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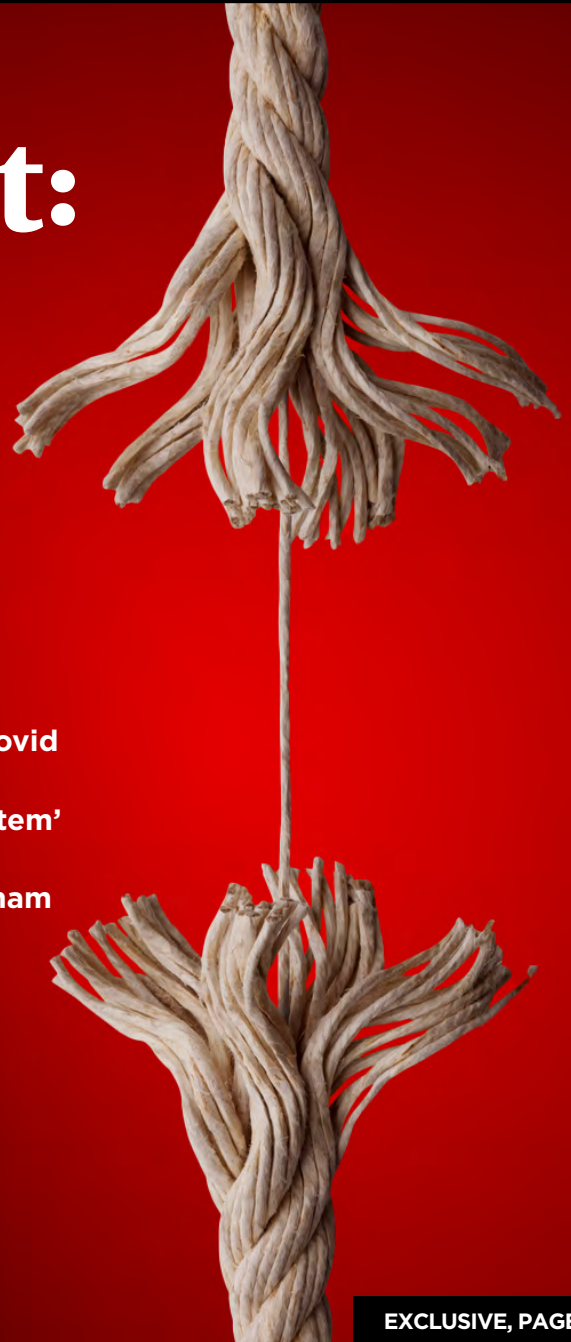
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- Families 'in crisis' as widespread failures revealed
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- DfE parachutes SEND commissioner into Birmingham



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Meet the news team



John Dickens
EDITOR

@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLS WEEK.CO.UK



JL Dutaut
COMMISSIONING
EDITOR

@DUTAUT
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@LSECT.COM



Jess Staufenberg
COMMISSIONING
EDITOR

@STAUFENBERGJ
JESS.STAUFGENBERG@SCHOOLS WEEK.CO.UK



Freddie Whittaker
CHIEF REPORTER

@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLS WEEK.CO.UK



Samantha Booth
SENIOR REPORTER

@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLS WEEK.CO.UK



James Carr
SENIOR REPORTER

@JAMESCARR_93
JAMES.CARR@LSECT.COM



Tom Belger
SENIOR REPORTER

@TOM_BELGER
TOM.BELGER@SCHOOLS WEEK.CO.UK



Nicky Phillips
HEAD DESIGNER

@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Shane Mann
MANAGING DIRECTOR

@SHANERMANN
SHANE.MANN@LSECT.COM

THE TEAM | Designer: Simon Kay | Sales Manager: Bridget Stockdale | Sales executive: Clare Halliday | Operations and Finance Manager: Victoria Boyle
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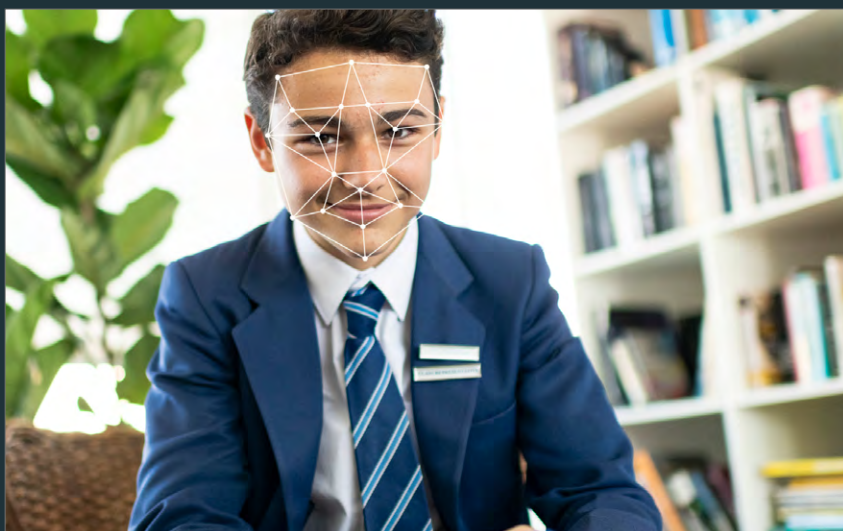
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Schools no longer recognise facial recognition



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INVESTIGATION

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How the system is failing children with special needs

JOHN DICKENS & JAMES CARR

@SCHOOLSWEEK

EXCLUSIVE

Support for pupils with special educational needs in seven of eight areas visited by Ofsted after inspections restarted this year had “significant areas of weakness”.

The shocking reports detail how vulnerable children and their families are left to fall into crisis before getting help.

Youngsters are waiting more than two years for support in some areas, with delays exacerbated by the pandemic, Ofsted found.

It comes as the government this week sent a SEND commissioner to remedy failures in Birmingham – the first intervention of its kind.

Ofsted said the reports were “very concerning. As before the pandemic, we’re seeing children and young people with special educational needs, and their families, being let down by the system.

“In some places, these shortcomings have been made worse by Covid-19. Moving forward, it’s vital that children and families are given the priority they deserve.”

More councils failing

Schools Week found Ofsted has completed 16 local area SEND inspections since May. Inspections had been on pause because of the pandemic.

Of the eight areas visited for the first time, seven were told to produce a written statement of action because of “significant areas of weakness in the local area’s practice”.

Another eight councils already found to be failing were revisited. Just two of those had made sufficient progress in all their areas of weakness.

The findings suggest the pandemic has caused further failings. Previously about half of councils visited were found to have “serious weaknesses”.

Simon Knight, the joint head of Frank Wise School in Oxfordshire and a national leader for Whole School Send, said the pandemic had “magnified the failings in a system that was already struggling to meet the requirements and rights of too many children”.

‘Too many children reach crisis point’

In a report published on Tuesday, services



Birmingham county council

in Rotherham were found to be failing, with identifying SEND among primary pupils not consistent.

“Too many children and young people reach crisis point,” the report said. “This puts strain on an already saturated system, especially as pupils enter key stage 3.”

Ofsted found eight areas of “significant weakness” at Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) council after a visit in June.

Widespread failures prevented youngsters from accessing the appropriate support in a “timely fashion. Families commonly end up in crisis before their circumstances become properly assessed and understood.”

Youngsters wait years for help

In Haringey, found to have three areas of “serious weaknesses” in a report published on October 8, waiting times for assessments to identify autism were “too long”.

“This has more recently been exacerbated by the pandemic,” inspectors said. Assessment waiting times for five to 12-year-olds was, in some circumstances, “more than two years”.

Some children in the north London borough who needed to be assessed by speech and language therapists as part of their autism checks were also waiting “too long for a potential diagnosis, with little or no support provided” during the delays.

In Richmond upon Thames in west London, another area found to be failing, children were

waiting “too long” for autism assessments. Covid had led to “further delays in diagnosis”.

In Warwickshire, waiting times for autism assessments and services for those awaiting assessments or support were one of five “serious weaknesses” exposed in a September report.

While autism was identified early in primary school, children often failed to get the required support until secondary school. It left “too many families ... struggling to cope”.

Inspectors also flagged “long” waiting times for educational psychologist and child and adolescent mental health services assessments.

‘Children discharged without support’

In other areas, children identified for help were not able to access it.

There were “significant gaps” in the speech and language therapy service for under-5s in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, found in a September report to have four areas of “significant weakness”.

“Some young children have been assessed and then discharged as there was no service available,” the report stated.

In BCP, families “still have to fight for what their children ... need”.

More families had no choice but to fight for the support they were entitled to in court. The number of SEND tribunal appeals registered in 2019-20 was 7,917 – a 13 per cent rise on the previous year.



INVESTIGATION

Staggeringly, just 190 of the 3,770 outcomes handed down last year were upheld in favour of the council (5 per cent).

Graham Quinn, chair of Special Schools' Voice, said it was a "dreadful position" for families. The "gatekeeping" of support by councils "is not supporting our families in what they need for their children", he said.

'Pressure building on schools'

North Somerset was revisited in May, but found to have only made sufficient progress in two of eight "significant weaknesses" identified at an initial inspection in June 2018.

Poor practice meant a "disproportionate number of children ... travel through the system with unidentified needs, leading to them presenting with significantly more challenging behaviours than they might".

This is "fuelling the view" that youngsters "need specialist provision when they do not... Consequently, pressure is building on the specialist sector to fill the gap in an unsustainable way."

A lack of services for SEND pupils in BCP meant children were "sometimes seen as a nuisance or too complex for schools to support. As a result, their mental health is negatively affected."

This had a "direct impact on the wellbeing of their wider family, who often are left to pick up the pieces, fight for needs to be met or look for alternative approaches for their children to access education".

Ofsted also found exclusions of SEND pupils were "too high". A need to save money at the council also meant specialist equipment was not forthcoming leaving provision for children "compromised".

SEND commissioner sent into Birmingham

Birmingham was issued with a statutory direction on Friday. The Department for Education said the council was "failing to perform to an adequate standard in some or all" of its SEND functions.

Birmingham was found to have 13 "significant areas of weakness" in 2018. A reinspection in May found sufficient progress had been made in just one of those areas.

Councillor Sharon Thompson said Birmingham was "committed to being transparent" about its SEND services and would work to improve the "fundamental weaknesses in the system".

John Coughlan, the former chief executive of Hampshire County Council, has been



parachuted in by the DfE as SEND commissioner. Birmingham must comply with his instructions and submit an "accelerated progress plan".

A DfE spokesperson said it would not "hesitate to take action" when councils were failing. Ensuring SEND pupils get the right services is a "government priority".

But the government has today been accused by the parliamentary public accounts committee (PAC) of an "unacceptable" delay on the promised SEND review.

The government has missed three of its own deadlines to publish the report. PAC has demanded a written update on progress after the "continued failure".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

'Pushback' sees schools evade looked-after children duty

Virtual school heads lack the powers to get children in care the education they need in the face of "pushback" from schools, MPs have been warned.

Patrick Ward, chair of the National Association of Virtual School Heads, told the education committee councils were "failing as a corporate parent" because they were often not using statutory powers to secure school places.

Virtual school heads have a duty to promote the educational achievement of children in care and manage their pupil premium funding.

Legally, schools have to prioritise looked-after children in admissions. Councils can resort to forcing schools to take them, but not all councils delegate the powers to virtual school heads.

In a survey of the professionals in March, seen by *Schools Week*, most said their councils had been forced to initiate the

direction process. Around 30 per cent did so "once or twice a year".

"When you try and place a young person in a mainstream school, a vulnerable young person, you get a lot of pushback," Ward told MPs.

"Schools essentially do not want to take these young people because they believe there will be a negative impact then on their outcomes."

Ward also warned the government did not collect data on looked-after children missing in education, leading to a lack of accountability for councils and virtual school heads.

"No one holds a director of children's services or a local authority to account, or a virtual school for that matter, over how many of their children are missing in education or in unregulated provision. The department doesn't know. The stats aren't held anywhere."

Calvin Kipling, virtual school head in Darlington, said there was "often a hesitancy" from schools "around the impact that young person may have in their school".

And Matthew Cooke, another virtual head, from Suffolk, said that "where there is a sense from the school that it's going to be a challenge, they will put in as many barriers as they can".

But Paul Whiteman, leader of the NAHT, said schools needed "sufficient support available to support each child's needs. If children are placed in schools that can't meet their needs effectively and support them fully to be able to learn, then that is not a good place for the child."

And Margaret Mulholland, from the ASCL leadership union, said children in care "can have complex needs and it is important that the school in which they are placed has the expertise and capacity to meet those needs".

NEWS

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New alliance to stop schools being swept under MAT

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

Five single-academy trusts have launched an alliance to ward off the erosion of each school's "individuality" as the government continues its push towards MATs.

Leaders behind the West Kent Single Academy Trust Alliance want to sustain ties strengthened during Covid, and to face the "increasing pressure" of the government's multi-academy trust drive.

The model is believed to be the first of its kind, with a strategic board composed of each school's senior leaders, a memorandum of understanding and a shared fund. Contributions will reflect a school's size and support received.

Leaders hope it will facilitate more school-to-school support, staff career and training opportunities, the sharing of best practice and specialisms, back-office collaboration and greater buying power.

Hadlow Rural Community School, Hillview School for Girls, Knole Academy, Tonbridge Grammar School and The Trinity School hope the partnership unveiled this week will be "fully functioning and sustainable" by the end of this academic year.

Hilary Burkett, Hillview's head, said single-academy trusts had often been "insular". But the pandemic had "forced us to be more open", with the five heads meeting regularly

to share ideas, information and support.

This revealed common aims, and built trust and desire to show "system leadership", according to Rosemary Joyce, Tonbridge Grammar's head. Strong relationships had been built, despite the diversity of the schools - selective and non-selective, mixed and single-sex, rural and urban.

Sir David Carter, the former national schools commissioner, said co-operation on areas such as CPD and procurement could prove beneficial, but questioned why the schools would not create a multi-academy trust.

Such alliances were "not what the government has in mind", and if any school's performance slid significantly, it could still face pressure to join an MAT.

The schools considered other structures, including "flat MATs" - without a chief executive - and federations. But FAQ documents for parents stress "individuality", rather than absorption into a MAT and "narrowing educational choice" locally.

Joyce said her "outstanding" school initially converted after an invitation from Michael Gove, the former education secretary, on the basis "school leaders are best placed to develop their school system and experience".

The alliance will have no chief executive and there will be no uniform, name changes or bailouts for members. Only financially strong schools could join in future.

Burkett said schools were also "not in the right place" to create an MAT as they tried to emerge from the "Covid nightmare".

Paul Boxall, Hadlow's head, said their collaboration was "something the DfE would want trusts to be doing", but potential departmental opinions were "secondary" to outcomes for students and staff. Ninety-eight per cent of staff are reported to have welcomed it.

The regional schools commissioner was aware of the move, Burkett said, but had not given any "major response".

"Whether it'll be seen as acceptable - in the end it'll be out of our hands. But we believe we can work together well."

Peter Read, a former local head whose blog first revealed the plans, also welcomed the alliance, saying it showed there were "other models" to joining large trusts.

"But it's difficult for schools in the current climate. It happens these schools have strong leaders, but if it were tried with schools in continued trouble, the model would fail."

Carter warned of a "risk you don't challenge yourself" in strong single-academy trusts, even in partnerships. Single leadership in MATs also gave authority for hard decisions.

But Boxall said the alliance would provide challenge with "collective decisions", rather than the risk of decisions "unacceptable to one school". Member schools were also free to withdraw, unlike members of an MAT.



Hilary Burkett

Rosemary Joyce

Paul Boxall

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Plan to move towards more academies 'still the same'

The Department for Education considered introducing new powers to force all schools in struggling local authority areas to become academies, it has emerged.

A briefing paper from the public relations firm PLMR this week said area-specific compulsory moves to school trusts - for example where councils fell into difficulty or results were "stubbornly low" - were a "likely" policy development "based on indicators from the Williamson era".

In these instances, "all schools could be asked or ordered to convert, either with a school trust of their choice or one chosen for them".

Gavin Williamson, the former education secretary, said earlier this year that it was his "vision" for all schools to be in "strong multi-academy trusts".

Two sources close to policy-making told *Schools Week* such an approach had been under consideration during Williamson's tenure. The position of Nadhim Zahawi, his successor, is not known.

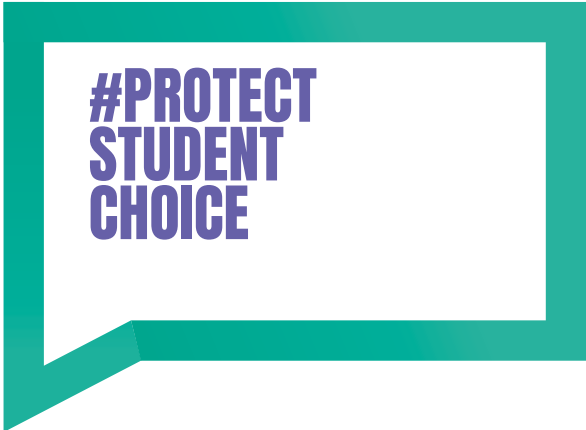
Any move to force schools to become academies would require a change in the law. Currently, academy orders can only be issued if a maintained school has been rated 'inadequate'.

It comes after Zahawi told the National Association of Head Teachers' annual conference earlier this month that he would not set "arbitrary deadlines" for structural reform. He wanted to "move forward together" with the sector.

Some have taken his comments as a softening of the government's stance.

But PLMR, which works with many multi-academy trusts, predicted the "academy trajectory is still the same".

Williamson and the DfE were approached for comment.



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NEWS

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Facial recognition systems off the menu

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

At least two schools in England are reversing their plans to install facial recognition systems in their canteens after a Scottish council faced widespread criticism for its use of the technology.

Nine schools in North Ayrshire launched the biometric systems this week to allow pupils to make contactless payments for their lunches.

The move sparked a backlash from campaigners and prompted the UK's data privacy watchdog to make enquiries and advise schools to use a "less intrusive approach".

This advice has led to schools in England rethinking their approach.

'We weren't aware of the advice'

CRB Cunninghams, the cashless catering company, is behind the scheme in Scotland, but also provides facial recognition technology to 27 English schools.

Another 16 schools were preparing to go live with the system, but *Schools Week* understands two have pulled out and opted to use fingerprint technology.

Great Academy Ashton, in Ashton-under-Lyne, had planned to roll out facial recognition systems after half-term and had parental consent from all pupils. It currently uses fingerprint technology to increase speed of purchase and reduce cash handling.

This week the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) warned that "organisations need to carefully consider the necessity and proportionality of collecting biometric data before they do so".

Schools should consider "using a different approach if the same goal can be achieved in a less intrusive manner".

David Waugh, the head of Great Academy Ashton, said: "The ICO is saying it's essentially overkill in terms of data security and the use of facial recognition as a data source for catering in schools.

"Because I've now been made aware of the [views of] the ICO we're obviously acting upon that."



Backlash against 'border-style' checks

There are wider concerns, too.

Silkie Carlo, a director of Big Brother Watch, said no child should go through "border-style identity checks" to get a school meal. "This is highly sensitive, personal data that children should be taught to protect."

David Swanston, CRB Cunninghams' managing director, confirmed a second school had also decided to revert to the fingerprint system.

"We went through the same thing when we introduced fingerprints until people realised it was completely contained in the school," he said. CRB launched its fingerprints system in 2006, now used by about 2,000 schools.

"Fingerprints are normalised now... Everyone wants to be reassured that they're doing the right thing."

Swanston told *Schools Week* the facial recognition system was developed after schools requested an alternative no-touch biometrics solution because of fears over Covid. It was launched in June.

He understood the response of campaigners, but said: "You've got to take it for what it is being used for, and in this case it's purely for ease for the user."

Speed of processing pupils was a main driver, he added.

On data concerns, he said that pupil biometric data, in this case eight to 12 points on their face and the distance between them, was stored on a secure database and linked to a student number.

It was not a live scanning system, only picking up faces when the operator touched the screen.

Each database was unique to the school and usually stored on the school's server. The data was not shared with any outside parties and biometric data was protected behind military grade encryption, Swanston said.

"It's only used for cashless payments in a closed loop environment... all it does is link a person to their account in the school."

Under the Protections of Freedoms Act 2012 schools must seek consent from parents of pupils under the age of 18 if they wish to use the child's biometric data.

It costs up to £12,000 for a school to install a fingerprint biometrics system, plus up to £3,000 a year, depending on the size of the school and package ordered.

The Department for Education said it was up to schools whether they used facial recognition or other biometrics.

POLITICS

Former minister Gibb reveals plan for a model history curriculum

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

The government is to launch a model history curriculum with the help of a well-known subject expert, the former schools minister has suggested.

Nick Gibb told an Ark Schools event on Wednesday that he had been working on a model curriculum with Christine Counsell, a former Inspiration Trust director of education who more recently has worked for the David Ross Education Trust.

It comes after the former minister said earlier this year that "there is a case" for a model history curriculum, amid mounting pressure to teach more black history in schools.

"In recent years I've been working with subject experts and teachers on a model music curriculum, [and] a model history curriculum we've just launched with Christine Counsell," Gibb said, "going into the kind of detail that we did in the

primary curriculum, key stage 1 and 2, in the secondary curriculum. Not part of the national curriculum, just trying to spread and exemplify what the profession is doing in terms of best practice. And that is something I think we need to continue — that process."

But the DfE this week remained tight-lipped on its plans. A spokesperson said: "We introduced a model music curriculum to support schools in teaching the subject, and ensure all children and young people can benefit from an excellent music education. We are exploring how this model can be applied to other subjects."

In his first event since being axed as schools minister, Gibb also claimed some headteachers had "no interest in the curriculum" before the new Ofsted framework was brought in.

The Conservative MP said the new

framework put a "greater emphasis" on curriculum, meaning leaders saw it as "far more important".

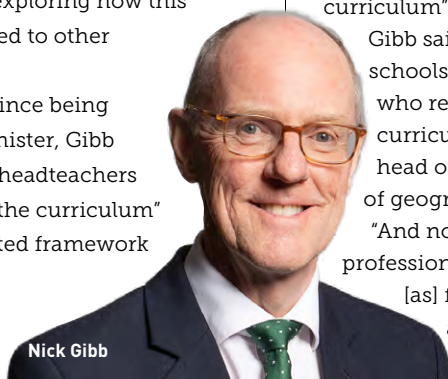
Gibb was sacked from his ministerial role last month in Boris Johnson's reshuffle, leaving the Department for Education having spent around nine of the last 11 years in Sanctuary Buildings.

Gibb said key stage 3 had been "heavily criticised by Ofsted over the years as being wasted years and so on, I think they sometimes call it".

But he added that "of course we then have the Ofsted 2019 education inspection framework, with its greater emphasis on curriculum".

Gibb said he could "remember visiting schools and meeting headteachers who really had no interest in the curriculum, this was a matter for the head of maths, head of English, head of geography.

"And now I think all schools and all professionals are taking the curriculum [as] far more important. It is absolutely core to what children are learning."



Nick Gibb

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Don't teach 'white privilege' as fact, DfE tells heads

Schools should not teach "contested views about white privilege" as fact, the government has warned, with ministers planning new guidance for schools to help "meet their duties".

Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, has submitted the government's response to a report by the parliamentary education committee, "The forgotten: how white working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it".

The report sparked accusations that MPs were trying to start a culture war when it recommended that schools consider whether promoting "politically controversial terminology" such as "white privilege" was in line with their duties under the Equality Act.

MPs also recommended that the Department for Education "take steps to ensure that young people are not inadvertently being inducted into political movements". They also

wanted "clear guidance for schools" on how to deliver teaching on these complex issues in a "balanced, impartial and age-appropriate way".

Kim Johnson, a Labour member of the committee, disowned the report and told *The Guardian* she was "not happy about the whole section on white privilege".

"The inquiry cherry-picked data. I think they were trying to create a bit of a culture war," she said.

In its response to the report, the government said schools played a "crucial role in helping pupils understand the world around them and their place within it, and in teaching about respect for other people and for difference".

But the response warned that schools "must not promote partisan political views and should take steps to ensure the balanced treatment of political issues".

Schools "should not teach contested

theories and opinions as fact", and this included "contested views about 'white privilege'".

"Political issues relating to racial and social justice can be taught about in a balanced and factual manner, just as pupils are often taught about a range of different views on other topics."

The government said these were "important principles to uphold", and revealed it had "already begun working with the sector to develop guidance that will help schools understand and meet their duties in this area".

The guidance would "support schools to teach about complex political issues, in line with their legal duties on political impartiality, covering factors including age-appropriateness and the use of external agencies".

LONG READ

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How schools will join the green revolution

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

While the government's Net Zero strategy lacks much focus on schools, the Department for Education has been sowing the seeds of a plan. With just over a week until the COP26 climate change conference, Schools Week investigates ...

Boris Johnson vowed to put schools, homes, workplaces and hospitals "at the heart" of the green economic recovery in his "Green Industrial Revolution" last year.

But the word school is mentioned just eight times in the government's Net Zero

Strategy published this week. However, we have been told the government is bringing "forward" a strategy to set out how education will "support the UK to meet its net zero target, become more resilient to climate change and improve biodiversity".

The strategy will "include a focus on ensuring excellence in education for a changing world, which will prepare children and young people with the knowledge and skills they need to contribute to the green economy".

Gavin Williamson, the former education secretary, said in July he hoped to launch a consultation on the sustainability and climate change strategy would be published

between November and January this year. The final strategy would be published in April.

Williamson told the environment and climate change select committee in July it would be "the starting point of a programme of change in guidance, policy and communications to lead and coordinate the education sector towards our net zero targets and a more resilient education estate".

The government wants the Department for Education to be a "trailblazer on climate education".

The DfE has set up a "sustainability and climate change unit" and is recruiting an environmental analyst or scientist to "make sure decision-makers in the department are aware of the environmental impact of new policies and

major programmes".

One of the first schemes to surface publicly is a virtual nature park and climate leaders' award, run by the National History Museum.

According to tender documents, seen by *Schools Week*, the scheme will "connect children to nature throughout their school journey and develop climate change and nature leaders of the future".

While few details have been announced, the awards will be linked to a pupil's educational stage and "complement the curriculum", with £99,000 set aside for the contract.

The award was inspired by the Dasgupta review, a landmark study commissioned by the government on the economics of biodiversity.

In a blog post yesterday, DfE said COP26 marks an "unprecedented opportunity" for "greater international links" between education and environment ministries.

It was also calling for people to use a #OneStepGreener hashtag, saying "we could all do more to tackle climate change" such as litter picking.

Time for a greener curriculum?

Ministers face pressure to include more climate change in the national curriculum – but there's been no hint of how they will do this.

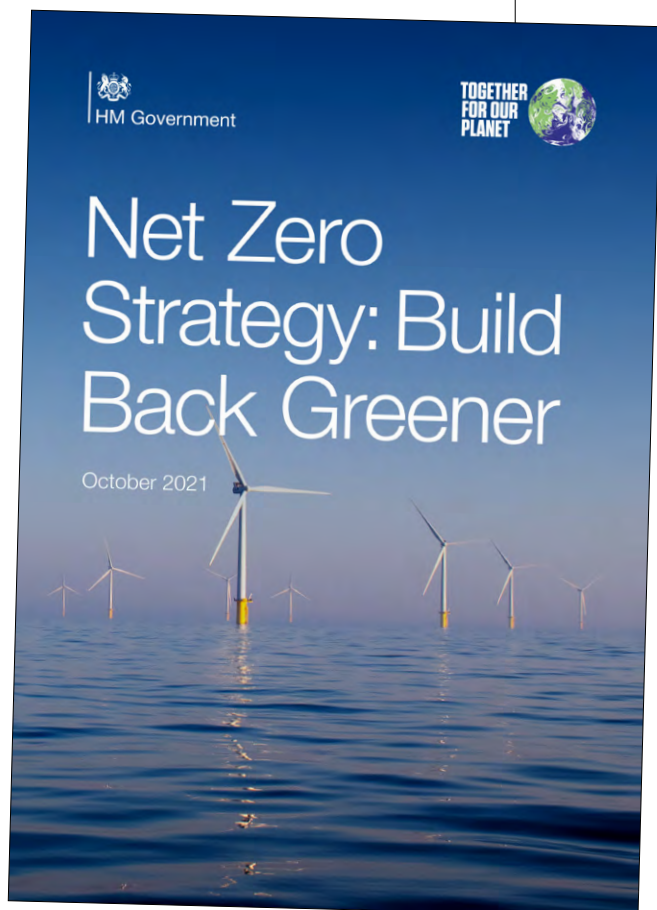
Dr Meryl Batchelder, science subject leader at Corbridge Middle School in Northumberland, said climate change was "pretty much absent" in the curriculum in England. It was not mentioned in key stage 2, and she estimated that it formed 0.8 per cent of the key stage 3 science curriculum.

In response to her letter raising concern, Robin Walker, the schools minister, agreed that young people were taught about climate change, but "related topics" were taught throughout science and geography, including at primary.

A DfE spokesperson said teacher "have the freedom to expand on these areas if they wish to do so".

Batchelder said that while the DfE might argue that there was some curriculum flexibility, "with so much else to cover it's tricky to extend the environmental topics whilst covering everything else".

Mark Castle, the chief executive at the Field Studies Council, said field work where children engaged with nature had been "squeezed" out, particularly during the pandemic.



LONG READ

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Lord Jim Knight, a former schools minister, has tabled a draft law to make “provision in the national curriculum regarding sustainable citizenship and protection of the environment”.

The Labour peer told the Lords in July that the bill aimed to update the definition of citizenship to include lessons on learning “to protect and restore the natural environment for present and future generations”.

Also sitting in ministers’ in-trays are the proposals for a natural history GCSE, which has been more than three years in the making.

Tim Oates, the group director of assessment research and development at Cambridge Assessment, was involved in the GCSE’s development. He said the GCSE aimed to “remedy ... aspects of current debate about ‘young people caring’ and ‘older people not’ – which are destructive of intergenerational trust”.

“It signals that the state, schools and the education system share young people’s concerns about the health and welfare of the natural world.”

He shied away from curriculum overhaul, though, and instead suggested schools used the National Association for Environmental Education curriculum guides for schools.

Battle of the ageing buildings

Williamson said in July one of the “key challenges” was ensuring the education estate “contributes” to the government’s 2050 net zero carbon target and was “more resilient to climate change”.

Ageing, energy-intensive school buildings are a problem for the government. A DfE report earlier this year found that 8 per cent of the school estate were built before 1900, while 9 per cent date back to the

first half the 20th century.

The government has launched a new ten-year school rebuilding programme, committing to 500 rebuilding projects over the next decade.

Williamson claimed that since 2015, the DfE had allocated £11.3 billion to maintain and improve the condition of school buildings, including improving efficiency.

But the department has admitted that repairing or replacing all defects in England’s schools would cost another £11.4 billion.

Matthew Clements-Wheeler, a former chair of the Institute of School Business Leaders, said the “fragmentation of the school system is beginning to mitigate against swift and effective decarbonisation of the school estate”.

But schools could access cash from the £1 billion public sector decarbonisation fund, launched last year.

East Midlands Education Trust was awarded £689,029 to replace coal-fired boilers at Ripley Academy secondary school and sixth form with air-source heat pumps. The roof will also be replaced.

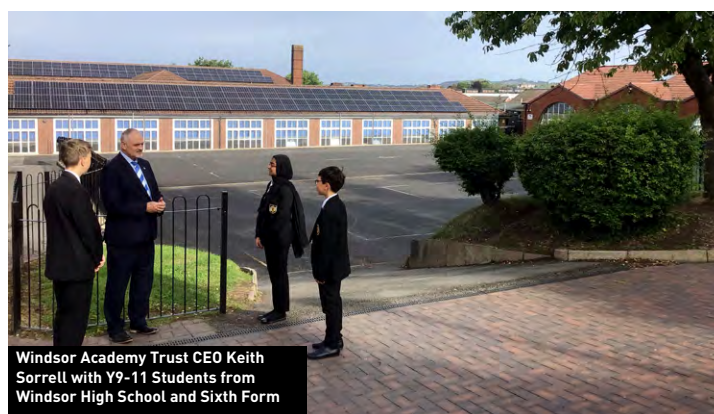
Windsor Academy Trust in the West Midlands got £2.4 million to help replace windows and a boiler, and install solar panels on the roofs of their secondary schools.

Rob Dunn, its chief operating officer, said it would have taken up to ten years to raise the funds. “We are on a mission to become one of the most sustainable trusts in the country.”

Hayley Dunn, a business leadership specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders, questioned whether the government could win funding for addressing basic school repairs while also delivering its climate change promises.



Forest School at Manor Way Academy



Windsor Academy Trust CEO Keith Sorrell with Y9-11 Students from Windsor High School and Sixth Form

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SPEED READ

How Covid has affected recruitment and retention

A new report from Teacher Tapp and SchoolDash delves into the impact of Covid on teacher recruitment and retention. Here's what you need to know...

1 DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS BENEFIT FROM GREATER SUPPLY

Schools in the highest quartile for free school meals (FSM) eligibility used to have the most trouble filling posts.

In May 2019, 37 per cent of teachers in the most disadvantaged schools felt uncertain about whether upcoming jobs would be filled, compared with 27 per cent at the most affluent state schools.

But this fell dramatically in 2020 and 2021 to 23 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

While this is still higher than the 17 per cent recorded in low FSM schools, it represents a much smaller divide.

2 IT'S A 'BUYER'S MARKET' WHEN IT COMES TO TEACHERS ...

In May, 43 per cent of senior leaders said they had more applicants for jobs than normal, compared with 25 per cent who reported having fewer.

Similarly, the proportion of leaders expressing concerns that vacant posts would not be filled by suitably qualified candidates fell from 30 per cent in 2019 to 18 per cent in 2021.

3 ...BUT RETAINING NON-TEACHING STAFF IS 'INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT'

SchoolDash found that the number of technician job adverts had recovered strongly since the summer, with numbers exceeding pre-pandemic levels and mirroring demand in other parts of the economy.

The report said it was likely schools were competing with other sectors for these workers, and warned that a "real shortage of technicians emerges as wages rise for alternative job opportunities".

4 FEWER SECONDARY TEACHERS ARE MOVING SCHOOL

The pandemic has ushered in greater stability in teacher movement in secondary schools.

Fifty-three per cent of teachers reported that no colleagues had resigned in their subject department this year, the same as last year and a rise from 41 per cent in pre-pandemic 2019.

Meanwhile, primary movement has returned to pre-pandemic levels, with 33 per cent of staff reporting no teachers resigning at their school, the same as in 2019. Levels briefly peaked at 46 per cent in 2020.

5 HEADS AT GREATER LEVELS OF BURNOUT...

In October 2018 20 per cent of headteachers reported feeling "sustained burnout". This leapt to 36 per cent in 2020 and 2021 as the constant pressures of Covid took their toll.

The report found that in a normal year, feelings of sustained burnout did "not tend to vary a great deal by job role". All roles across schools reported between 15 and 20 per cent burnout in 2018.

It did rise for other roles, but less severely than at headship. Roughly 25 per cent of classroom teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders (excluding heads) feel burnt out.

Proportion feeling sustained burnout in October 2018, 2020 and 2021



6 ...BUT ARE NOT MORE LIKELY TO LEAVE

Despite higher levels of burnout, more heads said they were likely to be in education in three years' time.

In September, 70 per cent of heads surveyed said they would likely still be in teaching in three years – down slightly from 76 per cent in 2020, but up from 67 per cent in 2019.

Moreover, the proportion of heads expecting to stay in their existing school for the next academic year rose from 86 per cent in 2019, to 93 per cent this year.

One reason for the change is the restriction of "non-headship opportunities" following the pandemic. Two-fifths of heads said they would leave if they could find another job that matched their current salary.

This "serves as a reminder that crises in teacher retention only manifest themselves if teachers both have a desire to leave, and a place to go that provides them with sufficient income".



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ESFA rejects more related party transactions

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

More than 100 academy trust deals with linked companies or individuals were vetoed by the government last year, new figures reveal.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency vetoed 108 "related party transactions" (RPTs) worth at least £20,000 each in 2020-21, more than double the 48 deals rejected in 2019-20.

New rules forcing trusts to disclose all RPTs pre-agreement were introduced in 2019, with prior sign-off required for larger payments.

It followed pressure from MPs after a series of controversial deals, with trusts such as Bright Tribe and EMLC handing six-figure sums to companies linked to founders.

Schools Week obtained a breakdown of trusts' declared transactions through a freedom of information request.

Trusts recorded 1,285 deals with influential related parties in the year to April 2021, up 10.1 per cent on the previous year. Two hundred and fifty-two deals worth at least six figures were submitted for sign-off, up from 206.

The proportion rejected also rose from 42.6 to 52.9 per cent among submissions deemed "in scope".

The ESFA said common areas of non-compliance included decision-making, procurement and retrospective approval requests, and a smaller number involved "at-cost" rules for deals over £2,500.

Such RPTs must not be for profit. But experts warn this is difficult to determine, and some back banning them altogether.

Nigel Gann, an education consultant and author, warned companies could "cover up all sorts of things" in calculating at-cost prices.

He noted reports that Premier League football clubs had voted this week for their own RPT restrictions, amid concerns over potential Newcastle United sponsorship deals involving its new Saudi owners.

"If the Premier League, not



renowned for its ethical purity, can do it, why not the DfE?"

Sir David Carter, the former national schools commissioner, welcomed the government's stricter approach. Some past cases had done "huge reputational damage" to academies.

But he said officials should go further. "If we want to reduce some of the opaqueness, you have to say you can be a trustee or provide services through tendering, but it's difficult to justify both."

Experts say most rejected RPTs were probably inadvertent mistakes.

Phillip Reynolds, a senior audit manager at accountants Kreston Reeves, said he was not surprised by more vetoed deals, with new rules "another admin burden" and trusts still familiarising themselves. Some trustees still did not understand they had to declare all interests, he added.

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said she believed much was not "under-handed", but a problem of handling the new system. Leaders had also been focused on dealing with Covid.

Schools Week has uncovered cases where trusts did not seek ESFA sign-off.

Staff at St Augustine's Academy in Bedfordshire only discovered it needed approval for a £41,986 catering deal with a trustee's company in 2018-19 when it was flagged by auditors.

Stephen Mead, the school's business manager, said it reflected confusion around rules over renewing existing contracts, with a similar deal subsequently approved.

"It can be difficult to navigate, but we understand why regulations are in place."

Guildford Education Partnerships, now merged into the Athena-GEP trust, similarly blamed a "management error" for breaching the rules. It paid £44,699 to a building company run by a governor's husband.

A spokesperson said neither was involved in the competitive, arms'-length tender process. Approval was sought retrospectively, with "lessons learned".

A DfE spokesperson said related parties could offer academies "good value" opportunities. "We achieve high levels of accountability and transparency, over and above any other sector."

Cruddas said academies had always faced more scrutiny than maintained schools, and transparency tended to "throw up more instances of non-compliance".

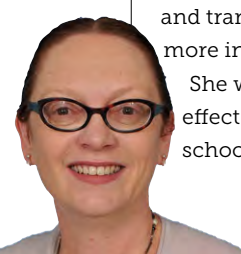
She welcomed similar rules, which took effect last month, forcing maintained schools and councils to report RPTs.



Sir David Carter



Phillip Reynolds



Leora Cruddas

NEWS

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ESFA opens probe after trust CEO payoff

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

A trust that had to top-slice more cash from schools than it had planned because it had overspent is now under investigation by the government.

Experts said it was “disheartening” to see another controversy about a trust’s finances, and called for more transparency over the ex-CEO’s settlement package.

A spokesperson for Oval Learning Trust, which runs five small Leicestershire primaries, said leadership had now been “stabilised” and school budgets brought into surplus under the new board this year. It also plans to join the Rise trust.

But board minutes reveal worries among new trustees and senior leaders about the financial situation inherited after multiple departures at the start of the year. They also reveal an Education and Skills Funding Agency probe, with the trust still awaiting the outcome.

Interim CEO Mark Cole warned in January that a “settlement” reached with his predecessor Donna Moulds, a new employee plus legal costs had had a “large negative impact on the central budget”.

Chief financial officer Stephen Mitchell then presented a “list of concerns” regarding compliance with academy funding rules in February. He said recent payroll journals had not been properly recorded, bringing trust systems “into doubt”.

It was felt there had previously “not been any



meaningful level of internal scrutiny”.

Cole said he was “uncomfortable” over the finances, but agreed with others that transparency to ESFA was key.

In a March meeting discussing similar planned transparency with schools, Cole said they should be told “the trust had set a deficit budget, miscalculated income...and overspent”.

Schools would face a top-slice of 6.5 per cent of general annual grant funds, not the five per cent budgeted, minutes add.

Governance expert Raj Unsworth said it felt “unfair” that small rural schools appeared saddled with higher charges, “taking away from education when it’s needed most”.

The March meeting also saw “much concern expressed about an ex-CEO obtaining a post so rapidly after resigning, and the supportive reference by the previous board”.

The Astrea trust announced Moulds’ appointment as a regional director in late January.

A statement sent on behalf of Moulds said the founding CEO had left to seek new career opportunities as Oval “moved into its next stage”. It said regulators had not flagged any concerns with her over her financial oversight, and she

could not comment on trust activities since her departure.

A government spokesperson said it could not comment on ongoing investigations. “Any type of financial mismanagement in schools is completely unacceptable,” the spokesperson added.

Where intervention is required, the government acts to “protect education provision and hold those responsible for any wrongdoing accountable”.

Moulds and three trustees had quit at the turn of the year, with another declining to extend their term.

Minutes show this followed a row with the Diocese of Leicester, whose director of education had ordered the removal of “the named board of directors” by January 7.

Reasons are not spelled out, but the diocese is said to have previously warned that Oval’s complaints policy did not meet Academies Financial Handbook rules. December minutes also recorded a £36,000 central services deficit and “irregularity” over management accounts.

Trustees had demanded the diocese explain its decision, with minutes referencing legal advice that it was “illegal”. One trustee warned dismissal did not reflect the MAT’s “Christian values”.

Unsworth said it is “disheartening to see these kinds of issues continue” in the academy sector.

Chair Patrick Rendall said Oval had achieved “a great deal” this year. The new board was focused on supporting schools, as well as any ESFA investigation into the recent past, he added.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

MPs question per-pupil funding in academies

The government should publish the exact amount of per-pupil funding in every academy, MPs have said.

A report today also found it was “not possible” to tell if ministers were living up to their commitments.

Boris Johnson promised last January that every school would receive minimum funding of £3,750 per primary pupil and £5,000 per secondary pupil in 2020-21.

But the parliamentary public accounts committee found that although councils were legally required to ensure their maintained schools received the minimum

funding levels, academy trusts could pool the funding and did not have to provide each school with the minimum.

As a result, it was not possible to tell whether individual academy schools received the government’s guaranteed minimum per-pupil funding.

The committee said the Department for Education should publish annual details, starting with the year ending August 31 2021, of the schools’ block per-pupil funding that each academy received.

The report also warned that the DfE “does not seem to have a grip on the impact of

falling rolls on schools”.

It found schools with dwindling rolls due to changes in local populations still had to cover fixed costs, while their funding fell “significantly”.

The DfE highlighted a “falling rolls fund” for local authorities and the lump sum handed to all schools through the national funding formula. But the report found the department “does not appear to have a strong understanding of the practical financial impact of falling rolls on individual schools”.

NEWS

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Birbalsingh on her new role: 'I'm difficult to ignore'

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Katharine Birbalsingh, set to be the government's new social mobility tsar, has said "excellent behaviour" in schools would solve Covid learning loss "very quickly".

Birbalsingh, head of the Michaela free school in north London, was quizzed by the women's and equalities committee this week after she was named the government's preferred candidate to chair the Social Mobility Commission.

She said that "the reason why people shy away from having high expectations" was that teachers "don't like giving detentions".

"I promise you, if we were to have excellent behaviour across all of our schools suddenly, if we could just wave a magic wand and go bam, and it happened, we would all catch up on the losses from the pandemic very quickly."

Dame Martina Milburn, the former chair of the commission, stood down last year saying the role needed beefing up.

When Birbalsingh was asked if the role had enough teeth to make a difference, she said she didn't know, but added she "had a lot of teeth... I tend to make a bit of a splash".

"I have a lot of respect for Liz Truss [equalities minister] signing this off. I would be worried if I were her. I would be worried if I was the rest of the government.

"From the government's perspective, they have no idea what I'm going to say. I can imagine that they might even think of me as a bit of a risk.

"I'm looking forward to my



Katharine Birbalsingh

independence and experience bringing something to this role. It's possible that the government might ignore me, but I do make it very difficult to be ignored."

Birbalsingh, who made her name after telling the 2010 Conservative party conference that the education system was broken, told MPs this week she was somebody "who speaks my own mind and I'm not a yes man."

She told *The Sunday Telegraph* this week that she vowed to bring the same strict principles at Michaela to social mobility.

Michaela has silent corridors, has ditched SEND labels and gives detentions to pupils who fail to have a pen.

One of her priorities in her new role will be tackling bad parenting. On Wednesday she supported a "national campaign" of no mobile phones for toddlers.

"There's a lack of knowledge out there. It's a bad idea to give your toddler a phone to occupy his time... it will make it much more difficult for him to read later."

On teaching styles, she

said: "You don't leave it to the children to lead because children need guidance."

She also praised "teacher-

led" teaching, saying that she didn't think teaching children in groups around tables had been a change "for the better".

Birbalsingh also said that in the pandemic "we were all sort of kidding ourselves" that there were "extraordinary Zoom lessons" and that children could learn via their laptops.

"There was some learning going on... I'm not going to knock all of it. The fact is that there is nothing better for a child than being in a good classroom with a good teacher."

The committee will now prepare a report on her suitability for the role, although Truss can appoint her without members' approval.

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PROGRAMME:

9:00am - 9:30am:
English Hub Information Session

9:30am - 10:30am:
Phonics Learning Walk

10:45am - 11:45am:
Keynote: Julian Grenier speaking about the importance of getting early literacy right (02.12.21)/Marco Rowland speaking about strategies that work for disadvantaged pupils.

11:45am - 12:30pm:
Workshop 1: How to ensure your phonics programme meets Ofsted requirements **OR**
Workshop 2: Establishing a reading for pleasure culture in your school

1:00pm - 2:00pm:
Keynote: Rekha Bhakoo speaking about how to build a strong foundation for all pupils to 'learn to read' to be able to 'read to learn'.

2:00pm - 5:00pm:
Workshop 3: Accessing support, funding and next steps

Marco Rowland
Foremost expert on the effective use of PPG & improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

Julian Grenier
Head teacher of Sheringham Nursery School & author of the revised Development Matters

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COVID

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Vaccination centres open to under-16s as school rollout falters

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

Secondary pupils will be able to receive their Covid jab at vaccination centres from half-term.

Experts who have long called for vaccinations in schools as infections rates rise have criticised the programme's slow rollout.

Amanda Pritchard, NHS England's chief executive, told MPs this week that under-16s will be able to arrange a vaccination through the national booking service.

The NHS boss said there would be a big push to offer additional capacity for youngsters for the next "two weeks in particular".

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, said the move would offer families greater flexibility. "It is important that anyone who is invited as eligible for a vaccine, including young people, come forward and take up that offer."

The NHS said the centres would be accessible for children after half-term, but vaccinations would still be run in schools. Appointments must be made at a vaccination centre.

Since September 20, the School Age Immunisation Service (SAIS) has used school sites to vaccinate pupils aged between 12 and 15.

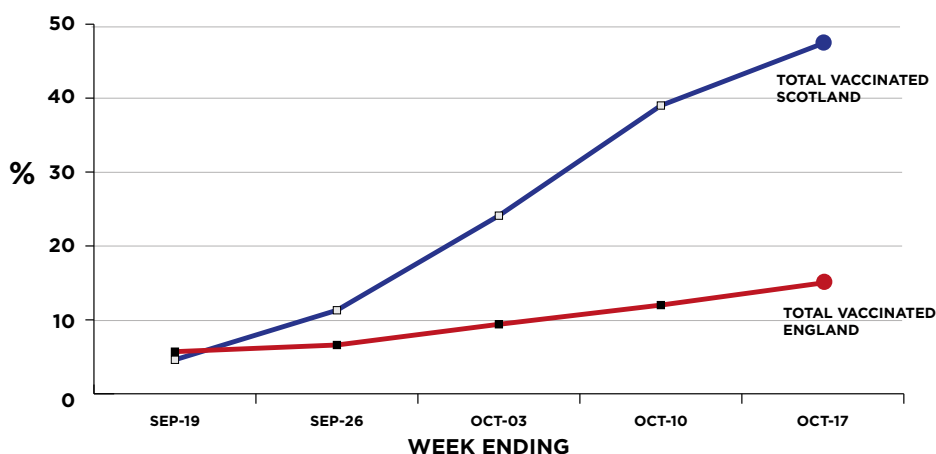
But the rollout has faced numerous delays. *Schools Week* revealed SAIS staff and teacher unions had raised serious concerns over teams' capacity to carry out the vaccinations.

pupils who test positive for Covid must wait 28 days before they can receive the vaccination.

A rise in Covid-related absences from schools since the beginning of term has slowed, with attendance rates improving nationally last week.

Department for Education figures published this week estimate that 209,000 pupils, or 2.6 per cent of the pupil population, were absent for Covid-related reasons on October 14. This is up from 204,000 pupils, or 2.5 per cent on September 30.

Vaccination of 12- to 15-year-olds by nation



Overall, however, the proportion of pupils attending school rose to 90 per cent, up from 89.5 per cent on September 30.

However, the number of pupils absent with a confirmed case of Covid reached a record high last week, rising almost 9 per cent in a fortnight.

A survey from the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) last week revealed that 42 per cent of schools were not scheduled to do vaccinations before the target date of the October half-term.

The survey, which had more than 500 responses, also found one in four schools said the scheduled date for Covid vaccinations had been delayed for all or some students

According to national statistics as of Sunday, 15 per cent of 12 to 15-year-olds in England have received a Covid jab.

Scotland, which started inoculating under-16s at the same time as England, but in walk-in centres, has now vaccinated 47.4 per cent of the age group.

Parents of under-16s will receive a letter from the NHS with more information on the vaccination programme shortly, including information on how to book appointments.

The latest Office for National Statistics infection survey data estimates that about one in 12 secondary pupils tested positive in the week ending October 9, up from one in 15 the week before.

PUPILS MISS 219 MILLION DAYS IN THE CLASSROOM

Partial closures in the spring term led to pupils missing 219 million days of being in school, according to new government data.

Absence data for the spring term of 2021 shows 57.5 per cent of physical school sessions were missed because of Covid between the start of term in January and the beginning of the Easter holidays. That is equivalent to 219 million days, and up from about 5 per cent in a normal spring term. In comparison, in autumn 2020 when there were no nationwide school closures but widespread disruption to schooling

as a result of Covid, the equivalent of 33 million days in school were missed due to the virus.

The government announced in early January that schools would close again to all but the most vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers. Most pupils were educated remotely between then and mid-March, when pupils started to return to the classroom. Non-Covid-related absence in the spring term stood at 3.3 per cent, or 12.5 million days. This is lower than the usual absence rate for the same period.

EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Our crumbling system is failing pupils with special needs

The support for many pupils with special educational needs is in crisis.

In Rotherham, Ofsted found “too many children and young people reach crisis point” before getting support.

In Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, families “commonly end up in crisis” before they get “meaningful support”.

Our investigation today reveals seven of eight councils visited by Ofsted after local area SEND inspections returned earlier this year have “significant areas of weaknesses”.

Plus, of the eight councils revisited, just two had addressed all of their weaknesses.

Tens of thousands of pupils and their families are being failed by a system that is falling over.

And it’s getting worse. Since the inspections began, about half of the councils visited were found to be failing.

This is a national scandal. A school found to be failing would swiftly become an academy or handed to another trust to drive urgent improvement. It would not be allowed to

repeatedly fail its youngsters.

But this is happening for SEND pupils across many areas in England.

What is the government doing? Just this week, the Department for Education flexed its legal powers to send in a commissioner to take over SEND services in Birmingham – the first intervention of its kind.

A local area SEND inspection in 2018 found 13 “significant areas of weakness”. A follow-up inspection in May – three years later – found insufficient progress in 12 of those areas.

But this is just a sticking plaster, with ministers still stalling on the long-promised SEND review. They have already missed three of their own deadlines.

Let’s hope the delay is down to the department securing much-needed funding to inject into the system at next week’s spending review.

Children should not have to wait years for support, parents should not have to fight in court for help they are legally entitled to and schools should not be left to deal with the fall-out of a system in crisis.

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Feature

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ

ST MARGARET'S
CHURCH OF ENGLAND
PRIMARY SCHOOL,
LINCOLNSHIRE

'Being a research school is about best bets'

Five years after they were set up, research schools haven't enjoyed much public hullabaloo. Jess Staufenberg visits a lead school to find out what's really happening

James Siddle has always been on a search for good evidence. The headteacher at St Margaret's Church of England primary, a local authority school in Lincolnshire, used to have a list of the top ten performing schools locally, and would visit them one by one.

A classroom teacher at the time, he wanted to "get better" but "used to feel it

was just about who had the loudest voice in the staffroom. I would feel quite frustrated about understanding how we made decisions."

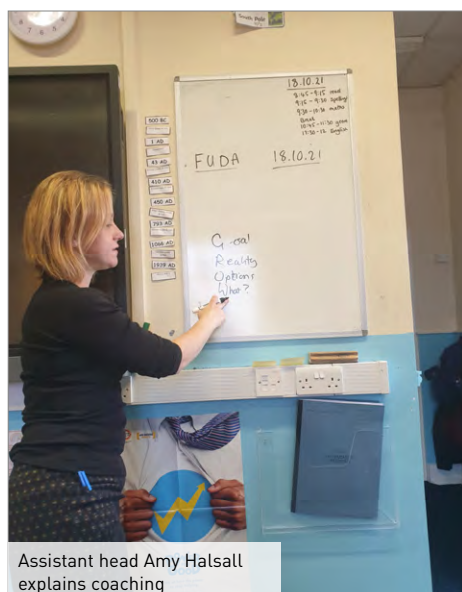
He found some of the schools were "exam factories", and remained unconvinced. But after reading a 2013 academic paper by Steve Higgins, professor of education at Durham University, on the minimal impact

of teaching assistants, he reached out again.

"I emailed Steve and I said, 'I find this really interesting and I don't agree'. He ended up coming back to my school [...]. That for me was the gateway into evidence."

Soon Siddle was involved in a project on teaching assistants with the relatively new Education Endowment Foundation

Feature



– the charity set up in 2011 by the Sutton Trust to share evidence around closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils. He bumped into Professor Jonathan Sharples from the University of York's Institute for Effective Education and heard that together, the EEF and IEE (which has now closed) were launching the Research Schools Network in 2016. Part of the thinking behind the scheme was that schools are more likely to listen to schools than to academics.

St Margaret's primary, which has just 72 pupils, soon became a lead school within the Kyra Research School – a group of schools stretching across Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire and North Hampshire. With Siddle as director, it was one of just five "research schools" to win funding to spread evidence-informed practice, supported by the EEF, in 2016.

There are now 28 research schools and ten associate research schools (smaller hubs supported by the larger research schools). According to Stuart Mathers, head of dissemination and impact at EEF, each research school gets a core EEF grant of £40,000 a year.

Sitting in Siddle's staffroom, the first thing I notice is a shelf packed with papers and books. Titles such as *What Does this Look Like in the Classroom: Bridging the Gap between Research and Practice* and *Why Don't Students Like School?* (by a cognitive scientist, according to the subtitle) rub shoulders with lots of "guidance reports"



“Decisions were about who had the loudest voice in the staffroom”

from the EEF. These range from *Improving Behaviour in Schools* to *Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning*.

The guidance reports are the starting point for an evidence-based school, explains Amy Halsall, assistant head, who has come to fetch me for a year 6 lesson. Each report is a culmination of the EEF reviewing available academic evidence, then running a panel with "expert voices" of teachers to understand what staff most need help with. Halsall, for instance, sits on the primary science expert panel. Then the EEF either runs a trial of the intervention, or, if the evidence is already solid, produces a guidance report straight off.

For Halsall, a former biologist, the experience is professionally motivational: "It gives me the knowledge that I'm doing the best job I can. I want to know I'm taking the best approach possible."

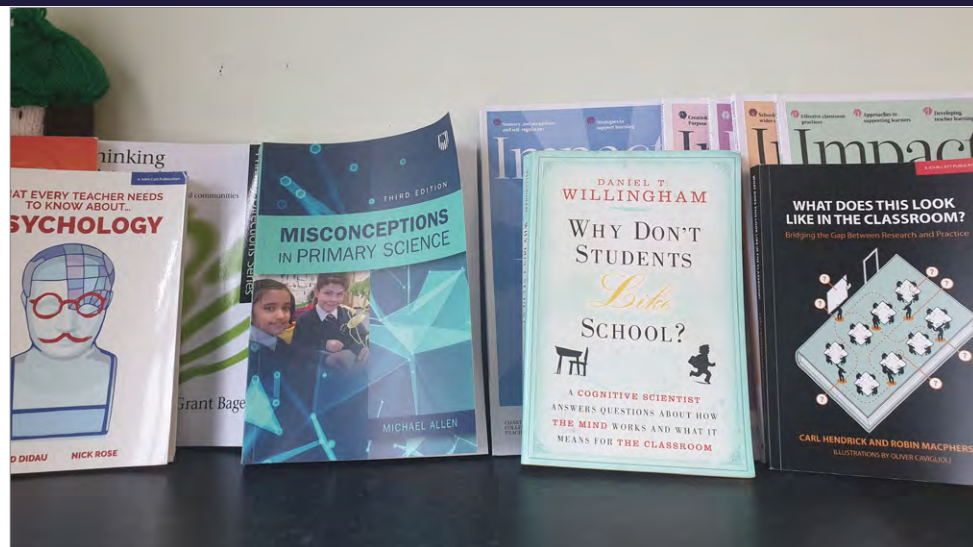
In front of me, year 6s are now doing

a "follow-up diagnostic assessment" in maths. Halsall sets them sums to ascertain their knowledge, then runs a lesson, then a follow-up assessment 24 hours later, then a week later, then a month later. This approach is based on education theorist Dylan Wiliam's "hinge questions", explains Halsall, which are questions used to identify key points in a child's learning.

It's also linked to a trial Kyra Research School itself carried out, which looked at the most effective gaps of time to leave between assessing students by year group. About 400 pupils took part, and the evidence revealed that smaller gaps between assessments worked better for younger students. This approach was then adopted across the research school, says Siddle.

Meanwhile, letting pupils know why they are doing these diagnostic assessments is also informed by the research on

Feature



“Buy books, sit down, and read the evidence”

metacognition, explains Halsall. “It’s all about self-regulation. The children should have an understanding of the success criteria, so they know how to improve their own work.” The EEF’s report states that developing “pupils’ understanding of what is required to succeed” adds, on average, an additional seven months’ progress.

Now the pupils fold up their Chromebooks and trot outside into a giant polytunnel, for a geometry class with compasses and protractors. Again, the EEF has a guidance report showing that “outdoor adventure learning” can improve self-confidence and self-efficacy (the school has recently bought a new climbing wall and obstacle course).

But Siddle also points me to research on “episodic” and “semantic” memory, which informed how the school decided to use the giant physical graphs outside, made of rope and wood. “Episodic memory means you remember you were outside, which can help you remember what you were learning, but it might also distract you. You want to bury what was learned in the pupils’ semantic memory,” he adds.

It’s another reason to repeat low-stakes assessment, even when working with giant outdoor equipment. “By repeating assessments, the children are more likely to remember the teaching points, rather than just being outside.”

The school’s attendance policy was also tweaked two years ago, based on a randomised control trial in the US. This showed that sending postcards

home comparing a pupil’s lower school attendance to the average attendance improved attendance by 2.4 per cent, says Siddle. Last summer, Halsall even rewrote the school’s behaviour policy based on the latest evidence. Now students start the day working on a task, rather than lining up outside to a whistle.

Both he and Halsall ooze a deep enthusiasm for what they are doing. The 17 EEF guidance reports are just the beginning, says Siddle. “What you have to do is start to read deeply and really understand the evidence.” He gives his staff at least one half-day a week to engage with research, and recommends school leaders put aside time to “buy books, sit down and read the evidence”.

To spread evidence-based practice, in 2018 Kyra Research School also created new roles called “evidence leads in education”, or ELEs. “These are evidence advocates in schools,” explains Siddle. Successful applicants get a three-day training course in “research design and how to understand evidence” with Kyra Research School. They’re then “deployed” for six days in the year to share practice. There are now 50 ELEs across the network, and the model has been adopted by most research schools, says Siddle.

A 2017 Ofsted report of the school, which maintained its ‘good’ rating, found parents are “overwhelming in their praise for the efforts taken to develop their child’s passion for learning”, adding the school is “extremely caring”. Meanwhile, its

performance outcomes in reading, writing and maths are all above local and national averages.

One potential issue I can see is the EEF, by focusing on the attainment gap, has mainly produced guidance reports on reading, writing, maths and science, with some on supporting special educational needs and behaviour. But there are no guidance reports on arts subjects, for instance. “We’re pretty clear we’re about attainment, and we do focus on measures around maths and English and science,” says Mathers.

Siddle agrees that a school currently can’t be evidence based in everything it does, because evidence simply doesn’t exist in some areas, such as “arts-based interventions”. It would seem a scientific oversight not to look closely into performing, drawing and singing, simply because they’re not in SATs.

But even without those additional areas, Kyra Research School has its work cut out. An EEF report in 2017 found just a quarter of teachers cited academic evidence as influencing their decision-making, with teacher-generated ideas holding much more sway. And the EEF’s own evaluation report of research schools in “opportunity areas” published this month says it’s still not easy to reach the neediest schools – with buy-in from leaders being the key factor.

If anything, it shows research schools have much more to do. “It’s not a silver bullet,” concludes Siddle. “But it is about best bets.”

Opinion

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

We can't expect to solve recruitment challenges if we don't accept that our system only allows us to pass the proverbial buck, writes Robin Bevan

It is not often that a well-intentioned and resourced policy announcement is so authoritatively dismissed. But to the arguments so cogently put in these pages last week about Nadim Zahawi's plan to offer golden hellos for maths and physics teachers choosing to work in challenging schools, I would add two of my own.

First, there are very many excellent teachers already in schools serving disadvantaged communities. And second, leaders have no appetite for advertising their schools as places where you need an enhanced salary to want to work. Besides, recruitment and retention payments already allow for individual teachers to be financially rewarded as a positive incentive.

So the policy isn't just poorly judged and badly pitched; it is also wholly ineffective! And the question we must ask ourselves – the lesson that must be learned – is why exactly that is. It won't do simply to dismiss the DfE as a bad policymaker (though there's plenty evidence of that).

After all, the policy is well intentioned. Retention and recruitment is a vital issue. We know salary matters and pay increases for the profession are needed – for those already in classrooms as well as those for whom a teaching career is in competition with other prospects. And of course it is absolutely right to ensure resources and expertise are targeted to the areas of greatest need.

But at heart, it is not part of a significant, sustained and sustainable response to the challenge. And it would be easy to dismiss that as a Treasury issue – an inevitable outcome of ongoing austerity – but there is



ROBIN BEVAN

Headteacher,
Southend High School for Boys

Our recruitment woes can only be solved with ethical leadership

another significant reason that policies consistently fail in this way, and it strikes at the heart of ethical decision-making.

Imagine the following scenario. Having advertised for a physics teacher, a school receives a single application from an experienced,

school leader has just appointed the other school's only qualified physics teacher. It's the right decision, but with the ethical consequences soundly displaced. Doing the "right thing" has just created (or more likely magnified) the challenges for the other school.

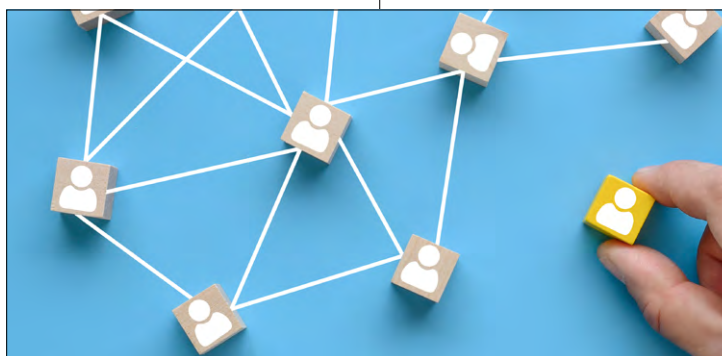
“ Perpetual asset stripping should come as no surprise

enthusiastic teacher working in a neighbouring institution. The teacher wants to move for sound personal reasons. The selection process is almost unnecessary. There is no one else in the field and the candidate is clearly competent. After lesson observation and interview, the job offer is made.

It is a good outcome in a dwindling teacher supply market. However, the

Such examples are rife. And this stark reality of perpetual asset stripping should come as no surprise. Our school system has been increasingly shoehorned into a competitive free-market model and depleted of resources.

But our analysis must run even deeper than that. Our teacher supply crisis is not replicated in



other comparable countries. So if the problem is characteristically English, then the solutions must be too.

England is exceptionally unusual in having a highly devolved system of school decision-making. Our approach to pupil admissions masquerading under the "parent choice" slogan is an excellent example. It is also relatively unusual in other countries to find schools free to choose their teaching staff, rather than a local education administration assigning teachers to the school of greatest need, with an attempt at best-fit distribution.

The political reality is that there is very little appetite among headteachers or parents to relinquish these levers of control for their own school. And that's fine, but we need to accept that without structural change, ethical displacement will continue to be unavoidable, feeding the recruitment and retention crisis and many other issues besides.

In the absence of Treasury largesse, there is only one way to dampen ethical displacement: to promote collective and cooperative ventures between schools where the best resources and opportunities are shared.

This no doubt happens in some localities, through some local authorities and within some multi-academy trusts. But for ethical shafting to cease being a defining characteristic of our system, such collaborations must work for the benefit of those both within and beyond their structures.

Incentivising that should be the DfE's priority. Anything else is just more ethical displacement, leaving our most disadvantaged communities to suffer the consequences.

Opinion

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CAROLE WILLIS

Chief executive, NFER

The spending review must fix the boat, not rely on life rafts

The spending review can only deliver a sustainable recovery and the prospect of future prosperity if it is focused on children and young people, writes Carole Willis

The prime minister is reported to view education as a central plank of the country's recovery. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) agrees, and that's why we will be looking to next week's comprehensive spending review to be focused on children and young people. Now is the time to deliver.

Allowing young people to suffer from adverse social and labour market impacts for years to come as a result of missed schooling would be catastrophic for both the economy and the individuals involved. By investing in their recovery now, we may be able to prevent this from happening. In short, if we fix the ship now, we may not need life rafts later.

Our July research showed that Covid-19 had already cost key stage 1 children around three months of learning in reading and maths. The disadvantage gap has widened for five-to-seven-year-olds, too. Study after study shows the damaging effects on children's learning across

the age spectrum.

The IFS recently projected the economic cost of children losing just half a year of schooling by the time the pandemic retreats at £40,000 of income over their lifetime. That's a staggering £350 billion in lost lifetime earnings across the 8.7 million school children in the UK.

“A purely academic focus won't be enough to bail us out

More bluntly for the chancellor, this means more than £100 billion less tax revenue. So missed schooling won't just impact individuals; it represents a critical long-term risk to the country's future prosperity. And that's before we factor in other

predicted shocks and disruptions, such as new technologies and demographic and environmental changes.

But a purely academic focus on pupils' recovery won't be enough to bail us out. NHS data shows that in 2020, one in six children aged five to 16 were identified as having a probable mental disorder, increasing from one in nine in 2017. And thanks to National Centre for Social Research, we know that pupils can't and won't learn as effectively if they are suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. Academic and wellbeing recovery must be funded simultaneously.

Persistent inequalities in attainment between pupils from different backgrounds must also be addressed. Yet the value of the pupil premium (the government's

main mechanism for doing so) has been eroded over time. Today, each disadvantaged primary pupil attracts around £100 less than if the funding had been uprated in line with consumer price inflation since 2014-15. This puts the one-off £145

recovery premium in perspective.

Meanwhile, the value of tutoring in closing attainment gaps has been widely accepted. Sufficient funding could ensure small-group tutoring becomes a permanent part of the landscape.

Cash is also urgently required to ensure schools can cover the additional costs of dealing with Covid and demographic challenges. Around 1,500 schools in 2020-21 were unable to meet unexpected pandemic costs from either existing reserves or recent funding increases. They have been forced to factor in the extra costs associated with sanitation, signage, social distancing and supply to cover self-isolating staff, while many of their income streams have taken a hit. Primary schools across the country are also finding their budgets stretched due to falling pupil numbers, despite the fact that many face limited scope for cost savings.

And there's the matter of retention too. Large numbers were attracted into the profession over the past two years, but to keep them, teachers' pay must remain competitive with other professions. This would also encourage more experienced and vital school leaders to remain in the profession after an exhausting and deeply challenging period, avoiding a return to the bad old days of teacher supply shortages.

We know teaching quality is the most significant school-based factor affecting children's attainment. And it is only with consistency of personnel that we can develop the experienced teachers we need to deliver the recovery.

Investing in our schools, teachers and young people benefits us all. The alternative is to allow lower skills and wider inequalities to fester, and that's no kind of recovery at all.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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COLIN HUGHES
CEO, AQA

Exams: GCSE reform isn't as simple as stick or twist

As clamour grows for post-Covid GCSE reform, it's important we listen to the opinions of all those concerned, writes Colin Hughes

It's hardly surprising (and no bad thing) that GCSE qualifications have come under heightened scrutiny following exam cancellations in 2020 and 2021. Two years of grade inflation and teacher assessment naturally intensify the argument about why we need them and what they're for.

Even Kenneth Baker, their original architect, has called for GCSEs to be scrapped. Along with other critics on both sides of the party-political divide, he doubts that we need a 16-plus hurdle when students all now remain in education to age 18.

But not all critics conduct the debate with Lord Baker's grasp of the issues. When you peel apart their concerns, it becomes clear that many centre more on the way GCSEs affect the curriculum, or approaches to teaching, than the qualification itself. Critics whose comments are headed "abolish" often turn out to be calling for content reform.

The risk in all this is we find ourselves judging a falsely diametric

opposition: either we keep GCSEs as they are, or we abandon them in favour of something radically different.

Actually, the most striking feature of GCSEs is how versatile and adaptable they have proved over the years. Hundreds have been created

over 50 different subjects already assess students in many different ways, including teacher assessment and coursework.

Also, many people who call for the complete deletion of assessment at 16 fail to explain what we're going to do about the fact that well over half of all students change institution at that age. Any would-be reformer should have to explain what will these young people will take with them.

Exams influence massively what's taught and how, and so they should be exposed to constant review to ensure they reflect changing social expectations, as well as educational needs. Above all, any qualification that lacks broad public support is an empty shell.

“There's no evidence GCSEs have lost public confidence

and replaced during the lifetime of the qualification.

People mistakenly think that changing the curriculum automatically means getting rid of GCSEs. Of course, an assessment used to measure so-called "soft skills" (creativity, problem-solving, teamwork...) looks different from one designed to assess grasp of knowledge. But existing GCSEs in

The fact is, though, there's no evidence GCSEs have lost that public confidence. On the contrary. Surveys of teachers and parents during the pandemic consistently showed that large majorities want to return to exams as soon as possible — because they see them as more rigorously fair and objectively transparent than the alternatives.

And what do students themselves

think? Where is their voice?

If you follow teenage social media in a normal exam year (as many of us at AQA do!) you probably think you know the answer. Students emerge from each exam with ever more inventive memes bemoaning the papers they've just taken. So surely you'd expect general student support for their demise?

Well, no. Quite the opposite.

AQA recently commissioned a poll of 1,001 young people in England who took GCSEs before the pandemic. Three-quarters of them said they were glad they'd sat them. The vast majority said their grades enabled them to move forward to the next stage of their lives and helped inform their decisions about what to do next. Most also reported that preparing for their GCSE exams helped motivate them, and helped prepare them for exams they took in subsequent years.

Not all the responses were rosy. Most young people thought GCSEs were too academic, and a lot thought they'd done too many. And students who attained lower grades were conspicuously less enthusiastic about the value of the qualification.

What you take away from these findings will probably come down to which side of the debate you're on: there is clearly strong student support for GCSEs, but also an obvious steer that the qualifications aren't working as well as they could for everyone.

But it's important we hear what young people are saying in these findings. The next generation of students, perhaps especially because they have been afflicted by the pandemic, deserve an informed and balanced debate about the future of GCSEs, and one that reflects their lived experience.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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DOMINIC NORRISH

Chief operating officer,
United Learning

Why every school and college should have a digital strategy

Leaders with a credible digital strategy are pushing at an open door to school improvement, and support is there to help them achieve it, writes Dominic Norrish

As we emerge from the pandemic, there is widespread acceptance of edtech's value. But turning this potential into a watershed moment will take a considerable effort of leadership. Acceptance doesn't organically evolve into effective practice; that needs to be planned for and implemented.

For a start, the skills staff gained through remote teaching are not the same as those needed to make effective use of technology in the classroom. We shouldn't expect an effortless translation. So school and college leaders need to think hard about what effective classroom use of tech looks like and then ensure it takes root. Without this, at best we'll see a wide variance in practice within and between settings; at worst, a narrow consistency amid a field of missed opportunities.

We must be more ambitious. School closures laid bare an undeniable injustice in the incomparable remote learning experiences of students attending digitally mature

institutions and many of their less advantaged peers. That difference began with the absence of a digital strategy, and the consequences are real-world gains and losses for young people, who moved closer or further

from the opportunities presented by a good education.

Sadly, nothing has really changed. The huge advantage conferred on those with ongoing access to a powerful curriculum beyond the confines of the timetabled day carries on. All schools and colleges should be planning a strategy for achieving this benefit for their pupils and students.

Sceptics point to the lack of evidence that edtech use leads to measurably improved outcomes.

This is undeniable, but focusing on empiricism rather misses the point. It is not that using technology is better than not using it, but that when intelligently deployed, technology very clearly confers advantages on the processes of teaching and learning.

Take, for example, the relationship between a teacher's ability to explain their subject clearly and their classes' ability to understand it. Chalk boards, whiteboards, overhead projectors, the Banda machine, computer projection and visualisers have all presented enhancements to that skill, each innovation ratchetting up teachers' ability to explain complex things well.

“ This is teacher clarity with the volume turned up to 11

Now, that projection can be driven by a tablet in one hand and a stylus to digitally ink the screen in the other. Teachers can do this from wherever in the room they deem most beneficial. Their annotations and voice can be captured and automatically distributed to their class once the lesson is over. This is “teacher clarity” with the volume turned up to 11.

If we begin with the processes of teaching and learning and layer

on technology that adds value — instead of the opposite approach, which has characterised so many failed innovations — there are many more enhancements we can make. (Not least eliminating the cause of perfectly understandable scepticism.)

But it won't do to leave individual teachers and “early adopters” to make what they can of this complex domain. It's up to leaders to identify their teachers' needs, think through which of these technology can best support, and plan out a strategy for change.

Hand-in-hand with the skills teachers developed out of necessity these past 18 months came confidence. And with confidence came experimentation, adaptation and innovation. So too came a realisation that technology isn't something we stop teaching in order to use, but a strand of effective practice. Leaders with a credible digital strategy will be pushing at an open door.

So, where should they start? With some simple questions. How can edtech support the things that we know make for effective teaching? Do we have access to those technologies already? How can we offer ongoing access to our curriculum once lessons are over? Can we scaffold that access further? Where are the gaps?

Happily, there's no need for each leader or team to navigate the process entirely on their own (though it should be locally owned). The Department for Education has funded a second year of its popular EdTech Demonstrator Programme, allowing schools to access up to 30 hours of support over the coming months, delivered by peers in similar institutions with deep experience in this kind of change.

And best of all, it's completely free.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The new education framework's first two years have been marked by unprecedented disruption, write Jeffery Quaye and Mary Myatt, but it has proven itself up to the task

Amid the seemingly never-ending train of events affecting schools over the past two years, it's easy to forget that this term marks the second anniversary of the launch of a new education inspection framework (EIF).

Ofsted's aim was to put curriculum back on centre stage in our efforts to educate children well and boost their life chances, and it made every school leader a curriculum leader. But only months later, Covid came along and made us all into home-learning leaders and community leaders. Amid that ongoing disruption, the killing of George Floyd brought increased calls to decolonise the curriculum, requiring us to become social justice leaders too.

Not only that, but with the appointment of Nadhim Zahawi, we are on to our third education secretary over the same period. So whatever else can be said about the EIF, we know that it has adapted to an unprecedented number of challenges and still operated as a framework for evaluating overall school effectiveness and quality of education.

However, the EIF has not been operationalised for a continuous period. With lengthy pauses in Ofsted inspections and constantly shifting priorities, it is unclear that its key principles – a huge departure from what came before – have fully embedded.

When it launched, it was to concerns that it could cause tensions between Ofsted's focus on curriculum offer and the DfE's focus on delivering

DR JEFFERY QUAYE

National director of education and standards, Aspirations Academies Trust



MARY MYATT

Education Adviser, writer and speaker

Two years on, how has Ofsted's inspection framework fared?

exam results. Somewhat ironically, there have been no exam results as such since, but the best answer to that point is that an excellent and ambitious curriculum will by default produce excellent examination results.

about quality of curriculum vs exam results: are the expectations of exam boards broad enough to accommodate local curriculum decisions? We may all want our pupils to know about the origins of algebra and the impact of the work

“It forces us to take a brutal view of our activities

The question of decolonisation is much more sensitive. It is concerned with promoting an inclusive curriculum which critically assesses different viewpoints and assumptions as well as giving students access to a range of diverse voices. It leaves curriculum leaders to grapple with difficult decisions about curriculum content.

This seemingly new tension is just a reformulation of the concern

of black academics and scientists, such as Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson, but when can we fit it all in?

There are no easy answers. There is certainly no one-size-fits-all model. But if anything, these challenges demonstrate that Ofsted's “curriculum turn” was timely and correct. This is curriculum leadership, and it is dynamic. It requires us to consider questions around entitlement, ambition and

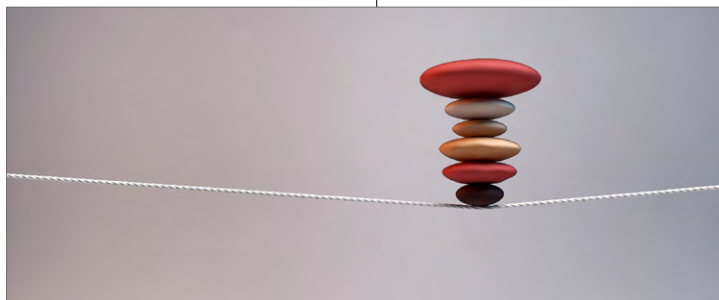
the intellectual journey our schools take pupils on. What is the role of our key stage 3? How do we provoke curiosity? How well are the big ideas identified and sequenced?

Such questions ignite professional interest in subjects. They shape thinking about purpose and practice. But of course, the challenge is not equal for all schools and leaders. Schools without strong subject experts will struggle, and it is not uncommon for staff to teach outside their specialism. That means some curriculum leadership challenges can only find their solutions through recruitment. And while that might seem impossible for some, it's actually inconceivable for others. In small schools, for example, leaders are usually responsible for multiple subjects for which they lack the expert knowledge they need to confidently drive improvement.

All of which puts the onus on another curriculum: professional development. It also brings us back to the real pressure that undermines effective curriculum leadership: lack of time. Again, this is no bad thing. It forces us to take a brutal view of our activities and to rethink those that are least likely to have the greatest impact on outcomes.

Like the events of the past two years, aligning our ambitions with our enacted curriculum seems to be never-ending. But unlike them, the outcomes should be joyous.

Two tumultuous years in, that bodes well for this framework long outliving its short-lived predecessors.



Reviews

BOOK
REVIEW**Teach Like A Champion 3.0: 63 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College****Author:** Doug Lemov**Publisher:** Jossey-Bass**Reviewer:** Shivan Davis, English teacher, St Joan of Arc Catholic School

Doug Lemov's *Teach Like A Champion* (TLAC) books are ubiquitous on CPD library shelves. When I trained in 2015 the first iteration was considered the holy grail of educational books; it offered pragmatic, actionable techniques to help beginner teachers build procedures and routines to manage their classrooms and improve their instruction.

This third instalment is also marketed for trainees and NQTs, while Lemov himself pitches his writing to more experienced teachers and school leaders. Both are right. Whether you're a trainee writing a paper on behaviour management, a middle leader coaching your team on teaching disciplinary literacy or a senior leader improving your school's CPD programme, you will find a veritable treasure trove of useful strategies here.

Familiar too will be Lemov's characteristic anthropological approach. He refers throughout to his "field notes" from hours of classroom observations to uncover the "secret tools" of master teachers, who he views as artisans.

The result is an(other) astonishingly ambitious and generous book that attempts to break down the art of teaching into its component parts. But what sets this edition apart is its grounding in cognitive science and evolutionary biology.

Working with Sweller, Kirschner and Clark's definition of learning, Lemov endeavours to connect the book's 63 techniques to the overall goals of forming habits, forging a sense of shared identity in the classroom and, most importantly, affect change in

students' long-term memory. The way cognitive science is woven throughout the chapters not only adds an important element to TLAC's original purpose, it also offers teachers who are unfamiliar with its central topics the distinct benefit of Lemov's clarity of explanation.

Another way TLAC 3.0 deviates from earlier editions is the extent to which Lemov rails against our "culture of distractions" and argues for schools to insulate and protect students from the excesses of social media. According to Lemov, "Reading as we know it is locked in a death struggle with the cell phone, a battle it is losing badly." For those of us who witness the pernicious influence of these devices on our students' attention spans and overall mental health on a daily basis, it's hard to disagree with him.

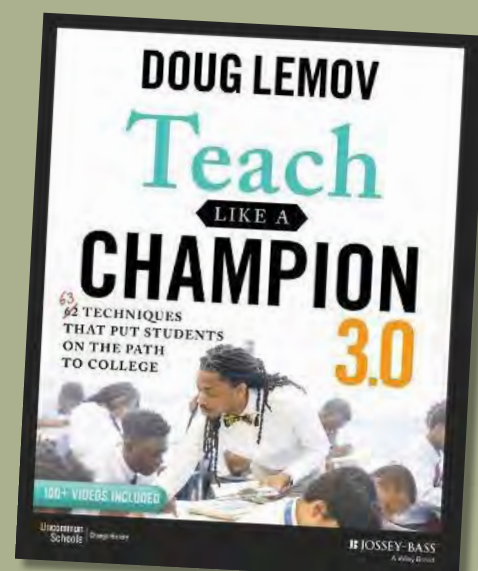
So it's no surprise to see him take on the proponents of teaching "21st-century skills" by pointing out that "too many classrooms presume that doing a task with technology or on a screen adds value". But even more reassuring for teachers using TLAC techniques who have found themselves accused of "carceral pedagogy" or "controlling Black and Brown bodies", it is refreshing to read Lemov's simple retort that "a classroom must be orderly for learning to take place". How did this become a controversial statement?

But if the book has a weakness, it is that Lemov spends too much time agonising over charges brought against his work. I'm not convinced anyone who believes cold-calling is cruel or "oppressive" should be taken so seriously. But Lemov addresses these concerns in a courteous and restrained manner. In fact, far from dismissing criticisms outright, he has reflected on them and adjusted a number of

his techniques accordingly. The highly contentious SLANT (Sit up, Listen, Ask and answer, Nod your head, and Track the speaker), for example, has been re-baptised STAR (Sit up, Track the speaker, Ask and answer questions, Respect those around you).

But despite striking a conciliatory tone for the majority of the book, Lemov pulls no punches here. He calls out a "sentimentalism" that leads some to lower their standards, and points out the hypocrisy of some of his critics in no uncertain terms. For example, he laughs off the controversy around his insistence that teachers have an obligation to help students master Standard English with a simple backhanded compliment: "For what it's worth, they [the critiques] were all written in impeccable Standard English".

This is Lemov at his best, believing fervently that real social justice can be achieved through making classrooms "radically better", and giving teachers the tools to do it.



Reviews



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

@son1bun

Reading Matters – children's book news

@Alibradylady

I know, I know...I've mentioned this blogger before, but I just need more readers (both primary and secondary) to understand how good Anne Thompson's weekly round-up of all things reading for pleasure is. She brings news from the world of children's books with such a gentle ferocity, taking in events, recommendations (hers and others'), competitions, resources, articles and news... all with links...phew!

What I love is the personal touch. You get a sense that all the news must have earned its place. And a particularly powerful feature is her inclusion of diverse news. For me, this speaks volumes about this blogger's commitment to widening conversations and reflecting reality. So, if you don't know Library Lady, get to know her – and change your reading life!

Building Leadership Presence through Awareness of Self

@msybibi via @DiverseEd2020

DiverseEd is a grassroots organisation, co-founded by Bennie Kara and Hannah Wilson. One of their missions is to amplify

TOP BLOGS of the week

the voice of a diverse range of teachers through their blog. This week's blogger is English teacher and assistant head Yamina Bibi, who shares how her inner critic threatened her confidence as a leader.

"As leaders, we have a duty to model vulnerability and authenticity," she states, demonstrating the benefits of the coaching programme that helped her overcome her sense of being a "fraud and failure" by letting go of her perceived "superwoman" persona. The programme allowed her to fully grasp that it's OK not to know everything.

The blog ends on a challenge for all of us to "share all of who we are, so that we can continue doing what we love without fear". Now that is one challenge I can get behind.

What was asked at ResearchEd Surrey

@Joe_Kirby

Joe Kirby celebrates all things ResearchEd and what he sees as the most "powerful questions and central insights" raised at the most recent event in Surrey. He takes in Rebecca Lee on building teacher knowledge, then reflects on Mark Enser's "treating teacher learning more like pupil learning". He then goes on to summarise talks by Josh Vallance on how to build a curriculum from scratch, Becky Allen and Matthew Evans on why leaders do daft things, Heather Fearn on Ofsted's research

reviews and Daisy Christodoulou on what makes good writing?

Each talk is summarised into just four key questions, and what is clear – other than his insight and incisiveness – is Kirby's respect for the "deep thinking" at these Saturday events. As a speaker at several ResearchEd events myself, teachers' eagerness to engage and learn on their days off is infectious. Kirby calls it "awe-inspiring", and even critics can't argue with that.

Differentiation and Sunday Dinner – Thinking Flexibly

@Emma_Turner75

When it comes to simplifying the often over-complicated world of education, the inimitable Emma Turner is the analogy queen. Here, she is at it again, making a challenging topic accessible, yet leaving her readers with plenty of their own thinking to do.

Turner tackles the thorny issue of differentiation, taking us on a journey from its rise to its lethal mutation and its eventual downfall. Turner acknowledges the issues, but makes a convincing case that the concept still has legs. In fact, considering how she needs to present dinner differently depending on her children's ages, she demonstrates its everyday-ness. They all eat the same meal, "but at different stages of proficiency".

With a sharp reminder that very many primaries teach in mixed-age classrooms, Turner wants to "reclaim differentiation as a real and useful tool for meeting the needs of a broad range of ages in our specific contexts".

This blog makes clear that this is not the old "differentiation by stealth". Rather, we should be aiming to "get to the stage where all our pupils can access their 'Sunday dinner' with little or no help, but we cannot pretend that they will get there just with scaffolding and high expectations alone".

Some readers may not agree. But for me, this blog is good enough to eat.

Research



University of Manchester Institute of Education will review a research development each half term. Contact @EducationUoM if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

How can we secure Covid collaborations for the future?

Professor Mel Ainscow, emeritus professor of education, and Dr Paul Armstrong, senior lecturer, University of Manchester

It's now a truism to say that the experience of the pandemic has revealed the extent of injustice across our school system. Those students who were most vulnerable were also those more likely to experience the greatest deficit in relation to their engagement in school and progress in learning.

Many are from low-income and minority backgrounds, or have special educational needs – the very same students who were already particularly vulnerable to marginalisation, underachievement and exclusion prior to the pandemic. Recovery cannot therefore be a simple matter of catch-up to the previous status quo, but must tackle these injustices at their root.

But the experience of the pandemic has also shed light on a previously untapped potential across our school system – that of local collaborations. Much has been written in these pages and elsewhere about their benefits and about the need to sustain them post-Covid. But there is little evidence of anyone doing the structural work to ensure that, nor of any change in policymaking at the DfE.

Greater Manchester's educational recovery strategy, Pathways To Success, stands in contrast to this return to an unsatisfactory normal, and lessons from this initiative are worthy of wider attention. Its aim is to support schools across the ten local authorities that make up the Greater Manchester area, and it offers a clear path to making grassroots collaboration a key feature of school and system improvement.

The preliminary work in the development of this strategy showed the remarkable agility schools have demonstrated since March 2020. The logical implication was that much of the best expertise regarding educational recovery now lies among practitioners themselves.



That's why Pathways To Success is school-led. The work of local authority representatives and university researchers through the steering group is in support of the challenges and solutions identified by school leaders.

Pathways To Success is built on a series of design features that emerged from some of our earlier research into achieving sustainable improvement for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, it is:

- Driven by a common agenda that is agreed by and binds all stakeholders
- Practitioner-led, with senior school staff taking responsibility for system-level improvement
- Experience-led, so that their knowledge identifies the barriers to progress and shapes the right responses to address them
- Partnership-based, to prevent marginalisation and learners "falling between the cracks"
- Coordinated by an inclusive and representative local steering group, made up of representatives from all the stakeholder groups

To date, approximately 150 schools have participated in the strategy. Working in trios, each made up of schools from different local authorities, practitioners have held online

meetings and then provided a summary of what has emerged from their discussions. This has led to a rich resource of information relating to how schools are responding to the ongoing challenges they face. Summaries of these ideas have been shared with all Greater Manchester schools.

Our analysis suggests that the sorts of discussions facilitated by the school trios have created new opportunities within which such knowledge can be shared. They have provided practitioners with the space and conditions to think aloud about their work in a supportive and non-judgmental context.

And in that context, opportunities to meet with new colleagues is proving to be particularly powerful. Through these discussions, individuals have shared knowledge and engaged in joint reflection, leading to new understandings of familiar situations and issues.

The Pathways To Success approach is radically different to the current emphasis on top-down policies. It's too early to point to measurable outcomes for disadvantaged learners, but the strategy is already in itself a tangible development.

Our international research shows the importance of national policymakers knowing the limits of their reach. The details of policy implementation are often not amenable to central regulation and better dealt with by those who are close to local contexts. Co-ordinated school-to-school collaboration is therefore essential in order to move existing knowledge around the wider system.

Pathways To Success not only shows that keeping the pandemic spirit of collaboration alive is possible, it offers a framework to do so for the benefit of our most vulnerable young people.

This article was written with the support of Dr Stephen Rayner, director of teaching and learning (operations), Manchester Institute of Education

Week in

Westminster

Your guide to what's happening in the corridors of power

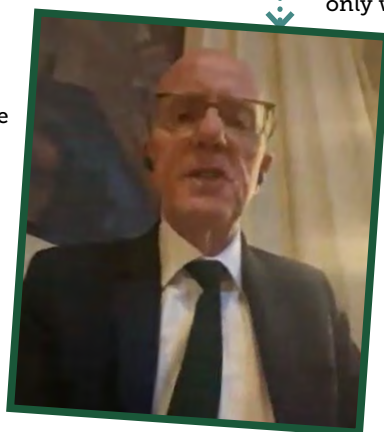
TUESDAY

Ofsted began the week by using the Twitter-verse to aid its hunt for a new head of external affairs.

In a moment of uncharacteristic self-awareness, the watchdog admits it needs *just a little bit of help* to "enhance our reputation among those we inspect and regulate". LOL LOL.

We know Ofsted isn't universally liked, and roundly hated by some. But Dame Alison Peacock took Ofsted criticism to a new level, in a tirade devoid of all hyperbole, telling the Times Education Commission the inspectorate was imposing a "reign of terror" across the sector.

Now, as all you history buffs are probably aware, "The Terror" was a period of mass executions



during the French Revolution (*thank you, Google!*).

While heads may rightly feel being downgraded during a pandemic is something of a kick in the gut, it's not quite a guillotine on the back of the neck.

WEDNESDAY

Nick Gibb (who he?) joined a virtual Ark Talks event today. (Total lolz: he did so from his phone outside the Commons voting lobby – whoever said he was a technophobe?)

Avid players of "Nick Gibb Bingo" were soon on their way to a full house. Not only was the talk on his favourite subject – the knowledge-rich curriculum – but within *10 seconds* Gibb had already mentioned his hero, E.D. Hirsch.

He recounted how he read Hirsch's book on a beach in South Carolina, before promptly recommending it to everyone, including Michael Gove (bingo). Honorary mentions of phonics,

D.T. Willingham, and favourite schools Michaela and Dixons Trinity and the Star Academies trust also followed.

The recently departed schools minister has no plans to stop talking about education any time soon – AND WE LOVE IT.

Nadhim Zahawi and his team of newly appointed avengers hosted the hottest (education) ticket in town as they welcomed a few hundred exclusive guests to a DfE reception.

All was going well until the new head boy took a pop at his backroom staff in an unplanned (but also very planned) off-the-cuff remark. "I have a long speech here, beautifully written by my officials. But I'm not going to read that. You deserve better, I'm just going to speak."

After a pause while everyone sucked in their breath, he quickly switched from biting to kissing the hand that feeds him, mumbling: "No, not better – I have a great group of officials. I didn't mean better!"

P.S. There was no battle of education royalty at the drinks reception. While Peacock did attend the bash, Her Maj Amanda Spielman wasn't to be seen. The latter must have been at home polishing the guillotine?



DEPUTY DIRECTOR REGIONAL SCHOOLS DELIVERY X2

One post based in East Midlands and Humber Region based in Sheffield, the other in the Lancashire and West Yorkshire Region, based in Manchester.



Department
for Education

Dedicated to delivering first-class education to children and young people across England, the Department for Education is a stimulating and rewarding place to work. With over 9700 open academies and free schools nationally, we are seeking two outstanding individuals with a proven track record of excellent leadership skills, a good understanding of the education landscape both nationally and locally, a commitment to diversity and an ability to lead through change. You will be resilient and have the credibility to engage with and influence at the most senior levels; including senior Ministers, along with a very wide range of local and national partners and stakeholders.

That means monitoring performance of academies and free schools, driving improvements in underperforming schools, facilitating multi academy trust development and growth, and leading on the opening of new free schools. You will also lead a Civil Service regional team that plays a key role in Covid response work, wider school improvement and sufficiency of pupil places. Engaging effectively with trust leaders and stakeholders is key, as is commanding respect in support and challenge in the sector.

Please visit [CS Jobs](#) and search for Regional Schools Commissioner



Academy Finance Lead

Tudor Grange Academies Trust is seeking an Academy Finance Lead to be based within its Trust office at Tudor Grange Academy Solihull, B91 3PD. The post holder will be primarily responsible for oversight of our two East Midland Academies and be providing an important contribution to Trust-wide projects and processes.

This is a full-time post, 37 hours per week, however, consideration may be given to term time plus 3 / 4 weeks. AAT Qualification essential with intent to qualify to CIMA or equivalent also essential. Membership of Local Govt Pension Scheme will be automatic, employer contribution rates +20%.

We are looking for someone with a passion to explain data to non-users; an ability to distil trends, to critique data; to engage your audience. You will be preparing data for month end Trust accounts; and gradually become involved in preparing the Trust's centrally prepared monthly management accounts.



PORTLAND SCHOOL
AND SPECIALIST COLLEGE



BUSINESS MANAGER

Portland School are seeking a Business Manager. Portland caters for children who experience Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties Year 1 to Year 11. The school is a split site provision. It is our aim to create a nurturing environment that is safe, stimulating and inclusive.

You will be working as part of the school's leadership team. As the BM, you will work alongside the Headteacher, the Leadership team/school governors.

Key elements of this job are Budget/finance, data protection premises and health & safety.

- Proven experience in finance including in the development, management and operation of financial management systems.
- Understanding of GDPR
- Staff management skills
- Ability to formulate ideas and solutions, possess high-level decision-making skills.
- Excellent written/verbal communication skills
- Excellent ICT skills in MS Office, financial management

Contact: Helen Smith , Portland School, Newcastle Road, Trent Vale
ST4 6NS Tel: 01782 882020 opt 2

Email: Portland@portlandschool.net

Closing date 1 November 2021



School Business Leader

Abbey Court caters for pupils aged 3-19 with Severe Learning Difficulties and is currently located on 2 Strood sites. Facilities include an on-site school farm.

We seek an exceptional and enthusiastic colleague to join our Outstanding School in this key strategic role. The successful candidate will be highly motivated and committed to providing leadership across the school's business and administrative functions.

Excellent interpersonal skills will be essential as the postholder is expected to work collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders.

This important role includes responsibility for high-quality leadership of the following services:

- School Finances
- Administration
- Human Resources
- Premises and Infrastructure
- Health & Safety
- ICT
- Catering

For more information and an application pack, please visit our website www.abbeycourt.medway.sch.uk/recruitment/vacancies.

If you have any queries and to arrange a visit to our school, please contact Mrs Sharon Marsh, School Business Manager by email marss332@abbeycourt.medway.sch.uk



Director of Estates

Salary: Grade 11, Pt 42 to pt 45, £45,859 to £48,863

Full time, 37 hours per week

25 days holiday + bank holidays

Closing date: 28/10/21

This is an exciting opportunity to join a developing Multi-Academy Trust of six schools. The role is intended to be part of the MAT's Executive Team, leading the developing central services function. The role will be based in the Omega Teaching Centre, in West Warrington, however the ability to travel to individual schools is a necessity. The purpose of the role is to establish a comprehensive Estates Central Service for the Trust, creating an effective Estates Strategy and Trust-wide 5-year Capital Plan and reviewing systems and practices in all schools. This role will work in conjunction with school leaders to lead development through across the various sites and cover all aspects of estates management, ensuring the Trust achieves value for money, whilst improving its capital assets.

For further details visit www.omegamat.co.uk/recruitment

Headteacher Vacancy



Audley Primary School | West Midlands

We are seeking a truly inspirational leader to join the largest school within our Trust. In addition to an impressive track record of school improvement you will have superb leadership skills and the credibility to motivate and empower others. You will have a clear vision for rapid school improvement and the ability to challenge robustly and constructively alongside the knowledge to facilitate success for both pupils and staff.

As a Trust headteacher you will also be an important senior leader within the wider Trust. You will work alongside other school leaders and be fully committed to driving improvement across the Trust through collaborative effort and the sharing of expertise.

If you would like to arrange an informal conversation about this post prior to making an application please call the Trust's Executive Director of School Improvement, James Hill on 07725 984363.

If you wish to apply for this role, please download an application form from the Trust website www.drbignitemat.org

Applications should be addressed to James Hill, Executive Director of

School Improvement and submitted with a covering letter (no more than two sides of A4) outlining your expertise for a headteacher role in the Trust. Once completed, forms can be emailed to: rhawkins@drbignitemat.org

Please note: In line with Safer Recruitment Practice, the successful candidate will be subject to final references before an appointment is formally offered. The Trust is absolutely committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults through its safer recruitment processes. The Trust expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. An enhanced DBS check will be required for this post.

The Trust Board welcomes diversity and is absolutely committed to equal opportunity.

Closing date for applications: Friday 12th November 2021 at 12.00pm

Interview dates: w/c 22nd November 2021

Start date: Easter 2022



HEADTEACHER

Wycombe High School's Board of Trustees is seeking an inspirational headteacher for this nationally and internationally renowned girls' grammar school. The current headteacher is retiring in August 2022, after almost 14 highly successful years in post, during which time the school has gone from strength to strength.

Applications are welcomed from existing headteachers wishing to develop their leadership impact and/or strong experienced deputy headteachers. This is an exciting opportunity for a forward-thinking, driven leader who will embrace the ethos and values of this ambitious school and take it to new heights. Applicants must be dedicated to our unwavering commitment to girls' education. Wycombe High School is a national Initial Teacher Training provider, operating an innovative state-independent sector partnership across England and a Mathematics Hub.

We go above and beyond for our staff, and are proud to work alongside Mind, having achieved their workplace Gold Award in 2020-2021 for 'successfully embedding mental health into our policies and practices, demonstrating a long-term and in-depth commitment to staff mental health'. Informal visits in advance of application are welcomed.

For full details and an application form please visit our school's website or contact Mrs Maggie Brookling, HR Manager

Closing date for applications: 8am on Monday 1 November 2021
Interviews will be held: week commencing Monday 8 November 2021 (We reserve the right to close the vacancy if we have sufficient applications)

Wycombe High School and WHSAT are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

The successful applicant will be subject to a disclosure of criminal records at an enhanced level and must provide proof of the right to work in the UK.

Marlow Road,
High Wycombe, Bucks,
HP11 1TB
01494 523961
www.whs.bucks.sch.uk | mbrookling@whs.bucks.sch.uk



LANCASTER UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS



Lancaster University School of Mathematics

Head of School

This is an exciting and unique opportunity for an individual with a passion for the teaching of mathematics to shape and lead a first-class specialist Maths School.

Opening in September 2022, the Maths School will be the fourth in England - joining those set up by King's College London, the University of Exeter and the University of Liverpool.

The successful candidate will play a pivotal role in bringing the vision of the Maths School to life, enabling the most gifted mathematicians from all backgrounds to realise their potential within an inspiring, inclusive and supportive learning community.

Under the successful candidate's direction and leadership, the Maths School will provide exceptional teaching, an intellectually stimulating

and challenging curriculum along with first-class facilities and high-quality resources for 16-19-year-olds who love maths.

We welcome applications for this leadership post to commence 1st May 2022.

Hours: The role is a full-time position.

Salary paid at L14 to L19 of the SFCA Leadership spine, currently pro rata to £66,285 to £74,628 per annum.

Closing date for receipt of applications: 9.00 a.m. Tuesday 2nd November 2021.

Please apply using the application form provided, CVs will not be accepted.

Further details are available at <https://lusom.ac.uk/job-vacancies/current-posts/> or by telephone on 01772 460181. Interested applicants are invited to have an informal discussion with the Executive Principal, Nick Burnham. To arrange this please contact the HR department on 01772 460181 or email HR@lusom.ac.uk

All offers of appointment are subject to Disclosure and Barring Service Clearance as well as a range of other safer recruitment checks



Director of HR

Salary: Grade 11, Pt 42 to Pt 45, £45,859 to £48,863
Full time, 37 hours per week
25 days holiday + bank holidays

Closing Date: 28/10/21

This is an exciting opportunity to join a developing Multi-Academy Trust of six schools. The role will be part of the MAT's Executive Team, leading the developing central services function. The Trust's strategic objectives focus on providing the best possible school experience for its pupils and staff, aiming to be the best employer possible. The role will be based in the Omega Teaching Centre, in West Warrington, however the ability to travel to individual schools is a necessity. The purpose of the role is to provide a comprehensive HR service for over 500 staff within the Trust, to lead the HR Central Service team & cover all aspects of people management. HR support is currently provided externally by the Schools People and Payroll by the Warrington Borough Council Payroll Services

For further details visit www.omegamat.co.uk/recruitment

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