, Trustees would encourage you to arrange an informal and confidential virtual meeting to discuss the post in more detail with the Chair, Frances Jones, prior to applying.

This appointment is supported by ASCL's Leadership Appointment Service.

If you feel this opportunity is for you, please contact Bal at ASCL Leadership Appointment Service on 07492 353368 or email [Bal.Kaur-Pierpoint@ascl.org](mailto:Bal.Kaur-Pierpoint@ascl.org). uk for further information. To arrange an informal and confidential conversation / virtual meeting about this post with Frances, please contact Bal.

**Please email your completed application form to [s.valentine-swallow@skylarkpartnershiptrust.co.uk](mailto:s.valentine-swallow@skylarkpartnershiptrust.co.uk).**

**Closing date for applications is: Monday 12th July at 12 noon**

**Shortlisting will take place on: Monday 12th July**

**Interviews will be held over three days between 13th – 16th July. Days 1 and 2 will be remote**

# HEADTEACHER

## THE CAMBRIDGE PARK ACADEMY

From January 2022

Salary: Leadership Group 7: L24 – L39\* (£74,295 - £106,176) pay award pending

Salary Range: L26 – L32 (£78,025 - £90,379) Salary negotiable for the right candidate

Responsible to: CEO and Humber Education Trust Board



Due to the retirement of the current post holder, we are looking for a committed and ambitious Headteacher with a proven record of sustained school improvement to lead The Cambridge Park Academy.

The Cambridge Park Academy is a special school which caters for children and young people aged 3 to 19 with a range of severe and complex learning needs. A high proportion of learners have autistic spectrum conditions.

If you are innovative, creative, forward thinking, and have a passion for working with staff and communities to ensure children with additional needs get the education they deserve, this may be the opportunity for you to make a real difference.

For an informal discussion regarding the post and Humber Education Trust please contact Rachel Wilkes, CEO Humber Education Trust on 01482 755674 or at [rwilkes@het.academy](mailto:rwilkes@het.academy)

Visits to the school are welcomed and can be arranged via the

school office on 01472 230110. Further information about the school can be found on the school website [www.cambridgepark.co.uk](http://www.cambridgepark.co.uk)

Application forms, job descriptions and person specifications are available from **Sharon Herrick**, Human Resources, Humber Education Trust at [sherrick@het.academy](mailto:sherrick@het.academy)

You can find out more about our Trust at [www.humbereducationtrust.co.uk](http://www.humbereducationtrust.co.uk) and can follow us on Twitter @HumberEdTrust

Electronic, signed application forms or a hard copy must be returned to Sharon Herrick in line with the timetable shown below.

- **Closing Date: Monday 28th June 12pm**
- **Interviews will take place w/c 5th July 2021**
- **You will be interviewed by members of the HET Trust Board and local governors from the school.**



## TRAINER (HOME-BASED, MATERNITY COVER) (13 MONTHS, FULL TIME)



**The Bell Foundation is a Cambridge based educational charity working to overcome exclusion through language education and is delivering its vision through four programmes which focus on pupils, young people and those involved with the criminal justice system for whom English is an Additional Language.**

The Bell Foundation has a rewarding opportunity for a full-time, home-based online Trainer to work within a growing, dynamic team to develop EAL training and resources for schools and teachers on both its UK-based EAL Programme and its Language for Results International Programme.

**Trainer:** £29,217- £33,913 per annum

**Hours:** 35 hours per week, Monday to Friday (13-month maternity cover)

You will play a key role in both the development and implementation of training as part of the Foundation's EAL and International Programmes. You will also support the Criminal Justice and ESOL Programmes to develop training and resources.

You will have a proven track record of running high quality EAL teacher training to schools and experience of working in a comparable role. You will have

experience of creating digital content and resources and a sound understanding of what constitutes effective and evidence-informed CPD.

With excellent digital, communication and interpersonal skills, you will be a self-starter with a can-do attitude with excellent attention to detail and an eye for quality with the ability to critically evaluate and review.

This is a home-based role with one day per month from The Bell Foundation Cambridge office.

### To apply

To download the application form please visit:

<https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/about-us/vacancies/>

The Bell Foundation is committed to promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment. A DBS check will be requested in the event of a successful application.

**Closing date:** 17:30 on Thursday 8 July

**Online interviews:** Thursday 15 and Friday 16 July 2021



## Teaching Institute Programme and Project Manager

An exciting opportunity to join a high performing academy trust as we extend our reach from West Yorkshire into the North West. Dixons Teaching Institute provides first class training and development for staff in our academies. It is also home to Bradford Research School, part of the EEF Research School Network and a DfE Behaviour Hub. We work across the North West to develop evidence informed teaching and leadership. We are now looking for an experienced programme and project manager to manage the professional development provision we offer and support our rapid growth.

### Why choose Dixons Academies Trust?

- Values driven
- Almost 30 years of challenging educational and social disadvantage
- Ambitious for every child and highly inclusive
- Always in the top 5 nationally for progress at secondary
- Committed to recruiting a diverse workforce
- Exceptional colleagues will support you to be your best
- Low staff turnover

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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# World-class leadership development for schools



## Shifting mindsets, unlocking potential and building leadership capability

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*"The most effective professional development I have ever taken part in. The programme has had a deep and long-lasting impact on my leadership style and on my personal well-being."*

Ian Nurser, Executive Headteacher, St. Peter's CE School

*"My coaching has allowed me to take a step back, untangle things, see things more clearly and therefore make better, more strategic plans moving forward."*

Susan Douglas, CEO, Eden Academy Trust

*"Within minutes of talking to my coach it was clear that the process was going to be of huge benefit to me. To sum it up, my coach just got me and got where I could develop and most importantly gave me tools to be able to do it."*

Matt Sealby, Director of Learning for Key Stage 5, Littlehampton Academy

BTS Spark is the not-for-profit education practice within award-winning, global leadership company BTS



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