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# SCHOOLS WEEK

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### Schools caught up in SIMs contract changes



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#### Correction:

In a story in last week's edition, Nearly half of reinspected ITT providers now less than 'good', we incorrectly reported that the University of Birmingham's primary-age provision dropped from 'good' to 'requires improvement'.

This should have referred to the University of Buckingham, and we apologise for the error. The University of Birmingham's provision is rated 'outstanding' across the board, based on a 2013 inspection.

#### Apology:

Schools Week was informed one of the TikTok images used in our investigation last week had led to identification of the staff pictured. We had blurred parts of the picture, and once informed immediately blurred the whole image. Our intention behind including the image was to show the abhorrent abuse being targeted at teachers, not to identify those featured. We apologise for any distress caused.

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## NEWS

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# Academies minister asks top LA schools to 'share the love'

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EXCLUSIVE

The new academies minister has urged strong maintained schools to "share the love" by launching multi-academy trusts.

Baroness Barran went on a charm offensive at the Schools and Academies Show in Birmingham this week, telling local authority heads and governors in a speech: "We need you".

In a later interview with *Schools Week*, her first since becoming academies minister in September, she also revealed that the government is investigating different trust operating models to see which produce the best outcomes.

## 'Evolution' of DfE strategy

Barran, a former investment banker and charity leader, spoke of "maximising the pounds in the classroom" through economies of scale, and the "trust dividend".

She said the sector should also "take comfort" that policy under education secretary Nadhim Zahawi would be "evidence-driven".

She was "skipping with delight" to find common ground with the fellow ex-business leader's approach, as her own working background was "heavily grounded in evidence".

The Department for Education was carrying out financial analysis "right now" to find which operating models delivered best outcomes. This evidence focus marked an "evolution of the strategy".

When asked if she would publish the findings, Barran said: "If we can be transparent, we will be."

Yet she repeatedly stressed the DfE's continued vision of all schools joining MATs, dampening recent speculation Zahawi may be less committed to his predecessor's agenda.

## Ministers change their tune on councils

But she added: "One of the unanswered questions is how we unlock some of the

capacity within the maintained sector where they're delivering a great education. We would like them to share the love."

The department wants strong maintained schools to share their great assets and expertise more widely, she said.

"There's a real opportunity for them, not only to do good in their community, but also the opportunities it offers their staff."

It marks a change of rhetoric towards councils from the government as it attempts to revive the academies drive.

At present, 37 per cent of primary schools are academies, compared with 78 per cent of secondaries. More than half of pupils now attend an academy.

But government survey figures released this week show only 13 per cent of local authority primaries and 22 per cent of secondaries were considering converting. Most fear a loss of autonomy.

Barran said the government had to "move the needle" on the 600,000 children in schools with 'inadequate' or repeat 'requires improvement' ratings. She said her office walls were plastered with national maps showing academisation coldspots and failing schools "to remind me every morning".

The evidence showed strong trusts could transform such schools, she said. But the minister acknowledged some areas lacked trust capacity, even if other MAT leaders were "chomping at the bit" to expand.



Baroness Barran

Asked whether councils running their own trusts could feature in a white paper, she said the government wanted schools in "strong families", but did not have hard and fast rules or ideas. She declined to rule it out, and said she could not pre-empt white paper announcements.

## Accountability but not 'Soviet'-style

Her speech acknowledged that "not all trusts are strong", with a need to do more, despite rigorous scrutiny and robust intervention. Her speech acknowledged that "not all trusts are strong", with a need to do more, despite rigorous scrutiny and robust intervention already. But she said it did not mean micro-management or a "Soviet model", with the aim a "consistent, "We want to take a careful look at how we hold trusts to account and ensure they deliver value for public money."

Her speech further pledged that trusts' role in communities would not only continue but be "strengthened".

Asked to elaborate, she said the DfE was "not going to tell them how to do it", but wanted to learn from best practice.

When asked how big she would be comfortable with trusts growing, Barran said: "Our north star has to be what delivers the best outcomes for children, rather than a set idea about £50 million or £100 million turnover being too big".



## ON LOCATION: ACADEMIES SHOW

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## NTP academic tutors opened up to majority of schools

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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More than half of schools in England can now access the government's academic mentors scheme after the eligibility criteria was widened.

The Department for Education has told leaders that following a review of the National Tutoring Programme, it was extending eligibility for the academic mentors arm to include all schools where more than 30 per cent of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, regardless of where they are located.

Schools were previously only eligible for support through the academic mentors arm of the programme if they had already accessed the scheme last year, or were in 118 districts or opportunity areas listed by the government.

According to the DfE, the change increases the scope of schools eligible for this resource "to 53 per cent of all schools in England". It is not known what percentage of schools were eligible under the previous criteria.

It comes after the government official in charge of education recovery policy urged schools struggling to afford their share of

the cost of tutoring to "think about" what else they are spending their money on.

Graham Archer, director of education recovery at the DfE, said schools were getting a "really good deal" from the programme, and said tutoring was "one of the best-evidenced ways of working with children".

Government subsidy of the tuition partners arm of the NTP is set to reduce from 70 per cent to 50 per cent next year, and to just ten per cent the year after. The subsidy for school-led tutoring will also drop to 25 per cent by 2023-24.

Challenged by a delegate at the Schools and Academies Show who said some schools were struggling to afford even the current contributions, Archer said tutoring was "one of the best-evidenced ways of working with children, both to enable them to catch up and to close some of the attainment gaps".

"And I think in terms of use of schools' pupil premium or other resources this is a really good deal and there's a big subsidy... and I would urge schools to think about what are you doing that's better than tutoring that means that you can't access it?"

Archer also defended the appointment



of Randstad, a Dutch outsourcing firm, to run the NTP from this year. He said the government had run a "competitive procurement, Randstad put in the best bid, and we're working with them to deliver that through their own officers and those of a lot of the tutoring partners who operated last year".

Randstad was also last week handed £6 million more funding to provide training for tutors recruited under the school-led tutoring programme.

The training scheme, being delivered "in partnership" with the Education Development Trust, was launched in September, but the firm's contract has only recently been updated, with an additional £6,693,963 for the training element.

It means Randstad's total contract value has increased from £25.6 million to £32 million.

## Adviser says ITT reforms set for more flexibility

The government's ITT review has been watered down to be "more implementable", a member of its advisory group has suggested.

Professor Sam Twiselton said the final initial teacher training market review, due out in the next few weeks, would be more "flexible and do-able".

She was one of many teacher training professionals who expressed doubts about the review when it was published in July. The initial proposals would have left providers having to apply for re-accreditation by next summer.

Twiselton told *Schools Week* at the time that the proposed reforms were "hugely risky" to teacher supply and quality, and

backed delaying implementation for a year.

Speaking at the Schools and Academies Show yesterday, Twiselton said the government had listened to concerns.

"You might have noticed that when the consultation was launched, I expressed some worries...not about what it was trying to achieve, but about how implementable it was.

"I think I've been listened to to an extent. So most of the proposals exist still in some form in the response, but have been made more flexible, more do-able. And I'm hopeful there might be more time."

The latter comment hints ministers have agreed to push back the deadline for re-

accreditation, something *Schools Week* first revealed was on the table.

The timing of the re-accreditation in the original proposals prompted outrage across the sector.

At the time, Emma Hollis, from the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers, warned that "forcing providers to submit applications for re-accreditation within just a five-month window risks the loss of some exceptional ones because they simply do not have sufficient time, resource and capacity to undertake the process effectively".

## NEWS

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## £24m extra cash for Ofsted to speed up inspections ...

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Ofsted has received a £24 million funding boost to inspect all schools and colleges by summer 2025, although acceleration of inspections will not begin until next year.

The cash injection will allow the watchdog to recruit more inspectors and provide a quicker assessment of education recovery.

Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, said this would "provide parents with an up-to-date picture and swifter recognition of the hard work of leaders and teachers".

But Nick Brook, the deputy general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, said the announcement felt "completely tone-deaf" because of the pressure schools were under and the recent calls to pause inspections.

The inspectorate will receive £23.85 million over the next three financial years. More than half, £13.3 million, has



Amanda Spielman

been ring-fenced for accelerating school inspections.

The remaining £10.55 million will go towards inspections of further education providers.

The accelerated inspections will not begin until September next year and all schools will be inspected by 2025, a year earlier than envisaged.

Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector,

said: "Everyone working in education must do everything they can to give this generation the best possible chance to fulfil its potential."

"Ofsted will play its part – by giving parents and learners up-to-date information, and by helping schools and colleges shape their plans."

But the funding boost comes as many school leaders oppose the return of inspections, which restarted this September (see story below). 'Outstanding' schools are also facing routine inspections for the first time since 2010.

Brook added: "Rather than thinking about how it can increase the number of inspections that take place, Ofsted should be concentrating on how best to support and inspect schools in a post-lockdown world."

Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders, said Ofsted inspections would not help children to catch-up with lost learning caused by the pandemic. Instead, all schools and colleges should have "sufficient funding from the government".

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## ... but heads say inspectors' return 'profoundly wrong'

Ofsted's chief inspector has said it is "absolutely right" to hold routine inspections while schools are still grappling with Covid.

In a speech at the Schools & Academies Show in Birmingham yesterday, Amanda Spielman sought to reassure schools that inspectors "know what you're up against" with the pandemic. But she said reimposing routine inspections had been a "ministerial decision".

It comes as unions call for schools to be able to defer inspections when they are in "crisis mode", and school leaders claim inspectors fail to fully reflect Covid's toll on schools.

Hundreds of education figures this week also penned an open letter to Ofsted demanding reforms to stop "unnecessary stress" and rework an "insular and unaccountable" complaints process.

Spielman began her speech by acknowledging it "really isn't business as

usual", given challenges that include high pupil and staff absences.

"It's been a torrid 20 months, and it's absolutely right that we recognise that."

Inspectors have been in schools "regularly" and "seen first-hand" how difficult Covid has made their work, even when routine inspections were suspended.

Routine inspections started again in September, with 500 inspections between September and the October half term.

She said many school leaders were "ready for an inspection" and keen to show how much they had improved.

But one headteacher at the event told Spielman he faced a struggle to keep his school open at all in a Covid environment.

The idea it was the right time to do normal inspections was "profoundly wrong", and he questioned whether Ofsted had properly consulted schools, given its judgments have such a "profound effect".

The head received loud applause. But Spielman replied: "The reason it's the right time is because children are the people who've had the worst deal from Covid."

Their "lives have been put on hold" and they have been "paying the price for protecting adults, all of us here".

She said there was "nothing unrealistic" about its approach, and that it was "absolutely right we are there looking at what children are getting".

One audience member said heads were "really struggling" and highlighted fears of an exodus. Another head warned he had three senior leaders who wanted to resign, and he was struggling to recruit.

Sir Kevan Collins, the former recovery tsar, told the event on Wednesday that while inspection "still has a place in our system", there was "something wrong with people being so frightened".



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# The big interview

Dr Jo Saxton

## ‘No one will be able to say I hid away in the Ofqual attic’

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

**Dr Jo Saxton, the new chief regulator of Ofqual, tells John Dickens she likes a challenge. Just as well, as she faces having to restore confidence in what many see as a shattered system**

Dr Jo Saxton doesn't do easy.

After leading an academy trust founded by former academies minister Lord Nash, she set up her own – Turner Schools, in Kent – from scratch. Not just that, it took over two schools in need of major rehabilitation after they had been failed under one of the sector's biggest scandal-hit trusts, Lilac Sky.

With Turner established, she left in March last year to become policy adviser to then education secretary Gavin Williamson. A tough job got tougher when, a week after her appointment, Covid hit.

Then in September she became chief regulator of Ofqual, an organisation in need of major change after it was nearly brought to its knees by the 2020 exams fiasco.

So what draws her to such challenges?

“It could be that I'm the fourth of five children,” she says. “It could be that I hate, hate low expectations... I suppose I've said yes to things where there was a chance to do something about raising expectations, particularly for the disadvantaged.”

She cites her own school experience where teachers had “low expectations of me. That made me cross.

“I was really slow learning to read. OK, I probably have mild dyslexia. And my secondary school, which sent loads of kids to Oxbridge, didn't think that I was in that pile. I was determined to prove them wrong and managed to get myself to Cambridge.”

But how does she prove the (growing) Ofqual doubters wrong?

The regulator's own survey earlier this year found trust in GCSEs had plummeted after last summer's exams fiasco. Just 27 per cent of respondents agreed that ‘GCSEs are trusted’ when asked about 2020, compared to three-quarters in a normal year.



“I want to look at places that are struggling – what can I do for them?”

### ‘What can I do for struggling schools?’

“Ofqual tried really hard to listen to the sector,” Saxton says. “But I'm going to try even harder.”

Robert Halfon, the education committee chair, even accused the regulator of “hiding away in the Ofqual attic” while the fiasco exploded.

The government U-turned on plans to award standardised grades after nearly 40 per cent of teacher grades were hauled down by an ill-fated algorithm.

Was Halfon right?

“It definitely felt like that. I don't think Ofqual was trying to hide away in the Ofqual attic. But how I'm going to work no one will be able to say that.”

Saxton has started to visit schools as part of a “listening tour” that will see her reach every region in the country.

She wants to start with those in areas worst-hit by Covid, as well as those in “coastal isolation”. One of the criteria for a visit is that schools must serve at least the national average of disadvantaged pupils.

“They often aren't the ones who get to sit at the roundtables,” Saxton says. “But the people that need me to think differently are not the affluent suburbs in Guildford. I want to look at places that are struggling – what can I do for them?”

She says the “penny really dropped” while speaking to a parent governor during a recent

## THE BIG INTERVIEW

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school visit in Bristol.

"Policymakers and regulators are really good at talking to sector representative bodies, government and other policymakers. But I want to spend more time with the people who these qualifications are for, who our regulation affects."

And she doesn't just want to see the "lovely perfect bits. I'm not talking about kind of tokenistic visits. I want to talk to learners about the challenges that they face with the qualification system."

It's fitting we meet at the National Gallery, where Saxton fell in love with paintings at the age of 12. The former professional art historian says the location signifies her desire to make the "inaccessible, accessible" (she often brought both university and school students here).

"Due to the pandemic, the assessment blackbox has been opened to schools – and I want to keep doing that. I want parents to understand it."

### 'It's a question of when, not if, on exams technology'

She says it's also a response to the shifting purpose of the regulator. "Ofqual was founded to control grade inflation and [create] technical rules for exam boards. The ask of Ofqual is very different now."

"Now it's having to work hard to deal with general qualifications and public confidence – and whether they are fair. It's definitely taken a knock in the pandemic."

While calls to reform exams are not new, that "knock" has amplified the arguments of dissenters. Do any reform proposals have merit?

"Lots of people are saying, and I agree with, 'let's get more tech in qualifications.'"

This could benefit exam security and make the system more environmentally friendly, she says.

"Think of the tonnes of paper ... in the different delivery trucks that take papers to and from centres. There's a big sort of green agenda."

Saxton says one likely change could be making more use of online, multiple-choice elements (think driving test theory) in GCSEs and A-levels.

"If you have a myriad of questions that lived in a wonderful database, and it can spit them out to candidates in a totally random order (obviously they will relate to the exam), yes, that could work really well."

It would help spread the "benefits" from some vocational qualifications, such as functional skills, of being able to "test when ready".

But she would want a "hybrid approach" that did not "undermine other skills. We shouldn't lose the importance of writing."

Talks will start soon with the department, while Nadhim Zahawi is said to be "very keen" to look at

## "Technology? It's not if, but where and when"

technology in exams.

"The pandemic has accelerated the involvement of technology. It's not a question of if, it's where might we involve it more, and when."

### 'It's not comparable outcomes that have failed children struggling to write'

Another problem on her desk is criticism over the use of comparable outcomes. Ofqual's "mutant" algorithm took much of the blame for the 2020 failures.

About a third of children leave school without a 'standard' pass grade 4 in GCSE English and maths. An independent inquiry into the "forgotten third" by the Association of School and College Leaders says this is "not an accident, but the product of the system of comparable outcomes whereby the spread of GCSE grades is pegged to what cohorts of similar ability achieved in the past".

Saxton does not buy it – she says comparable outcomes just make sure there is inter-cohort fairness. And she has some choice words for the sector.

"The exam system is not intending to set anybody up to fail. The question you have to ask is what has happened in the ten years of education before that point that children fail?"

"If you look at [those] candidate scripts, it's just so dispiriting. There are children who are struggling to write. It's not the GCSE that has failed them, or comparable outcomes."

Saxton also isn't worried about potential issues with future cohorts having no key stage 2 data to feed into the comparable outcomes machine, saying that the national reference test does the job just as well.

The nerdier aspects of regulation don't seem to bother her, in fact she delights in it.

Working in the academy system ignited a passion for regulation (she has an "embarrassingly large" number of books about regulation on her bedside table).

Specifically, it was the academy scandals – and

seeing the consequences at the "grassroots" – that drew her in.

When Turner Schools took over the Lilac Sky schools Martello Primary and Morehall Primary, she arrived to find one hadn't had functioning heating for years. Staff and pupils would wear coats in certain rooms as it was "just what they did".

A government investigation into Lilac Sky academy trust is still unpublished. But annual accounts have shed some light on what went on – from leaders spending public money on "luxury alcohol" to handing staff severance pay-offs before rehiring them the next day.

"The DfE has not got the powers it actually needs to be the champion for the vulnerable that it wants to be," she says.

The solution? "It needs a bit of legislation, so that it could deal with abject cases of failure at school quick."

### 'Full academisation needs finishing'

She describes Williamson's job during the pandemic as "unwinnable, just an impossible task".

What did she learn from working with him?

"The importance of being nice to people even when something is really difficult."

"At the height of the most stressful days, with incredibly long hours, he always took the time to ask people how they were, and meant it. It was difficult being on the other side of it, and seeing the grilling that he was getting because he cared about learners having a high-quality education."

Saxton says "fully academising" is the thing that she most would have liked to have seen through.

"It's not a big ideological thing. High-performing jurisdictions don't have mixed models of school governance and it's just really messy in England. We have just over half of pupils in academies now; that needs finishing."

She was keen on new policies to "nudge" people into it, acknowledging work was needed to "break down this myth that cases like Lilac Sky have built up – the concept that academy trusts are bad and evil. The majority are really good people who want to be able to affect change in more than one school."

But rather than pushing the benefits of a new system, her exams challenge requires trying to restore confidence in a shattered one.

"I completely, totally, believe in my DNA that qualifications open doors for people. Once you're armed with them – the world is your oyster."

"I want people to be able to fulfil their aspirations. And I firmly believe that the pursuit of qualifications contributes to that."

## NEWS

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# Schools told to hold off on three-year MIS contract

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EXCLUSIVE

The government is urging schools to delay signing a three-year contract extension with England's biggest school information management system supplier.

Schools have raised "serious concerns" after Education Software Solutions (ESS) SIMS announced it was scrapping its normal one-year rolling contracts.

The extended contract means those planning to switch management information service (MIS) providers in the next few years now have just six weeks to arrange an alternative.

SIMS says the terms are "not unusual in our industry" and its previous model "was very much an anomaly".

But a Department for Education spokesperson said it was looking into the change "and would encourage all schools to pause before agreeing to this new contract whilst we investigate".

The new contract follows Capita's £400 million sale of the ESS education platform last year. While still the dominant supplier, SIMS' market share has slipped from 84 per cent of schools in 2012 to about 70 per cent, according to analysis by the Bring More Data blog.

ParentPay, the new company that owns SIMS, sent an email to schools last week explaining the extension of the annual entitlement plan to three years.

Costs would be fixed for the first year and capped price increases would apply for the



next two.

Further emails state schools wishing to leave must inform SIMS by December 31. School contracts are due to end in April next year, so new systems would need to be in place by then.

Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said school leaders had "serious concerns" over the extension.

Joshua Perry, an MIS expert who runs the Bring More Data blog, said it typically took a school six to 12 months to move from deciding to run a procurement to completion.

Richard Hastings, IT manager of an all-through independent school, said the contract extension had "forced" his school to move providers "because we don't want to get locked in for three years".

He warned of a "rush of schools leaving that don't make the right decision".

A survey on Wednesday of 275 schools using SIMS found 91 per cent did not feel they had

enough time to look at procuring other systems by April.

The survey, conducted by The Key – a competitor to SIMS – also found 38 per cent were not aware of the contract change.

It could also leave schools needing to re-tender for the contract.

Department for Education guidance sent to schools in 2019 states that if an update within a contract term is "sufficiently material", a new procurement exercise is required.

But Mark Brant, ParentPay chief executive, said the use of three or five-year terms was "not unusual in our industry – until now SIMS was very much the anomaly".

He expressed "sincere regret" for any concern and urged customers to get in touch so they could "look into their specific circumstances".

Capita sold ESS last year to Montagu Private Equity for £400 million – about £100 million under initial estimates.

In August, ParentPay completed its acquisition of ESS to become the UK's biggest edtech business, with Montagu taking a significant minority interest.

The merger was investigated by the Competition and Markets Authority, which found "schools are increasingly willing to switch from SIMS' MIS to cloud-based alternatives".

Perry said the rate at which schools were leaving for other providers had increased to about 4 per cent annually.

SIMS was more than seven times larger than its next biggest competitor, when comparing market share.

EXCLUSIVE

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR\_93

## Software supplier takes legal action against second trust

A major school software supplier is taking legal action against an academy trust after losing out on a £2 million contract.

Bromcom Computers filed a High Court claim against Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) last Friday over the procurement of a five-year deal to supply its school management information system.

The company is currently embroiled in a High Court spat with United Learning (UL) after it failed to obtain a similar five-year contract worth £2 million.

In that instance, Bromcom claimed the trust had breached procurement law. The case is ongoing and is not expected to conclude until the middle of next year at the earliest.

*Schools Week* understands the AET contract, for 57 schools, was ultimately awarded to Arbor Education – which also won the UL deal.

Details of the action against AET are yet to be published.

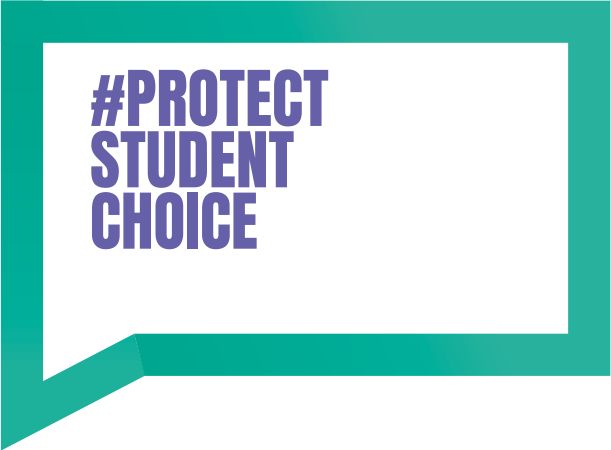
Rebecca Boomer-Clark, the chief executive

of AET, said it was "very disappointing" Bromcom was pursuing a legal route. It would "only serve to absorb precious time and money that would otherwise be supporting our schools".

The trust was confident "the procurement process was thorough".

Bromcom said it had only taken legal action as a "last resort" and had "on a small number of occasions challenged apparently unlawful procurement practices to make sure taxpayers secure value for money".





**#PROTECT  
STUDENT  
CHOICE**

# DON'T SCRAP BTECS

The **#ProtectStudentChoice** campaign coalition of over 20 organisations that represent and support staff and students in schools, colleges and universities is deeply concerned about the Government's recent review of Level 3 BTECs and other applied general qualifications in England. We urgently need your support to protect the future of BTECs and other applied general qualifications:

- **Sign our petition on the Parliament website and share with your colleagues, governors, students and parents – [petition.parliament.uk/petitions/592642](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/592642)**
- **Write to your local MPs to secure their support**
- **Tweet support for the campaign [#ProtectStudentChoice](https://twitter.com/ProtectStudentChoice)**



To find out more visit [www.protectstudentchoice.org](http://www.protectstudentchoice.org)

## KEY FINDINGS

# Academisation rate 'unlikely to increase' without new policies, DfE study finds

The number of academy conversions in the next three years will be "limited to a steady rate" and is "unlikely to increase" without any change to current policies, a new study has found.

The Department for Education has published a research report on schools' views on joining a multi-academy trust.

Former education secretary Gavin Williamson said the department's "vision" was for all schools to join a MAT.

Researchers interviewed 300 LA-maintained schools, 300 recent converters in MATs and 100 standalone academies in June and July this year.

Here are the report's key findings...

### 1. Most converters said change had 'positive impact'...

Most recent converters – 82 per cent of primary schools and 74 per cent of secondary schools – said the overall impact of joining a MAT had been positive.

Most schools – 60 per cent at primary and 73 per cent at secondary – said that increasing collaboration was a key reason for joining a MAT. Secondary schools were more likely to report significant improvements to the school's reputation and image and the quality of school governance. Primary schools saw big improvements on sharing of skills.

The report said improvements in the school's sense of direction, training of staff and quality of leadership were all experienced "more frequently" than had been anticipated.

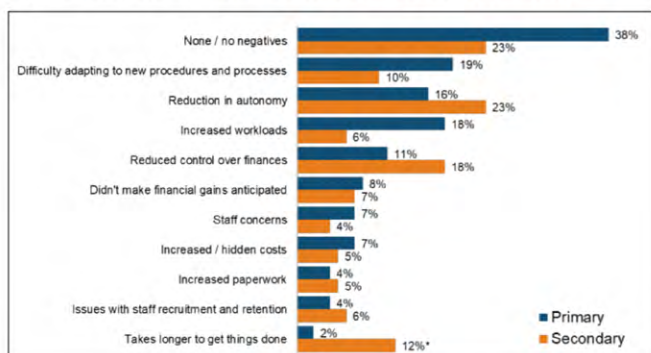
This suggested "there is potential to increase awareness and raise expectations of these benefits amongst schools that are not part of MATs".

### 2. ...but there were also negatives

Of the recent converters, only four in ten primary schools (38 per cent) and 23 per cent of secondaries said there had been no negatives. For primary schools, difficulty adapting to new processes (19 per cent), increased workloads (18 per cent) and reduction in autonomy (16 per cent) were the biggest negatives.

For secondaries, the reduction in autonomy (23 per cent), reduced control over finances (18 per cent) and taking longer to get things done (12 per cent) were the biggest drawbacks.

Figure 13: Negatives experienced as a result of joining a MAT (spontaneous)



Base: Recent converters; primary schools (260), Secondary schools (40).

### 3. Conversion process also 'challenging'

Most recent converters – 60 per cent of primaries and 70 per cent of secondaries – found the process "challenging".

For those that found the process the hardest, the main difficulty was increased workload or time spent on the process (30 per cent of primary schools and 23 per cent of secondaries).

A quarter of primaries found that dealing with objections from parents or staff (25 per cent) and the volume of paperwork (22 per cent) had made the process difficult.

### 4. Few schools plan to join a MAT (with loss of autonomy big sticking point)

Only 13 per cent of local authority primaries and 22 per cent of LA secondaries were considering converting to academy status.

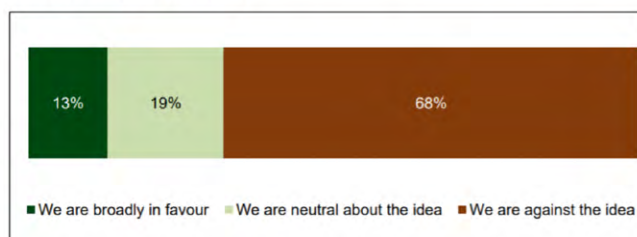
The vast majority – 94 per cent of primary and 87 per cent of secondaries – felt there would be negatives linked with converting, with "loss of autonomy and culture" the most frequent concern.

But there seems to be more appetite among single-academy trusts. Around one-third of standalone academies (35 per cent) were currently considering forming or joining a MAT in the next two years.

However, 66 per cent said that not joining a MAT was an "active decision"; while 21 per cent felt that other MATs were unsuitable.

The report suggests "the rate of conversions in the coming two to three years to academies will be limited to a steady rate and is unlikely to increase without any change to current policies".

Figure 42: Whether long-term standalone academies were in favour, neutral or against the idea of joining an existing MAT



Base: All long-term standalone academies excluding those within a MAT which contains no other schools (85).

### 5. 'Evidencing positives' critical, says DfE

The report concludes that schools not in MATs could see the benefits, but they felt these would not outweigh their concerns.

It adds that if the department wants to implement its vision of having all schools in a strong MAT, then "evidencing the positive experiences of schools in MATs will be critical".

Researchers also said the positive findings "suggest that the downsides associated with any loss of autonomy experienced was outweighed by the benefits", and DfE should communicate this more clearly to reach its aim.

Academies minister Baroness Barran said this week she is keen to "tackle" apprehension over converting.

## NEWS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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# On hold: NLE programme delayed until September

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Reforms to the national leaders of education (NLE) programme have been delayed until next year, the government has confirmed.

The Department for Education had originally launched a tender, worth up to £2.5 million, in October last year to deliver the reforms nationwide.

Under that contract, the ambition was to have at least 450 NLEs trained by the end of September this year, and a further 100 by September 2022.

However, there were no successful bidders and an interim £88,213 training contract was instead awarded to teacher trainers Inspiring Teachers for the autumn and spring terms.

A DfE spokesperson said that "following the impact" of Covid-19 it had "paused" reforms until September 2022. Further details will be released in "due course", but it remains "committed" to the reforms to



make sure it's "as effective as possible".

The programme has now been rolled into the new Institute of Teaching, which will be expected to deliver a "development programme" for up to 650 NLEs between 2022 and 2025.

Tender documents show candidates will be "assessed against new, rigorous" standards. The programme is to be delivered over six school terms, comprising at least 45 hours. A contractor has yet to be announced.

NLEs are successful school leaders who work alongside others to support struggling schools.

In February 2020, an advisory group made six recommendations on reforming the role. They wanted government to have a "full-cadre" of newly designated NLEs in place by

the start of this academic year.

Their recommendations included allowing "transformative" academy trust chief executive and improvement directors to become NLEs. The role has traditionally been restricted to head teachers of individual schools.

The DfE said it would be "taking forward" recommendations, but did not commit to all of them.

However, a tender document last year suggested that only leaders who achieve high standards "in the context of a knowledge-rich curriculum" could become NLEs.

The DfE did not confirm this week how many NLEs had been trained during the past year, but said all training for NLEs that require it has taken place during the pandemic.

Earlier this month, 60 new national leaders of governance (NLGs) were appointed under reformed government support. Part of the reforms includes paying them £500 a day.

EXCLUSIVE

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR\_93

## DfE pays £124k for pension shortfall

The government had to stump up £124,000 to cover missed pension payments for a failed free school beset with financial woes.

Contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) were not made for 13 teachers from Collective Spirit Free School in Oldham after the trust allegedly failed to enrol them on the programme.

Collective Spirit closed in the summer of 2017 after it was placed in special measures. It got more than £250,000 from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to facilitate the closure.

Jim McMahon, the Labour MP for Oldham West and Royton, raised the pension issues with government.

The problem came to light when the school contacted the TPS to identify "pension arrears", despite an ESFA investigation into Collective Spirit and its sister school, Manchester Creative Studio School.

Responding to McMahon, Baroness Barran, the academies minister, admitted that the

arrears resulted from the "failure of the employer to identify teaching staff who, by default, should have been members of the TPS".

In January last year, the school asked the agency to pay unpaid pension contributions to 13 teachers totalling £123,574.06 – including almost £14,000 in interest – as it had "insufficient remaining funds". The trust that ran it was in the process of shutting.

Barran confirmed that the "missing contributions has been made good" and paid by ESFA, which also stumped up £41,250 to settle arrears for three staff members left out of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Employers have a "statutory obligation" to enrol eligible employees in the scheme. However, the TPS "would not be aware" if they failed to do so, the minister said.

It is "believed this is an isolated case", relating to "the failure of the trust to meet its employer responsibilities, rather than a failure in the system".

McMahon also asked why the issue was not

raised during the government's investigation into the sister schools – which were run as separate organisations, but governed by an overarching board of directors.

Manchester Creative Studio School closed in 2018.

In May 2019, an ESFA investigation found that the former chair of both schools, Alun Morgan, had broken the law over payments of more than £500,000 to his own company, the Collective Spirit Community Trust.

The investigation also cast "significant doubts" on the legitimacy of money paid to a company connected to Raja Miah, the former head of both schools.

Barran explained the scope of the investigation was "specifically" on concerns surrounding Collective Spirit Community Trust, so would not have included the pension arrears.

She added that "other work was already ongoing within the trust . . . to resolve outstanding matters, particularly in relations to financial management."



## NEWS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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## Birmingham could lose control of its SEND services

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

EXCLUSIVE

A council could see its failing special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) children support services handed over to an external body if it does not improve within the year, new tender documents reveal.

The government parachuted in John Coughlan as commissioner for SEND services at Birmingham City Council last month.

A statutory direction was issued after a damning Ofsted report found "sufficient progress" had not been made in 12 out of 13 "significant areas of weakness".

Tender documents published last week show that if Coughlan is not "convinced" of Birmingham's ability to improve, he can consider "options for effective delivery...outside of the operational control of the local authority".

Furthermore, the former Hampshire County Council chief executive must recommend whether there is evidence "strong enough for service control to remain with the council".

The Department for Education said any partial or complete removal of services would be a "last resort" and need careful planning.

Such a change would also be subject to ministerial approval.

Underperforming councils have previously lost control of elements of their provision before, but this has tended to be for children's services.

In 2012, Kingston Council's responsibility for child protection was taken over by neighbouring Richmond-upon-Thames.

Slough's children's services were handed over to an independent trust in 2015 after an 'inadequate' Ofsted. While this is now back under council ownership, it retains some independence.

Meanwhile the government took control of Croydon's children's services in 2017 due to "widespread and serious" failures.

Birmingham's SEND commissioner direction

was the first issued by government. Coughlan has the powers to "issue any necessary instructions" which would secure "immediate improvement" of SEND services.

The contract, which expires in September 2022, shows the commissioner will receive £57,600 for his services.

BCC and Coughlan were approached for comment.

Meanwhile, North Somerset Council was issued an improvement notice this month. Out of 11 live notices, it becomes the only council specifically told to improve its SEND services, while the rest apply to children's services overall.

A follow-up Ofsted inspection in May found the council had failed to make "sufficient" progress in addressing six of eight areas of "significant weaknesses".

The quality of education, health and care plans remained "weak" with "too much reliance" on schools to complete the annual reviews.

There was also "little sign" of "sustained improvement" in the attainment and progress of children with SEND. The council's strategies to tackle the problems have been "ineffective".

A council spokesperson said that while "significant progress" had been made "this has not been as fast as we, or the inspectors, would want".

"In part this relates to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to many years of historic underfunding for SEND services on both a local and national level."

A *Schools Week* investigation last month found that support for SEND children in seven of eight areas visited by Ofsted after inspections restarted this year had "significant areas of weakness".

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

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

## Defunding of BTECs to be delayed until 2024

FRASER WHIELDON

@FRASERWHIELDON

Plans to start removing funding for most BTECs and other applied general qualifications from 2023 will be delayed by a year.

Government has vowed to strip public funding from "poor-quality" qualifications that overlap with A-levels or T-levels.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi said the reforms are "rightly ambitious, but we know that we would be wrong to push too hard and risk compromising quality".

He said delaying the potential defunding of qualifications until 2024 would "allow us to continue to work hard to support the growth of T-levels". It would also give stakeholders "more notice" to prepare for changes.

The Department for Education, in a response to a consultation on the qualification changes, had said popular BTECs would become "rare" in the new "streamlined" system for level 3 courses.

But Zahawi signalled a softening of this stance to MPs during the second reading of the skills and post-16 education bill in the House of Commons on Monday.

He said it was "quite likely we will see many BTECs and other similar applied general style qualifications continuing to play an important role in 16-to-19 education, for the foreseeable future".

Labour shadow education secretary Kate Green said the delay "doesn't go far enough". She called for a four-year moratorium on scrapping any qualifications so that none is removed before 2025 – as called for by the House of Lords.

## T-level English and maths exit rules relaxed

Zahawi also announced the requirement for T-level students to reach a minimum standard in English and maths will be relaxed.

He said this was because the DfE hears consistently that some students are being put off taking a T-level "because they are worried that they will fail it if they do not reach level 2 in English and maths".

"This will bring them in line with other qualifications, including A-levels, and ensure talented young people with more diverse strengths are not arbitrarily shut out from rewarding careers in sectors such as construction, catering and healthcare."

# Delivering Differently: Family Learning Conference

24 November 2021 | 10:00am – 2:00pm via Zoom

## Discover creative and effective initiatives to engage parents and families in learning

Family and community learning practitioners are invited to discover creative and effective initiatives that engage parents and families. Find out how to make your virtual and face to face learning more personal and interactive for families to invigorate your delivery and create an innovative curriculum.

### Delegates from previous events say:

"An interesting and thought-provoking day to improve our family learning offer."

"A great opportunity to network and engage with other practitioners, finding similarities and exploring differences."

"Insightful, informative real life."

### This event is for anyone engaged in community, adult or family learning, including:

- staff involved with parental involvement and engagement
- family link workers
- practitioners that work directly with families
- partnership managers
- library staff
- outreach support staff

## Workshop highlights



**Sarah Cotton**,  
Creative Producer  
(Partnerships), Seven  
Stories, *The National  
Centre for Children's  
Books*: How Seven  
Stories used creative  
solutions to bring joy to  
families throughout the  
pandemic



**Jeszemma Howl**,  
Head of Training,  
Fatherhood Institute:  
*Time with Dad*:  
Building on what  
we know about  
Lockdown Fathers



**Ruby Mahathevan MBE**,  
Curriculum Manager  
Family Learning,  
Redbridge Institute:  
*A blended approach  
to family learning*:  
Adapting to fit the  
needs of the families  
and keep schools  
engaged

Book your tickets now at:

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## NEWS

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# University access fear over entrance test glitch (again)

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

INVESTIGATES

Some university applicants may be unfairly penalised by an exam body's handling of repeat IT problems during entrance tests, parents and school leaders have warned.

Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said it was "disappointing" Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing failed to prevent technical disruption for a second year running.

The BioMedical Admissions Test, moved online last year because of Covid, is used by many universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, to help select applicants for medical, dental, biomedical or veterinary courses.

Parents and staff told Schools Week IT glitches had left students "distracted" and even colleagues "heartbroken" when tests were held earlier this month. Some were unable to start or finish, while others reported the two-hour test taking over four hours as it continually froze or logged users out.

CAAT, the university-owned body that runs BMAT, would not say how many schools were affected and why problems occurred, when asked by Schools Week. One school said it was told systems were "unable to cope" with student numbers.

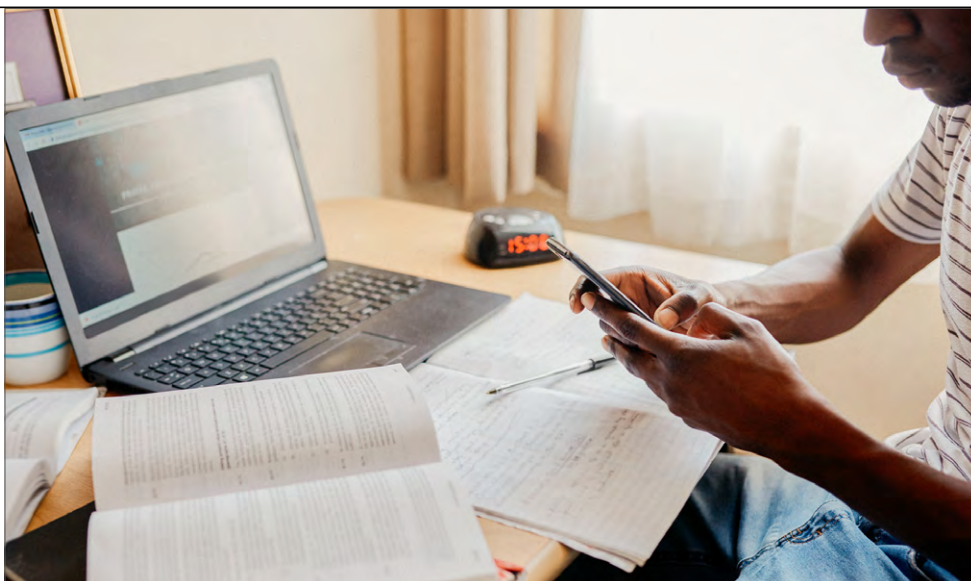
A CAAT spokesperson said it had apologised, but "most" candidates avoided disruption. The Student Room website reported a "huge spike in concern" on its forums, however, and the SFCA and school leaders' union ASCL reported members contacting them.

Such issues could have been avoided by giving schools back-up paper or downloadable alternatives in advance, Watkin said. "They really should have anticipated this."

Problems then spiralled beyond IT.

Watkin said worried staff could not get through to CAAT for immediate support.

Many schools and colleges abandoned tests. Eventually they received emails offering new exam dates. But some received several days' notice while others received "little if any," Watkin said, leaving students at a "further



disadvantage". Other students were able to sit tests remotely, albeit monitored.

Four parents also told Schools Week their children face continued uncertainty after being refused resits, as they managed to finish tests. They argue results are not comparable, as IT woes meant enormous stress and inadequate time. One student did not answer every question.

CAAT has said students will receive support, with schools advised to formally request "special consideration".

But parents voiced anger at receiving no more details or reassurance two weeks on, with results due next week. One said CAAT should have launched a helpline, with another urging a statement from leaders. "There's been radio silence."

Mhairi Underwood, student voice head at The Student Room, said limited information "compounded" stress expressed on forums.

Documents on CAAT's website suggests marks will not be adjusted for disadvantage. Instead, students will receive a "severity" rating, but only "where appropriate".

Universities will receive these ratings but not information on individuals' circumstances and will have "discretion" over how – or if – they use them.

CAAT also says it cannot reveal what severity ratings students receive.

One parent accused CAAT of "washing their hands" of responsibility, and said there was no apparent recourse if universities rejected applicants.

"Our worry is, how will we know

if they really pay attention?"

Another feared that medical schools, already over-subscribed before Covid grade inflation, would "unfairly" feel they still had to rely on BMAT scores.

Some also expressed concerns not all parents and schools would be "tenacious and organised" enough to send detailed statements backing each pupil's case. Candidates themselves may be wary too. "If you want to be a doctor, the last thing you want to say is it was stressful and I panicked," the parent said.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, which has written to CAAT, warned it appears "very difficult to iron out differing experiences" through special consideration. "The ongoing concern is whether the remedy is sufficient."

He said students who finished tests lasting "several hours in extremely stressful circumstances" should be offered resits, with the better marks standing.

But a CAAT spokesperson said recognising candidates' true abilities was its "priority", adding that it has "deep experience" handling special consideration requests fairly every year. Staff are working closely with universities ensuring applications are "not adversely affected", they said.

A Medical Schools Council spokesperson also said candidates should be reassured by admission teams' "wealth of experience" handling special consideration. Applications are treated fairly on a case-by-case basis in line with each university's admissions process, she added.



Bill Watkin



## NEWS

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## SEND schools take priority for 1,000 air-cleaning units

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

The government has promised 1,000 air-cleaning units for alternative provision and specialist or mainstream SEND settings, telling other schools to buy them.

A new online "marketplace" will be set up from early December for schools not eligible for Department for Education-funded units to buy suitable monitors at "reasonable" prices.

The DfE said it would provide funding for 1,000 units for eligible settings "where quick fixes to improve ventilation are not possible".

These schools are being prioritised because of their higher-than-average vulnerable pupil numbers, with further information on eligibility and applications promised next week.

"Air-cleaning units, when used properly, can help reduce airborne contaminants in a poorly ventilated space, including viruses like Covid-19," the DfE told heads in an email today.



"It should be noted that they are not a substitute for ventilation and should never be used as a reason to reduce ventilation," the DfE notice added, highlighting the need to open windows and doors.

They may be appropriate in the "very few cases" where such measures or minor repair works are not sufficient.

Officials declared the £25 million CO2 monitor scheme is also "on track", with

278,000 monitors now delivered to schools.

DfE had pledged to hand schools 300,000 monitors to help them manage ventilation to reduce Covid's spread. The announcement means 7.3 per cent, or 22,000, of the total promised are yet to be delivered.

But officials said in an emailed update to schools that the remainder would be delivered this term.

James Bowen, director of policy for school leaders' union NAHT, said it had been calling for more ventilation measures for months, adding it is "hard to fathom why it took so long".

"If there is a limited supply of the devices, then it clearly makes sense to prioritise the most vulnerable, but this needs to be the start of a national programme where all schools that need them are provided with such devices.

"We simply cannot work on the basis that only those schools that can afford them are able to access them."

Air purifiers and ultraviolet lights are being trialled under a £1.75 million scheme in 30 Bradford primary schools.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

## Trust appeals to court after losing special needs contract

A multi-academy trust is taking Cornwall Council to court over a "deeply flawed" procurement decision that could force a school for children with cancer to close.

Wave Multi-Academy Trust launched the legal appeal after losing a contract to provide alternative provision for children who are unable to attend school due to medical or health needs.

CHES Academy, part of Wave, has run the service over three sites since 2007. It is rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted and is attended by children with cancer and serious mental ill-health.

But Cornwall has awarded a new £14 million eight-year contract to Special Partnership Trust (SPT), which runs five special academies.

Wave claims that SPT "has no prior record of providing the education services required".

But Gary Chappell, SPT director, said they "have the knowledge to deliver this crucial service at the highest level". He added: "The tender is currently in its 'standstill period'. As such it is not appropriate for us to comment further at this stage."

Rob Gasson, Wave's chief executive, said CHES would probably have to close because it would become financially unviable, causing "enormous anxiety" to 120 pupils and their families.

"The local authority is not only denying unwell children from across our county access to an outstanding-rated provision but effectively closing an academy – something that only the secretary of state for education,

with whom we have our funding agreement, has the power to do."

The trust is also concerned about elements of the tender process and decision. It launched an appeal in the High Court this week.

A council spokesperson said it had "no power" to close academies. It added it was a "competition tender process" with the aim "of implementing a new model that will increase capacity".

Earlier this year, the local government and social care ombudsman recommended the council conduct an audit of children not attending school.

The watchdog said the council did not have "enough oversight" of the process and schools must follow when a child was out of education.

# EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Opening up Ofqual is the right place to start

Jo Saxton's commitment to touring schools across the country to listen to pupils and parents is a promising start.

These are people who the 2020 exams debacle really let down. And they should be the voices that Ofqual puts front and centre in its attempts to build back better.

Prioritising the schools worst-hit by Covid, and those in for instance coastal areas that are often left out of the policy round-table debates, is also encouraging.

But trust in qualifications is at an all-time low, and this must just be the start.

The voices calling for exams reform and challenging mechanisms like comparable outcomes to control grade inflation have grown louder.

If Ofqual believes the current system is the best and fairest for all pupils, then it needs a chief regulator not afraid of standing up for that – and it looks like they have found one.

## Ofsted won't change – but it has to listen

The return of inspections was always going to go down like a lead balloon with many in the sector.

But Ofsted is used to fending off criticism, and it has always had the shield of government to deflect uncomfortable opinions.

Ministers are just not interested in opposition against Ofsted, and they proved it this week.

While complaints were still whirring around over the return of inspections, government announced tens of millions of pounds to \*speed up\* visits.

But it's clear many school leaders are deeply unhappy, particularly given the ongoing Covid disruption.

And while they might not be able to drive change, they can make their voices heard – just as they did at the Academies Show this week.

Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman faced a grilling from leaders, with one telling her inspections at this time were "profoundly wrong".

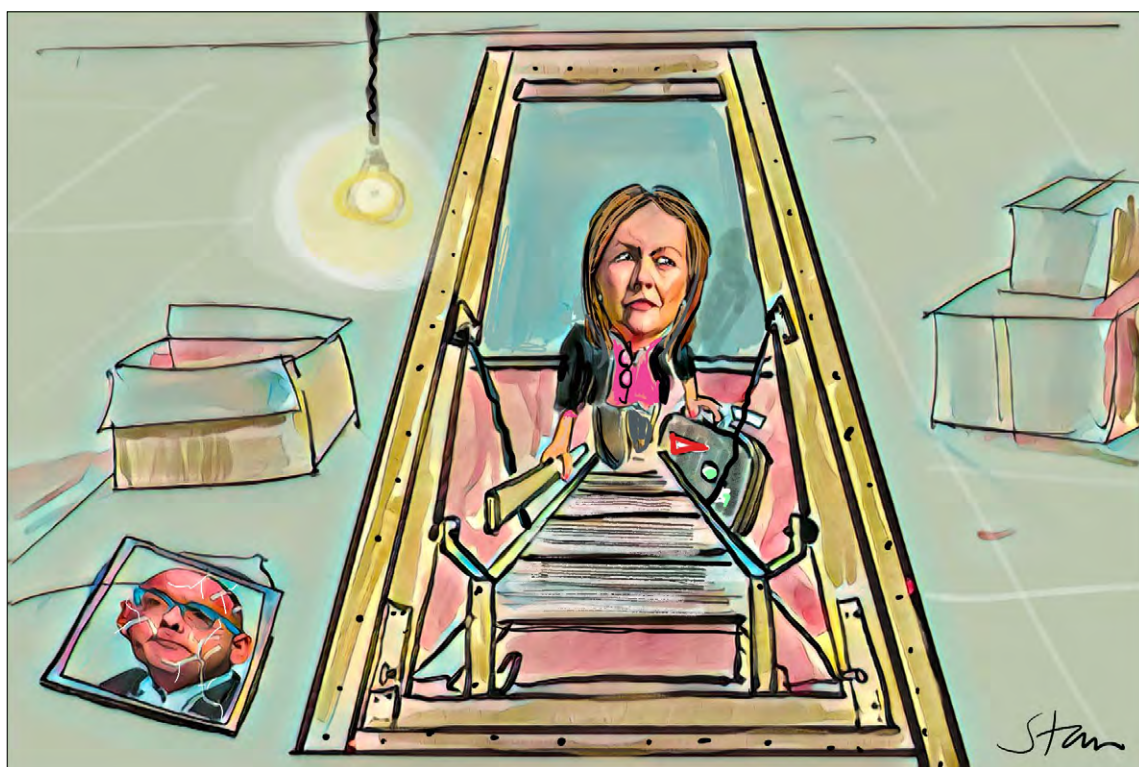
While it might not make a difference, it's important Ofsted knows the impact of its actions.

SCHOOLS WEEK



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# Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



**‘It didn’t matter how good my teaching was – I couldn’t save them’**

**Youth violence has increased significantly in the past decade. Iesha Small talks to Jess Staufenberg about trying to turn the tide**

Iesha Small can remember students she once taught who have lost their lives to youth violence. The head of change at the Youth Endowment Fund – a charity to reduce youth violence – was once a Teach First trainee and worked in London. But it wasn’t just her students in inner-city schools who were at risk from youth violence: she also later taught in “leafy”

Hertfordshire, and every year there was a walk “in memory of a boy who had been stabbed to death”.

“This stuff doesn’t just happen in London,” she tells me. “There are youth violence hotspots all around the country.” Of five priority areas in which her organisation is currently piloting approaches for tackling youth violence, four are cities, but the fifth

is the rural, coastal region of Norfolk.

Rising national knife crime among young people has been increasingly making headlines in national newspapers. In 2019-20, offences involving a knife reached 48,700, considerably higher than 32,400 such offences in 2010. Even though there was a drop this year due to the pandemic, it’s still 27 per cent higher than a decade



# Profile: Iesha Small



Pupils in the first school Small taught in, north London



Small's A level physics class as a student

ago. The West Midlands police force, not London's, recorded the highest rate of knife crime incidents.

There's also evidence the picture is starting to worsen again. In the first quarter of 2021, knife or offensive weapons possession was two per cent higher than in the first quarter of 2020. And the violence "disproportionately impacts the young and disadvantaged," warned a House of Commons library report in September. Young people between ten and 17 years old accounted for about one-fifth of everyone sentenced for possession of a knife or weapon this year, it says.

Youth violence is not just knife crime, but any physical violence between young people. (However, a noticeable issue is the lack of government data on youth violence in all its forms, with reports split instead into 'knife crime' or 'county lines involvement', instead of overall figures.) After the 2011 London riots, a follow-up government report said various national strategies had "failed". Yet in the ten years since, the data shows ministers have continued, largely, to fail.

Enter the Youth Endowment Fund in 2019. The charity was set up by Impetus, the private equity foundation that supports charities working with young people, with a £200 million endowment and ten-year mandate from the Home Office. It's a "what works" organisation, says Small, focused on finding and funding interventions that show promise in reducing youth violence. It also shares research (its 'Evidence and

## "As a Teach Firster, I thought that education was the magic bullet"

Gap Map' is well worth reading, ranking interventions based on the strength of their research base) and builds partnerships with local authorities and schools.

But how much can schools do? There's a tension here, which began to bother Small during her 14 years in teaching (she reached assistant head before leaving in 2016). School leaders told Ofsted in 2018 that young people involved in knife crime are more likely to be low attainers. But Small's view is that improving attainment is not anywhere close to the answer.

"I thought, as a Teach Firster, that education was the magic bullet – that if people have access to great teachers, that can change lives. But it doesn't, not as comprehensively as people think it can."

It's a bold and brave statement, and one she admits is a "heartbreaking realisation as a teacher".

She recalls students who have died. "It doesn't matter how good my maths teaching was, I couldn't save them. An excellent maths lesson is not going to change the life circumstances of a young person, and to pretend that it does is disingenuous. And actually, it makes me feel uncomfortable when politicians talk this way, because it puts the onus on schools, rather than on politicians to make

society better."

Three years ago, Ofsted published recommendations on knife crime, noting: "The most dangerous time for children is shortly after school, between 4pm and 6pm."

Youth violence is often just beyond the school gate. So schools are still crucial partners in tackling youth violence, says Small. "I can see why politicians put so much on school, because it's the one place young people are going to be. As a teacher, I could definitely identify who might be involved in violence." Youth work has also been "decimated", she adds, so schools are an even more key source of information and intervention.

But not many schools, particularly mainstream schools, are aware of the YEF, says Small, although they will know the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), which operates a similar 'what works' model. Now, the YEF and EEF are launching a 'joint grants round' in 2022 on "improving school presence", looking at how school attendance, exclusions and risk of youth violence interlink. Although it's early days, Small says schools may be able to bid for funding. It shows schools continue to be seen as key partners against – and places relevant to – youth violence.

## Profile: Iesha Small



Small's first school photo as a pupil

Issues around school attendance is something Small herself has personal experience of. She was brought up by parents, and a granddad, keen to give her good opportunities: there was a sense that black children were being failed by the UK education system, and that standards weren't as high as schools back in Jamaica. They sent her to a grammar school in Sutton, south London, and Small says she benefited from her ambitious peer cohort, going on to UCL to study engineering. But she was also an odd-one-out, because so few people were from a similar background: "I was definitely one of the only people from a working-class background at that school."

Having always loved school, Small says she hit a bad bout of depression in sixth form and soon stopped attending lessons. "I would still come into school, because school was a bit like a safe place, but I used to sit in the library. My form tutor used to check in with the librarian, my friends and parents." This approach worked for Small. "If someone had been all up in my business about not attending lessons, I imagine I would have stopped going completely."

Eventually, Small felt able to revise for her exams (she remembers cramming on Christmas Day with her neighbour's children playing a Spice Girls CD at full volume next door). Her story shows "school presence" is not a black-and-white issue: being able to attend school, but allowed



Small and her grandad

### "The most dangerous time for children is shortly after school"

to remain out of lessons, made all the difference to Small.

Perhaps partly because of these experiences, Small is particularly interested in mental health and family support for vulnerable young people. At the Centre for Education and Youth, where she worked for four years, she directed a series of videos, each showing new teachers how to support a different additional need in pupils – this is one of her proudest pieces of work, she says.

Now, she is turning her focus to family support. The YEF has opened applications for between £5 million and £10 million of funding for projects helping families and carers provide a more supportive environment for young people. It has four strands, says Small: domestic violence interventions, reducing parental conflict, a parenting programme and family therapy interventions.

So as head of change for education and families, Small is able to spearhead interventions in both pupils' school and home lives in a way she too often felt she



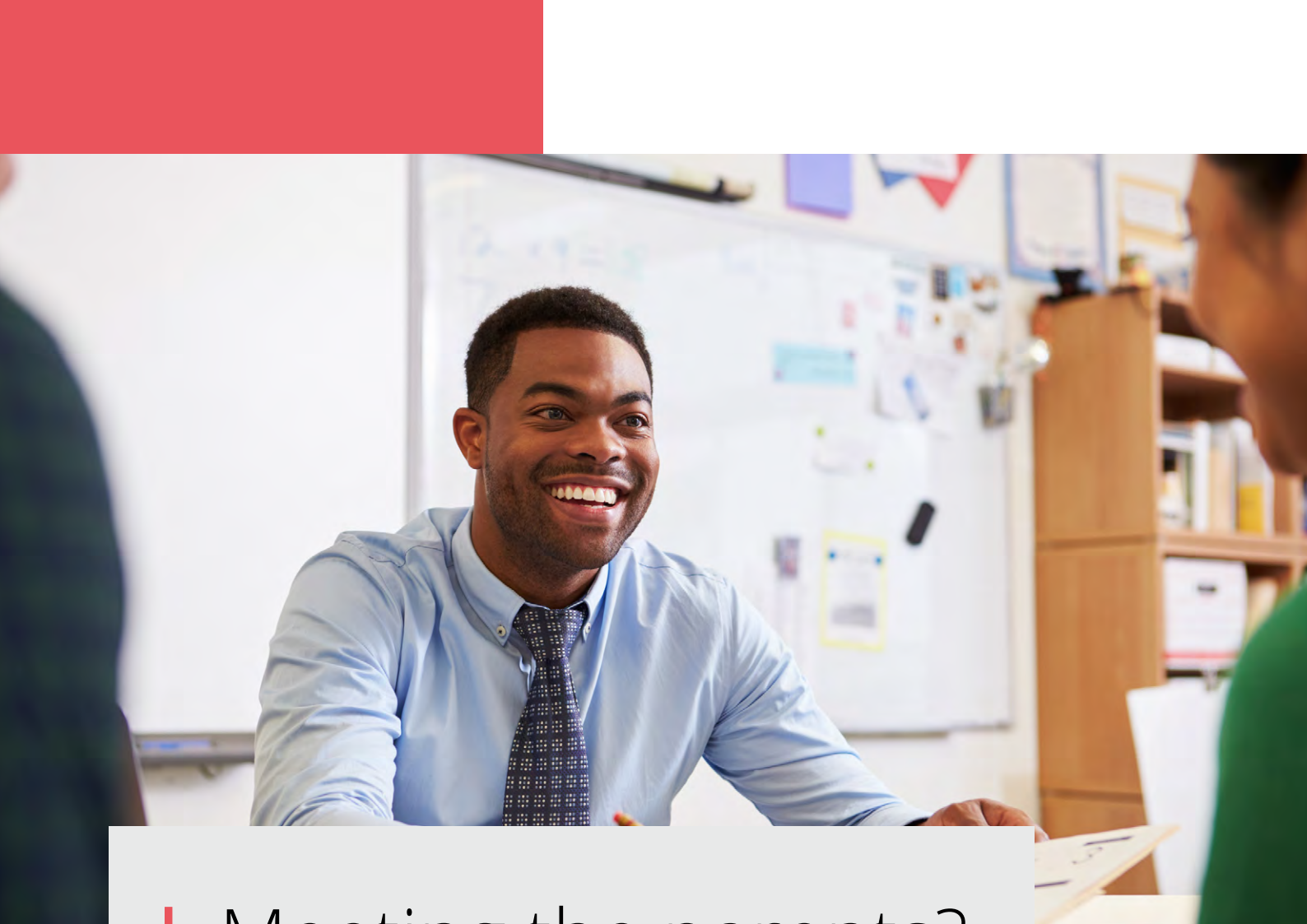
Enjoying the outdoors

could not as a classroom teacher.

The challenge is vast, though. The government is trying to take action – in July it announced £45 million for schools to tackle youth violence, and the previous month announced "violence reduction units" to deliver interventions (including cognitive behavioural therapy for young people, as recommended by the YEF). But in both cases, experts have blasted the cash as insufficient.

"All of my moves have been about trying to impact young people in society, and now I'm focused on doing the things teaching can't," says Small. "It's a very complex problem, and to solve it needs partnership."





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# Opinion

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**New data allows schools to benchmark their catch-up performance against the national experience, write Natalie Perera and John Moore**

As the pandemic continues to cause disruption, teachers will be acutely aware of the learning gaps that exist among their own pupils, even after months of concerted efforts to mitigate the impact of being away from the classroom. Now, thanks to new research, we also have detailed data from the recent 2021 summer term to help further inform those efforts.

The research, carried out by Renaissance and the Education Policy Institute (EPI) for the Department for Education, uses Renaissance's Star Assessments to create the largest sample size of its kind available in the country.

Our findings provide new evidence on the impact of the pandemic on pupils' school attainment at both a national and regional level, in primary and secondary schools, and by pupil characteristics, including among pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds.

What we found is that, despite a degree of recovery after schools fully reopened in March, pupils in England have still suffered substantial losses – particularly disadvantaged pupils and those in deprived areas.

In the summer, primary pupils were on average two (2.2) months behind where we would have expected them to be in maths had the pandemic not happened, and one (0.9) month behind in their reading. For primary pupils on free school meals, these losses rise to 2.6

NATALIE PERERA

CEO, Education Policy Institute

JOHN MOORE

UK director, Renaissance Learning



## New learning loss data can help schools plan the recovery

and 1.2 months respectively.

But it's disadvantaged pupils in secondary schools who have been hardest hit. These pupils had actually fallen further behind in their reading over the academic

losses. In the 2021 spring term, we found schools with a low level of absence saw average losses reach around 3.2 months in primary maths, compared to 4.7 months for schools with

“The pandemic has inflicted a ‘double-disadvantage’ on the poorest

year, with losses totalling 2.4 months by the 2021 summer term, compared to 1.9 months at the start of the academic year.

These gaps are a huge concern, but even more so when you consider that, prior to the pandemic, disadvantaged pupils were already many months behind their peers, even at primary. The pandemic has now inflicted a ‘double-disadvantage’ on the poorest, setting back years of progress in narrowing inequalities.

For the very first time, we've also explored the link between pupil absence (despite schools being open for in-person learning) and higher learning

a high level of pupil absence. This association between absence and outcomes could have significant implications for schools and pupils as they continue to respond to ongoing disruption.

The report also reveals substantial disparities in learning losses at a regional level, with those in parts of the north and the Midlands seeing greater losses than those in the south. Higher absence rates, digital learning inequalities, and poverty all likely play a role.

All of these findings confirm just how critical a targeted approach to education recovery is; one that sees a greater level

of resource directed at those pupils most affected.

EPI has called for education recovery funding to be allocated according to geographic deprivation. This means government should weight funding progressively towards the most deprived areas of England, helping those who have lost out the most and tackling the regional disparity in learning loss.

They also underline the role of real-time assessment and extra resources as we recover from the pandemic's effects. Reports such as this are invaluable for schools wishing to benchmark their current performance against the national experience. Being able to compare current assessments against historical averages from before and during the pandemic will allow leaders to identify areas of strength and weakness.

Of particular interest will be the ability to contextualise groups of interest, for example free school meals, against the benchmarks for these groups. To help support this, Renaissance has published a guide to formative assessment and made freely available practical workbooks that show the focus skills for reading and maths at each year level.

If there is one major lesson from the research it is that the impact of Covid has not been uniform across the country. These findings give an insight into those areas most affected and can provide school leaders with indications of where to concentrate resources, so that they can chart a course towards narrowing learning gaps and getting all pupils back on track.

# Opinion

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CLARE  
MACNAUGHTON

English PGCE student,  
Salisbury, Wiltshire

## Why the Covid recruitment boom will be followed by a retention bust

**I sought refuge in teaching but soon I'll be a refugee from its destructive workload crisis, writes Clare Macnaughton – and I won't be alone**

My copywriting business crumbled in the pandemic. Like so many others, I didn't have time to dwell on the ruins of what had taken me years to build. And like many of them, I decided teaching was an attractive prospect. So I took the leap, and here I am, a 49-year-old PGCE student retraining as an English teacher.

I started the course in September, and I am astonished that it has only been some ten weeks. The pressure teachers are under is indescribable to anyone who hasn't experienced it. I am going to complete my PGCE; but I am already questioning whether I will ever embark on a teaching career.

I am in a great school. I am completely supported. In terms of behaviour, the worst I can expect is a little low-level disruption. Yet the workload and pressure are already unsustainable and I am not even experiencing anywhere near what that's really like yet. I am 50 in January. Why would I walk into such a high-pressure, low-paid

environment?

It's no exaggeration to say that the impact of this workload is front and centre of everyone's minds in the staffroom too. Just scratch the surface and its imponderable depth reveals itself. We've just started Animal Farm with year 7. In the English office, I half-jokingly

prematurely for the glue factory. Like government policy chief Oliver Letwin all but promised in 2011, "discipline and fear" are keeping public sector workers in check.

From extra sanitation work to teaching students on- and off-site simultaneously, there's no doubt the pandemic has added a new element of stress for teachers. But it's not just that. Classroom differentiation is also becoming more complex as mainstream schools desperate for additional funding accept students with SEND, and absorb the extra money into the daily running of the school. And in these straitened times, per-pupil funding creates an incentive for some schools to attract students beyond their true capacity, converting staffrooms into classrooms on the cheap to

enough hours in the day. A teacher is contracted and paid for 37.5 hours per week but can easily work up to 60. At the Conservative Party conference, Boris Johnson committed to transforming the UK into a "high-wage, high-skill, high-productivity economy". Teaching is high-productivity, high-skill and low pay, but I can't see the government putting their money where their mouth is any time soon.

And the worst of it isn't even the tiredness and stress. It's the constant feeling of failure. The to-do list is always longer at the end of the day than at the start, no matter how productive. And that feeds into negativity and doubt, affecting reflective practice and feedback. Across schools and the system as a whole, one person's junk is another's treasure. Uncertainty and negativity feed into an endless downward spiral.

What of the students? Perhaps teachers are eminently replaceable bodies in front of a class. But even accepting that, what a waste that is! Here I am, with over 20 years of experience in business, marketing, journalism and copywriting. Yet, not only do I not have the time to consider how I might impart some of that knowledge and experience, I can't even imagine a time post-qualification when that will be valued. There is no interest, because there is no time.

Everybody is so supportive, friendly and welcoming. To a fault, even. But I don't feel like I am joining a profession. I feel like I am stepping on to the bottom rung of a ladder carrying a heavy sack of coal.

So please forgive me if I don't. I expect I won't be alone.

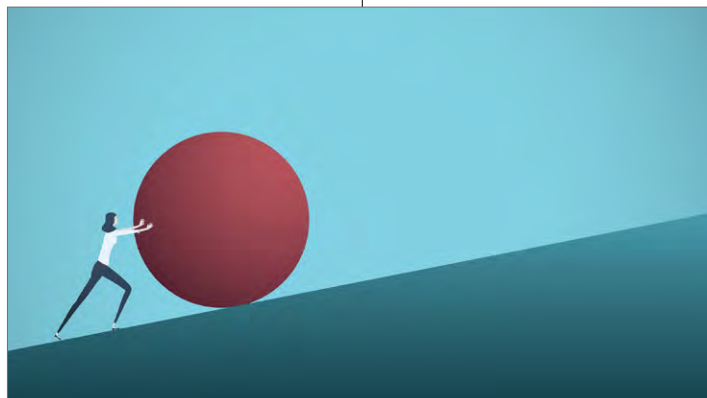
“Every day I see teachers working tirelessly, yet inevitably drowning

suggested teachers should rise up like the farmyard animals. "Perhaps," answered one, "but it won't be me leading the charge."

My mind quickly turned to Boxer's motto: "I will work harder", and I wondered how many of my colleagues are headed

accommodate the larger intake. The result? More work and less space for teachers to come together to support each other.

Every day I see teachers working tirelessly, yet inevitably drowning as the tasks pile up and the clock ticks away. There are simply not



# Opinion

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ANONYMOUS

## Islamophobia does exist – and it's in our staffrooms

**How can we teach children so-called British values while we persist in denial that some of our colleagues hold bigoted views, asks one anonymous school worker**

For their *State of Hate* report this year, Hope Not Hate found that 26 per cent of British people hold negative attitudes towards Muslims. Is it reasonable to expect school staff to be much different from the rest of the population? My experience tells me it isn't, and that a generalised denial of the issue stops us from making progress.

Over my nine years working in secondary education my experience as a visibly Muslim woman of colour included being: singled out for negative treatment, repeatedly told I should be grateful to have a job (even though I was overqualified), and dismissed as either too aggressive or not assertive enough in the face of hostility from colleagues.

My children were even used during an INSET day speech as an example of the school's success in promoting social mobility, even though my husband and I have high levels of education and a good income.

So first and foremost, schools

should have policies in place to deal with workplace hostility, ensuring its victims are not cast as perpetrators, and then enact them. If you're unsure how to get that right, then seek input from those who have suffered it.

Cast your mind back to March

“I choked trying to find the words to defend my faith

2019. Protests at Birmingham's Parkfield School were in full flow, inflaming anger among teachers. I walked into the staffroom and overheard a conversation. Driven to speak out against homophobia, my colleagues had descended into Islamophobia. Muslims, I heard

them agree, are endemically homophobic.

Had I been asked, I would have said that Islam discourages hate and that Muslim migrants worldwide adapt to the societal norms of their adopted countries. If they'd been interested in going beyond the headlines, I would have pointed out that it wasn't only Muslims who were concerned about the new RSE content. Had they sought my opinion, I would have said that there was no excuse for making staff feel threatened. And if I hadn't been marginalised, I would have reassured them that all the British Muslims I knew felt exactly as I did.

Yet here I was, the only Muslim on staff, knowingly excluded from a discussion about me. That's why policies aren't enough. To ensure

staff don't fall foul of them, they need training and support. There is also a wealth of CPD available that explains the law around free speech and how to safely lead conversations. Not only will teachers be better able to support students when distressing situations arise in

school or in the media, but they will be better equipped to talk to each other and avoid offence.

Subsequently, my experience only worsened. Already feeling victimised, I then heard a young teacher loudly declare that Islamophobia could not exist because Muslims make a choice to be Muslim. Even the assistant headteacher in charge of equality and diversity, previously active in the conversation, went silent. No one challenged it.

I choked trying to find the words to defend my existence and my faith. I couldn't believe that this is what I needed to do after the murder of 51 Muslims in New Zealand the previous week. Looking around the room, no one met my gaze. I left, shaken and wounded, to seek refuge in my office.

This is a matter of culture. Embedding professional courtesy must start at the top. Otherwise, disrespect is normalised and vulnerable staff are left without real opportunities to speak out.

For my part, my attempts to address this incident with SLT were rebuffed for two years. When I finally did, their response was to issue a general email stating that staff should not be discussing others' protected characteristics. There was no concern that some of those responsible for teaching and modelling tolerance and respect to our students held bigoted views.

So in the end it comes down to modelling a commitment to antiracism from the top. This could feel daunting at first, but nowhere near as daunting as silently suffering racism because you feel the senior team won't have your back.

Because one thing is certain: denial is not serving anyone.





## Nasen awards 2021 winners special

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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### Best primary provision: Whitefield Primary School, Liverpool



JILL  
WRIGHT

Acting headteacher, Whitefield  
Primary School

## Making inclusion count against persistent disadvantage

**Overcoming barriers to learning caused by multiple disadvantages is a matter of inviting everyone into the school family, says Jill Wright**

Our school sits in an area of significant social and economic disadvantage (in the bottom per cent of deprived areas nationally). There are high levels of crime, a low number of working households, a high prevalence of drug and alcohol misuse and a high level of medical needs. These circumstances affect families, and therefore the lives of our children. To secure their progress, we must acknowledge these persistent barriers of disadvantage and vulnerability.

Our percentage of pupils with SEN support is well above the national average. Of course, some of our children do move from mainstream to specialist settings, so the additional £2.6 billion in government spending to create additional places for children with significant additional needs is welcome news. However, as a mainstream school it is imperative that we seek to develop our practice to ensure all children in our setting can succeed.

For us, it's a question of culture. We are committed to providing each

individual child with appropriate access to learning, and commitment has to be evident from the governors to teachers, and from support staff to families. Everyone must feel part of their 'Whitefield family'.

**“At Whitefield, all teachers are teachers of SEND**

Our behaviour policy is based on zones of regulation, which aims to develop self-regulation from entry to school at age three. This approach to managing behaviour is taught as part of our curriculum and is applied consistently across the school. Alongside our resilience programme and a digital stress-management system, we have seen a huge impact on our children's ability to self-regulate and therefore access learning. Our next step is to work to build on that with a programme for parents and carers.

This approach works alongside our commitment to attachment- and trauma-sensitive practice. All our staff receive training and are skilled in supporting children in relation to these areas. This shared understanding of behaviour as communication and a consistent approach to working with the



children is fundamental to creating a safe, secure space where learning can happen and learners can flourish.

In essence, at Whitefield all teachers are teachers of SEND, and all staff have an excellent understanding

of children's individual needs. Our SENCO produces a Pyramids of Need document for each class to identify the needs of all learners. These pyramids are the basis of all our conversations regarding the needs of individual children and provide a shared understanding among staff.

That understanding goes on to underpin inclusive practices designed to enable all children to integrate as much as possible. We use visual timetables. Our classrooms are clear, ordered and consistent from class to class to support neurodiverse learners. Sensory corridors and spaces add to that inclusive environment. Our consistency offers predictability and safety, and reduces cognitive load and anxiety. To that end, we have also increased playtime to half an hour daily, with a focus on social communication skills and self-regulation, and embedded open-

ended 'loose parts play' stimuli.

But we know it can't all happen at school. Our influence must reach our communities, too, to have lasting impact. That's why we work hard to develop strong, lasting partnerships with parents and carers. Sometimes that means offering support, sometimes acting as a critical friend. Sometimes celebrating and sometimes sharing loss. Our family liaison and safeguarding officer works very closely to offer that support, and our senior leaders and SENCO make themselves as accessible to families as possible.

We try to walk alongside families who have children with additional needs, for example by co-producing support plans. Resulting from this work, we see the positive impact on attendance. Less measurably perhaps, but of no less importance, we see growing resilience in our families too.

Removing barriers to learning is a complex and ever-developing task. Research and practice are continually evolving, and it requires school leaders to continually overcome barriers themselves to drive the ethos of inclusion.

To paraphrase Thais Compont, inclusive leadership is not a destination but a journey. Few journeys are more rewarding.

# Nasen awards 2021 winners special

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Best secondary provision: Henley Bank High School, Gloucester



RHIAN  
WILLIAMS

SENCO, Henley Bank High School

### Harnessing the power of parental engagement

**Prioritising effective internal communication about students means external communication can be more honest, trusting and productive, writes Rhian Williams**

Perhaps it's a truism that co-production is central to effective SEND provision. We all appreciate that working closely with parents and carers provides us with important background information and ensures they know how to support their child at home using the same strategies we put into place at school.

The challenge is in coordinating all of that, and with 176 children currently on our SEND register, that requires a great deal of collaboration.

My team currently consists of seven teaching assistants, each taking a lead on one aspect of the four broad areas of need, for which they have received high-quality CPD. Our weekly team meetings are focused on ensuring everyone can run successful parent meetings, during which student passports are written.

The result is evident in the student passports and learning plans they create. And with my team able

to 'keywork' around 20 children each, I am able to focus my time on working with the more complex cases and new SEND referrals that inevitably come our way. But on top of that, I'm also able to run termly SENCo surgeries, inviting any parent to book a 20-minute meeting with

“Communication and trust are fundamental to effective provision

me to discuss their child.

To ensure these surgeries are positive and constructive, our internal communication must be up-to-date and acted on – in every classroom and ongoingly. And that's where our provision-mapping software comes in, streamlining our systems to ensure amendments can be made and shared across the school rapidly. It means our parents and carers trust us, and more than that, know that their voice and their children's is heard.

We continued with that through lockdowns, and we learned a few new tricks too. Virtual meetings allowed us to keep in touch with pupils and to meet with families to review our SEND provision. But we also met virtually with every



year 6 and their parents as part of our SEND transition and we found that when the children talked to us from the security of their own homes, they shared far more information than during a 'normal'

transition period. So this practice has continued.

Communication and trust are fundamental ingredients of effective provision (more broadly, but especially for SEND). So we work hard on our relationships with our feeder primaries too. Because when they recommend that families come to visit us, it's crucial support for transferring their trust to our staff.

But when they come to us, it's just as crucial to be frank about the support we can and can't offer, and as a teaching SENCo, I am very rarely able to answer the phone during a working day. Parents know that if they contact me, I will respond to their emails within 24 hours. Because my boundaries are clear, I am able to avoid disappointing

them.

Of course, like most SENCOs I still work beyond my usual hours. Parents of anxious children need to know that an urgent email will be picked up and that additional support will be in place when it's needed. The strength of our systems means I am able to focus on those true emergencies without feeling like everything else is just as urgent and pressured, and that's an excellent protection for me and my team. The result is less anxiety for us, as well as for those pupils and their parents.

But more than that, it means I can be flexible when engaging with our parents. I offer virtual meetings to those who aren't able to come into school, which enables me to be empathic to their needs, so that a trusting, collaborative relationship can be formed – and my team can take over to ensure their child gets the best from our school.

So it may seem like a truism – and sometimes a bit of a distant dream – but with collaboration, communication and trust, co-production is within every school's reach. And through it a more inclusive school system.



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# Reviews

## BOOK REVIEW



### Reaching the Unseen Children: Practical Strategies for Closing Stubborn Attainment Gaps in Disadvantaged Groups

Author: Jean Gross

Publisher: Routledge

Reviewer: Zoe Enser, specialist adviser, The Education People

It's always exciting to see a new book placing emphasis on addressing the educational impacts of socio-economic disadvantage. Jean Gross's *Reaching the Unseen Children* seeks to support teachers across all settings to work together to do just this by identifying the key strategies that are likely to improve disadvantaged pupils' outcomes.

However, this isn't a book that sets out to cover all aspects of disadvantage. Instead, it specifically aims to examine the issues experienced by white working-class boys, a group that is well-known for its concerning academic underperformance over several years but that hasn't necessarily been the key focus of some of policy conversations.

The challenge here of course is the same as when we talk about any groups in education: they are not homogenous. The issues white working-class boys experience are as varied and disparate as any other, so one size is *unlikely* to fit all. So I approached the book with caution. "Practical strategies for closing stubborn attainment gaps in disadvantaged groups" felt like a bit of an educational holy grail.

I needn't have worried. Throughout, Gross highlights the importance of understanding individuals, avoiding assumptions about 'the group' and working with the community. At every turn, she carefully identifies the issues and then highlights the areas that need to be at the fore of any strategy to improve educational achievement: early-years interventions, language and vocabulary acquisition, mathematics and social and emotional development.

Perhaps most importantly though, *Reaching the Unseen Children's* overwhelming emphasis is on the belief that these pupils can really achieve. Reading it is a constant reminder to avoid placing limitations on what can be achieved, or becoming overwhelmed by factors beyond our control. If we can't fix all of the issues our students face, Gross's many case studies and examples illustrate where schools have and can make a difference.

Of particular interest in this regard is the chapter on what is actually unlikely to help. Gross argues that many of the more popular interventions (for example, those focused on 'raising aspirations') are either completely rooted in myth or at best based on a mixed evidence base that should mean they come with a health warning.

Some will find their cherished notions challenged when Gross takes on smaller class sizes, ability setting and the allocation of teaching assistants. But the same readers are likely to find the evidence base she presents – largely Education Endowment Foundation reviews – equally controversial.

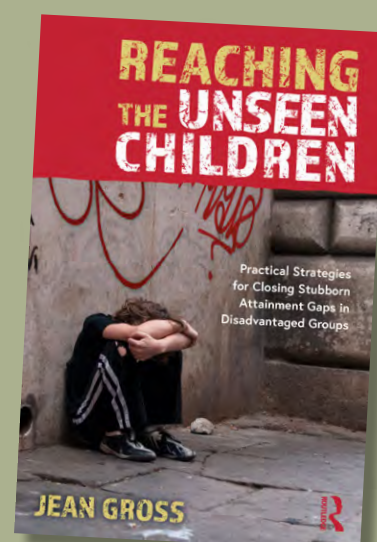
The strategies themselves offer no real surprises for those who are well versed in this area. Nor are there any silver bullets; just good, thoughtful practice and an awareness of what seems to work. The strongest factor in improving educational outcomes comes back to good-quality day-to-day teaching. But that's easier said than done, and Gross carefully unpicks what this looks like in classrooms and across the curriculum, with particular attention to the teaching of language, the use of early interventions and approaches to the explicit teaching of vocabulary and numeracy.

There are also key lessons from cognitive science, such as making use of retrieval

and interleaving, as well as developing self-efficacy and building relationships with parents. A whole chapter devoted to the 'maths gap' is a welcome addition to the usual focus on vocabulary and literacy. Unfortunately, in an attempt to cover so much ground, it sometimes feels like Gross has sacrificed some depth and detail.

Ultimately though, this book offers a combination of research, practical tips for teachers and schools across phases, and clear reminders that there is much more to learning than simply sharing information. The relationships we build with our students, how they perceive themselves as learners, and how we teach and nurture their belief in what they can achieve are all afforded the same importance as retrieval and memory.

In that sense, *Reaching the Unseen Children* will not only help teachers to support white working-class boys to achieve, but all learners regardless of background. And that will always be welcome.



# Reviews



**Penny Rabiger takes over our 'blogs of the week' slot once every half-term to point to the best of the education podcasts**

@Penny\_Ten

**Sustainability: what is it and why should we care?**

@zaharachowdhur2

Zahara Chowdhury's podcast series covers all the things we wish we'd learned at school. From wellbeing to finance, from prejudice to the school system itself, the aim is to give students, teachers and professionals a voice to discuss what they think school should be for our teachers, students and communities.

Here, Chowdhury is in conversation with business and sociology undergraduate, Louise. We learn how daily micro-choices can have a positive impact on the planet and our lives. With all the attention on global policy at COP26, it's sometimes difficult to know where to start and what we can do. This discussion is bound to inspire you towards small but effective actions you can take at school today.

**Teaching Sustainability**

@TeachStarter

This Australian podcast showcases real, everyday teachers sharing tips and ideas for teaching. This episode features primary school teacher Emma talking about all things green, following her own experience of teaching sustainability.

As someone who hadn't previously been



particularly engaged with the topic, Emma starts by taking us through some alarming stats she wishes she'd known. She then goes on to suggest ways teachers can reduce plastic waste, and other top tips. An excellent place to build your sustainability repertoire.

**Why we need education for human flourishing**

@Imanewteacher

In this episode of a podcast series that bills itself as "important conversations with the best minds in education and leadership", we hear from Dr Anantha Duraipappah, director of UNESCO's Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) in New Delhi.

Dr Duraipappah's focus is on researching and exploring how "firing Gandhi neurons" can be integrated into the curriculum of formal, informal and non-formal education systems around the globe. I won't do the concept justice in the space I have here, but if you're interested in systems thinking, critical thinking, economics and maths as skills that young people need, listen on. You might be surprised by his views on rationality, irrationality and the place of emotion in decision-making on things like climate change.

**The Global Goals**

@Mr\_Minchin

This podcast is yet another example of Scottish primary school teacher Blair Minchin's creative and innovative genius. Each episode features pupils talking about school subjects, curriculum, wellbeing

and more. In this episode, we hear from Alfie, a pupil who is passionate about the Sustainable Development Goals. He talks about what they mean to him, how schools and pupils can help drive the principles to accomplishment and what he hopes they will do for the world.

It's a great example of what's possible, not only to check that pupils understand what they're learning but also to help them develop their oracy skills. A lovely window into what teacher-pupil conversation can look like. Plus Alfie is cute as heck.

**COP This!**

@wosdec

Also from Scotland (because our Scottish colleagues are so far ahead in incorporating social justice and environmental sustainability) is a podcast episode entitled COP This!

In it, Friends of the Earth Scotland energy and climate campaigner Caroline Rance gives an overview of what COP26 is, and suggests ways teachers can incorporate it into their lessons – including why she thinks it's so important for all of us to learn from others who are coming from around the world.

The episode also features students and teachers sharing their learning, and Dr Alice König and Dr Peter McColl discuss their keynote talks through the Young Academy of Scotland's 'Charter For Responsible Debate', including the intriguing concepts of 'liquid democracy' and 'loser's consent'.

**Climate change and environmental racism**

@FlossyPodcast

This award-winning American podcast sees students tackle big social issues mixed in with their own lived experience. This edition focuses on the idea that pollution and the environment impact communities differently, even within places like Brooklyn. In one fascinating example, they reflect on their visit to a climate change march in Manhattan, where they saw mostly white people demonstrating. They wonder aloud, as to why, and their answers are eye-opening.

This is high school students speaking truth to power and it's well worth a listen.

# Research



UCL Institute of Education will review a research development each half term. Contact @IOE\_London if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

## How can we deliver the pledge to put climate at the heart of education?

**Nicola Walshe, head of department, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, UCL Institute of Education**

**D**espite calls for improving climate change education at the Paris Agreement at COP21 in 2015, there has been a noticeable absence of progress in this area. Five years on, education secretary Nadhim Zahawi announced his intention at this year's event to put climate change "at the heart of education", with a view to empowering children and young people to "take action on the environment".

It goes without saying that most teachers have understood the importance of climate change education for some time. A 2019 UKSCN/Oxfam survey found 69 per cent of UK teachers think there should be more teaching about climate change. However, research by Teach the Future undertaken this year reveals that 70 per cent of teachers feel they haven't received adequate training to teach about climate change themselves.

The problem for government is therefore primarily the fact that a majority of teachers feel under-prepared for this vital task. And without them, an education system that prepares and empowers children and young people to help prevent further climate change and deal with its consequences remains unlikely, regardless of Westminster Hall debates on whether sustainability and climate change should be included more prominently in the national curriculum.

But while these debates and policy conversations take place, there are pockets of inspirational practice to be found across the country. It's happening at all levels – from early years to sixth form – and involves both curricular innovation and rich, extra-curricular opportunity. And the impacts go far beyond a greater awareness of the



environment and how to protect it. In fact, policymakers may find supporting greater education for sustainability is not additional to, but perfectly complementary with, the twin drives to 'catch up' and 'level up'.

I lead the Eco-Capabilities project at the UCL Institute of Education. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, we consider how children's wellbeing can be supported through working with artists in nature and outdoor places. More specifically, the research focuses on the nature-based interventions of our project partner, Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination (CCI) and their impact in addressing children's disenfranchisement and supporting their wellbeing.

Through Eco-Capabilities, more than 100 key stage 2 primary school students have been working alongside their teachers, artists and researchers, for eight days of creative adventuring in nature (or 'artscaping'). These creative and participatory workshops took place once a week in two schools in areas of relatively high socio-economic deprivation in eastern England – areas just like those evidence suggests are significantly less

likely to offer children and young people access to nature and the arts.

Our findings demonstrate significant changes among the children who participate. These include increased resilience in and out of the classroom, increased capacity for risk-taking, greater collaboration and empathy between children and strengthened relationships between children and teachers, particularly for those who struggle in classroom environments.

What's more, after spending time outdoors children can better articulate emotions that are not easily verbalised, supporting self-regulation. And as they develop a greater sense of belonging in and being part of nature, we see enhanced recognition and appreciation of biodiversity and of nature as a space for calm and inspiration. Not to mention a rapidly growing understanding of the importance of environmental sustainability!

Nadhim Zahawi was on to something when his COP26 speech focused on encouraging children and young people "to get involved in the natural world by increasing biodiversity in the grounds of their nursery, school or college". CCI's effective projects work specifically on the premise of inviting children to explore familiar outdoor spaces and to re-engage with and reimagine the possibilities these spaces afford.

But the project also shows the limitation in the aspiration to "deliver world-leading climate change education through a model science curriculum". Art and movement are central to our project's impact. And even were policymakers to recommend – or better, stipulate – both, developing this practice in schools requires what CCI call 'slowness', a generosity with time and space.

Given the well-known pressures on teachers' time, any schools climate policy will need to include making workload more sustainable too.





Week in

# Westminster

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

## FRIDAY

The Department for Education is looking for somebody to co-ordinate its response to parliamentary questions, and the job ad gives some interesting insights into just how tough prising that information from officials will be.

The department wants a "resilient and tenacious" individual who can use "negotiation and influencing skills" to achieve "successful outcomes and timely performance"!

Who would have thought it would be such hard work?

## TUESDAY

The department issued a press release for Tuesday declaring "MORE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS TO TACKLE BULLYING", backed by £1.1 million funding.

The money will go towards projects and programmes that tackle bullying, "including LGBT, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and victims of hate-related bullying".

What they failed to mention in the release is that, actually, this is just partially reviving a scheme that was quietly shelved last year.

The announcement, timed for Anti-Bullying Week, also seemed somewhat rushed. The DfE was unable to say exactly how many schools would benefit from the support, nor whether the funding would continue beyond March.

But the DfE boss Nadhim Zahawi did have time to post the usual anti-bullying week pic of him wearing odd socks.

Whoever could accuse this government of PR over actual policies.

## WEDNESDAY

The department had also hyped up that its relatively new Education Staff and Wellbeing Charter was getting an update.

Turns out the big change was to, er, swap around points two and three (see image).

Elsewhere Nick Gibb's original foreword has been replaced with a Zahawi special, but that's about it.

In an indication that the wellbeing of the sector might need a bit more attention, the staff wellbeing charter panel at this year's School & Academies Show was standing-room only.

---

Meanwhile, Zahawi told MPs in a letter today he was "confident" the Ofqual guidance on producing teacher-assessed grades as part of the Plan B will "reduce workload" in "comparison with the arrangements" put in place for last year.

Given the hastily introduced arrangements last year, surely it's not worth boasting about the fact that the plans – should things go wrong again this year – are better organised (given the time they took to draw up!).

----

The march of the civil servants-turned-regional schools commissioners continues apace. Jonathan Duff has been appointed the new regional schools commissioner for east of England and north-east London (taking over from another government official, Sue Baldwin).

National schools commissioner Dominic Herrington said Duff has a "deep experience" of the academies programme, and he's not wrong.

Since the noughties Duff has worked on curriculum, 14-to-19 resources, teacher pay reforms, was an academies deputy director and even served in Herrington's own RSC office.

Since 2019, Duff has been the director for services, operations and transformation in the regional delivery directorate.

**We will:**

- 'Design-in' wellbeing**  
We will integrate wellbeing into DfE's school workload **policy test**, where appropriate, considering the impact of policy changes on staff wellbeing.
- Support the sector to drive down unnecessary workload**  
We will continue to work with the sector to drive down unnecessary workload and promote the Workload Reduction Toolkit. We will work to remove unnecessary burdens, including improving how we collect data.
- Measure and respond to changes in staff wellbeing**  
For the secondary and primary sectors, we will measure on an ongoing basis the levels of anxiety, happiness, worthwhileness, life satisfaction and job satisfaction across the profession, using established metrics and methods. We will track trends over time and build this evidence into policy making. We will also continue to take the advice of sector experts on wellbeing and mental health.<sup>2</sup>  
  
We will engage with FE sector bodies to understand insights into staff mental health and wellbeing within the sector. Where appropriate we will build this evidence into policy making.

**We will:**

- 'Design-in' wellbeing**  
We will integrate wellbeing into DfE's school workload **policy test**, where appropriate, considering the impact of policy changes on staff wellbeing.
- Measure and respond to changes in staff wellbeing**  
For the school sector, we will measure on an ongoing basis the levels of anxiety, happiness, worthwhileness, life satisfaction and job satisfaction across the sector, using established metrics and methods. We will track trends over time and build this evidence into policy making. We will also continue to take the advice of sector experts on wellbeing and mental health.<sup>2</sup>  
  
We will engage with FE sector bodies to understand insights into staff mental health and wellbeing within the sector. Where appropriate we will build this evidence into policy making.
- Support the sector to drive down unnecessary workload**  
We will continue to work with the sector to drive down unnecessary workload and promote the Workload Reduction Toolkit. We will work to remove unnecessary burdens, including improving how we collect data.

**Spot the difference ...**





# HEADTEACHER

Required for September 2022

An indicative salary range of L33-L39 (currently £92,624 - £107,239)  
This is a guideline and the salary is negotiable for the right candidate.  
A relocation package is also on offer for the right candidate

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 Wednesday 1 December 2021**  
**Interviews will be held: week commencing Monday 6 December 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](http://www.whs.bucks.sch.uk) | [mbrookling@whs.bucks.sch.uk](mailto:mbrookling@whs.bucks.sch.uk)



# Hub Director

This is a truly exciting time at DEMAT and we seeking to appoint a Hub Director to join us.

As one of the largest primary schools Trusts in the country, our 39 academies span across Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Norfolk, and Suffolk. This hugely important leadership role will mean having strategic oversight of up to 5 of our academies. You will enhance, promote, and demonstrate DEMAT values and standards across the hub.

As a recognised leader, you will share our passion and belief that all children have the right to, and deserve, the highest quality curriculum, which is academic, carefully sequenced and taught by expert teachers who insist on the highest expectations of behaviour. You will support our vision for every child to flourish, to be introduced to the richness of human experience, and to understand and question the world around them.

We are committed to providing systems of high-quality support and challenge to ensure that our school leaders develop and that our schools continually improve. Our leaders have direct links with each other, our Education Team, and our central support teams. We provide significant operational and management support, and together we are building a strong offer for professional development at each level.

You will find a **Hub Director applicant pack** below which will give you further insight into the role and who you will be joining.

If you would like an informal discussion about this role, or visit us, please contact Laura Barton via [hrteam@demat.org.uk](mailto:hrteam@demat.org.uk).

**The deadline for applications is midday on 1 December 2021 at midday.**



## Primary Principal of Goresbrook School, Barking and Dagenham



**Closing date: 8th December 2021**  
**Interviews: 13th and 14th December 2021**  
**Start date: April 2022**  
**Salary: £70,000 - £93,000 dependent upon experience, including TPS**

This is an excellent opportunity to build on your previous experience and to lead Goresbrook Primary as part of an all through school. As the Principal, you will combine the autonomy of leading the Primary school, working in close collaboration with the Secondary Principal in a co-headship role.

United Learning is a successful national group of academies and independent schools which share a mission to bring out 'the best in everyone' and improve the life chances of the children and young people.

As Principal, you will model excellence and demonstrate a clear commitment to the school and its communities. Your expertise and enthusiasm for education and the difference it makes to the lives of children and families will be evident each day.

[Find out more and apply here.](#)



## HR Manager

This is a new HR Manager role and an exciting time to join and establish a growing HR central professional team. We are looking for someone who is ambitious and able to positively influence the development of the HR support service.

The successful candidate will bring HR management and employee relations experience and knowledge, by building capacity in the effective management of disciplinary, grievance and sickness absence casework, updating policies and ensuring compliance. Your advice and guidance will be supported by Headteachers, dedicated school-based and other dedicated teams.

Lumen Christi Catholic Multi Academy aims to be an employer of choice by creating an inspirational and inclusive organisation. The role of HR Manager will have real impact in achieving this aspiration.

**For further details, please click anywhere on this advert to download the CES application form, job description and associated documentation.**





## HEAD OF ACADEMY

Our School Trust is seeking a Head of Academy to lead Ilsham C of E Academy in Torquay. You would be leading a school in a wonderful community as well as being part of the wider School Trust. We are seeking someone who is not only passionate about the highest quality education but can develop the distinctiveness of Ilsham and what it could offer the children it serves.

For further information on the role including job description, person specification and how to apply, please visit the careers section on our website: [www.lapsw.co.uk](http://www.lapsw.co.uk).



## Assistant principal

Ipswich Academy, part of Paradigm Trust, is seeking to appoint an inspirational assistant principal to join the senior leadership team early in 2022. The specific responsibilities of the postholder will be dependent on the experience the successful candidate brings. The leadership of our school was recognised as "outstanding" in our most recent Ofsted inspection (March 2019) and we are looking to expand our senior leadership team to drive the school's next exciting stage of development.

This is a great opportunity for a highly-motivated, ambitious professional who wants to make an impact. Leaders at Ipswich Academy are committed to changing children's lives through continuing growth and commitment to excellence; we seek to become one of the best schools in Ipswich.

We are looking for someone who enjoys visible leadership, who can quickly and effectively build strong relationships with students, families and staff alike.

## Become an Examiner for Pearson!

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- earn extra income in a flexible role
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- network with likeminded professionals

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## Catering Manager

From December 2021 (Permanent)

Scale 5 (point 12-15) £26,544.00 - £28,005.00 pro-rata term time only

7.30am – 3.45pm 5 days a week based at Grazebrook Primary School

This role requires someone who is dynamic and passionate about school meal catering & service and has a rich knowledge and understanding of food & nutrition. Previous experience of working as a Catering Manager /Chef in a school is desirable. Our parents and carers want the very best school meals service for their children and so do we. The role requires someone who has the following:

- > City & Guilds NVQ Level 3 in Catering or NVQ Level 2
- > Basic Food Hygiene Certificate
- > Proven ability to work on own initiative
- > Experience in managing groups of staff, on-job-training
- > Good organisational and communicational skills
- > Ability to order and maintain stock controls
- > Ability to carry out clerical duties
- > Good Knowledge of Health and Safety/ Food Hygiene practice
- > Knowledge of nutritional standards for school meals
- > Experience in hospitality and functions
- > Good computing skills



Our school is vibrant, diverse and inclusive. There are challenges but also great rewards in the work here. If you are an effective communicator, have vision, energy and believe that every child can and will succeed, we would like to meet you. Your communication skills will enable you to build a friendly and professional relationship with staff, pupils and parents.

### HOW TO APPLY:

Please download the application pack from the Hackney Learning Trust website, alternatively email: [achoudhry@newwavefederation.co.uk](mailto:achoudhry@newwavefederation.co.uk) or phone 020 7254 1415 for a pack to be sent out.



Closing date for applications: **12pm Friday 26th November 2021**

Interview date: **w/c Monday 6th December 2021**



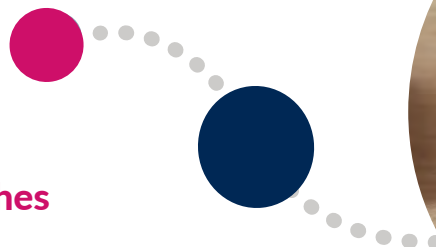
## Online Leadership Performance Coaches and Mentors

Best Practice Network, home of Outstanding Leaders Partnership, provides accredited qualifications for education professionals worldwide, with a mission to help every child access an excellent education.

This is an exciting opportunity to join the growing Associate team and work on the reformed National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), a suite of DfE accredited qualifications for school leaders, designed to transform the support and development offer for teachers and school leaders throughout their career.

**You will work online with a group of participants on our specialist or leadership NPQ programmes to-**

- Support and monitor progress
- Respond to participant tasks, activities and learning reflections
- Provide guidance and qualification enrichment activities
- Signpost participants to peer learning communities, multimedia content, research and expert school-led practice etc. on the virtual learning environment
- Undertake leadership performance coaching for each participant



### Roles

**Online Leadership Mentor – NPQ Specialist Route**

**Online Leadership Performance Coach – NPQ Leadership Route**

**Location:** Remote

**Type:** Part-time, Freelance (cohort-based)

**Salary/fee:** Competitive

**For more information and to view the full job descriptions, please visit:** [www.bestpracticenet.co.uk/programme-associate-vacancies](http://www.bestpracticenet.co.uk/programme-associate-vacancies)

To apply, please send a copy of your CV and cover letter to [bpn\\_hr@bestpracticenet.co.uk](mailto:bpn_hr@bestpracticenet.co.uk).

**Help us build a future for all children, regardless of their background and champion every teacher and school leader to become their very best.**



# Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

**Salary: £130,000-£145,000**

**Contract: Permanent**

**Working Pattern: Full Time | Hours: 36 hours per week.**

**DBS Check: Enhanced**

**Closing Date: 03/12/2021 at 18:00**

**Reference: LT/21/170084**

Lime Trust is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) specialising in mainstream primary and all through SEND provision, currently responsible for 8 schools, four of which are in Peterborough and four in London.

Following the retirement of the previous Lime CEO, the Lime Trustees are seeking to employ an outstanding strategic leader who is passionate about improving the life chances of all our learners, driving up school standards and ensuring outstanding performance in all areas of the Trust's operations.

We are looking for a dynamic and suitably experienced candidate who will be relentless in articulating the Trust's vision, values and ethos, and able to inspire and empower others to share in achieving them by providing the necessary challenge and professional development support to staff.

In their capacity as Accounting Officer for the Trust, the CEO will work with the Trust Board and local academy leaders to build the Trust's reputation as the education provider and employer of choice, with a value-led, sustainable business model, and ensure compliance with all statutory duties.

This is also a unique opportunity to work with the Lime Trustees in further developing and growing the Trust as appropriate.

## **We are looking for a CEO who has the following skills and knowledge:**

- Ability to drive cultural change and take ownership of the Trust's strategy
- Proven leadership and management experience, and expertise at senior management level in an educational setting for a substantial period of time, or across a variety of primary and special school settings
- Experience of working as Deputy CEO/Headteacher (minimum of 4 years)
- Experience of working in a MAT or a similar establishment
- Sustained record of school improvement in an education Trust environment
- Experience of effective management of funding and resources, including project costing and budgetary management
- Evidence of effective human and financial resources management
- Proven track record of developing business planning and managing the introduction of new initiatives and, in particular, effective building and premises management/improvement
- Excellent understanding of statutory education frameworks, including governance, current educational issues relating to academies, company, charity and education law, policies, guidance and codes of practice
- Comprehensive knowledge of the schools Ofsted inspection framework, criteria and processes

## **Recruitment timetable:**

**Closing date: 3 December 2021**

**Shortlisting: w/c 6 December 2021**

**Interviews: w/c 10/17 January 2022**

If you would like to visit one or more of our Lime schools, please contact [info@limetrust.org](mailto:info@limetrust.org) to make an appointment.

*Lime Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all our learners. The successful applicant will be required to undertake an enhanced Disclosure & Barring Service check. References will be taken up prior to interview.*





**Sheiling School  
Thornbury**

## School Business Manager

Sheiling School is an independent school and children's home for children and young people aged 6-19 with special educational needs

Following a review of the senior leadership team structure, Sheiling School is pleased to recruit for the new position of School Business Manager. Candidates must have excellent leadership skills, be educated to degree level or equivalent and must have CIPD level 5 minimum or equivalent with high level ICT skills (essential), with significant, practical and recent experience of HR management. The ideal candidate will also have experience of finance / charity accounting (desirable). This role is primarily HR focussed, with an element of Finance management.

This is an exciting opportunity for a highly motivated individual wishing to progress their career. The post of School Business Manager is crucial to our success in providing the best possible education and care to our pupils. Working closely with the CEO, this post will offer you the chance to make a real difference to the lives of the children in our care.



## ASSISTANT EDUCATION WELFARE ADVISOR

Education Welfare Advisory and Support Service Ltd are looking for an Assistant Education Welfare Advisor to work term time 40 weeks per annum 5 days per week.

We are committed to the principle of improving outcomes for children and young people.

Experience is essential and the candidate should have knowledge of the Education Act and Children Act along with experience in effective models of practice to evaluate and improve school attendance.

The candidate must also have knowledge of government requirements for school attendance and safeguarding .

Use of a car is desirable as you will be visiting different schools in Essex and Havering area along with conducting home visits. Our offices are based in Upshire, Essex.

The post is subject to an EDBS and appropriate reference.

Annual salary is £29,900.00, pro rata amount for 5 days per week, 40 weeks per annum is £23,000.00.

There is a company pension scheme and ongoing training to support your professional development.

**For a discussion and a copy of our safeguarding policy please contact [Lynn.jago@ewass.co.uk](mailto:Lynn.jago@ewass.co.uk).**

Please visit our website [ewass.co.uk](http://ewass.co.uk)

# DID YOU KNOW?

“

As a recruiter for an MAT of 34 Academies, I have been very impressed with the professional support we have received from Schools Week and the quick turnaround time they provide for our advertised vacancies.

**David Ross Education Trust**

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