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2021 in review,
from playground to
parliament



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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2021 | EDITION 270

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FOCUSED TOO MUCH
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COVID

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Plan B: What schools need to know

SAMANTHA BOOTH & JOHN DICKENS

@SCHOOLSWEEK

The Department for Education issued new guidance for schools yesterday after Boris Johnson moved the country into Plan B Covid restrictions. Here's what you need to know...

1 INSPECTIONS CANCELLED NEXT WEEK

Ofsted inspections will be suspended next week so schools can use the last week of term to consider Omicron contingency measures for January.

Inspections will only go ahead if there are safeguarding concerns.

Ofsted has already confirmed that secondary schools will not be inspected during the first week of January to allow onsite pupil testing to take place.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, said one week was not enough. "We will be pushing for that suspension to be extended into the new year."

But DfE guidance adds inspections will "continue to play an important role in providing independent assurance as schools and colleges continue to respond to the pandemic".

Ofsted visits for local authority SEND services and joint targeted area inspections will continue.

2 REVISIT OUTBREAK PLANS FOR OMICRON

The DfE says that while it continues to learn more about the new variant, all schools should revisit existing outbreak plans to ensure they are "well prepared for any future changes".

Secondary schools should also prepare for testing in January as it will help to reduce transmission after a "period of mixing over the holidays".

Exams and formal assessments for vocational and technical qualifications timetabled for January will go ahead.



Boris Johnson

3 'STRONGLY' ENCOURAGE TESTING NOW

The DfE "strongly" encourages all those involved in education to continue regular lateral flow testing (LFTs). Staff should also encourage pupils in year 7 and above to carry on testing.

Schools are also "strongly" encouraged to ask parents and other visitors to take LFTs before entering the site.

4 ATTENDANCE REMAINS MANDATORY

Education is a "national priority" so school attendance remains "mandatory" with all the usual rules in place.

Schools are able to grant leaves of absence for pupils in exceptional circumstances.

5 NO CHANGE ON FACE MASKS

Face coverings are not recommended for pupils and staff in classrooms, unless local public health directors advise their use as part of a contingency framework.

Face coverings in communal areas for all staff and secondary pupils remain, a move brought in last week when the first cases of Omicron were detected.

6 DON'T MOVE TEACHING ONLINE

Teaching should not be moved online as a result of the new work from home guidance, with all schools continuing to provide face-to-face teaching and staff continuing to attend work.

Therapists and wider children's service professionals should also continue to be invited into schools.

7 HEADS CAN CONSIDER IF SOME STAFF WORK FROM HOME

Office workers should work from home if they can from Monday. But school staff "should continue to attend their place of work if required in order to deliver this".

However, leaders "will need to consider whether it is possible for specific staff undertaking certain roles to work from home, while minimising disruption to face-to-face education and care".

Those considered to be vulnerable, clinical extremely vulnerable (CEV) and high or higher-risk are not being advised to shield again.

Children considered CEV should attend school. But in some circumstances, a child may have received advice from their specialist or clinician on "additional precautions", and should continue to follow that advice.

8 MOVE TO DAILY TESTING FOR CLOSE OMICRON CONTACTS (BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHEN)

Currently, anyone identified as a close contact of a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant will be required to self-isolate and book a PCR test.

However, the government plans to introduce daily testing "as soon as possible" for Omicron close contacts who are fully vaccinated, or under the age of 18 years and six months.

No date has been given for when this will be introduced.

NEWS

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A class of their own: T-level school recruits just one student

BILLY CAMDEN & TOM BELGER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

EXCLUSIVE

A school handed £1.2 million for a new six-classroom, purpose-built block to teach the government's flagship T-levels has recruited just one pupil.

An investigation by sister paper FE Week found first-year classes for pupils taking the new A-level equivalent vocational qualifications across five schools involved this year sit nearly half empty.

Struggling schools are now even calling for T-levels – in just their second year – to be reformed, and pleading with government to run another advertising blitz to boost numbers.

Salesian School, in Surrey, completed its new T-level block last summer. The government has handed out £183 million to T-level providers for buildings and equipment to help deliver the reforms.

After a one-year delay for Covid, the school hoped to recruit 15 students on its education and childcare course this September. But the school has recruited just one pupil, who now receives one-to-one tuition.

Painsley Catholic College, in Staffordshire, has built a £1 million hub intended for exclusive digital T-level use, including “state-of-the-art learning pods”.

It aimed to recruit eight pupils this year – but only two signed up. Both schools said some rooms were now temporarily being used for other courses.

FE Week asked each of the 105 colleges, providers and schools delivering T-levels in 2021 how many students were recruited this year against their targets.

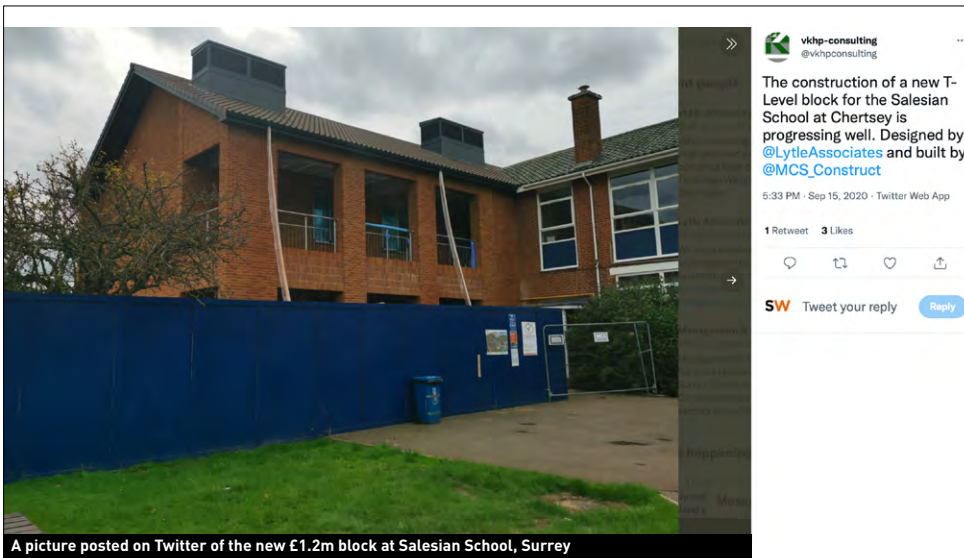
Sixty-six were able to provide breakdowns. Between them, the providers set an overall target of recruiting 5,360 students but enrolled 3,783 (70 per cent).

Four of the five schools that provided figures missed recruitment goals this year, with take-up 44.5 per cent below targets.

Six other schools offer T-levels, but did not respond to freedom of information requests.

Salesian executive headteacher James Kibble said: “We believe that T-Levels offer a real opportunity, so decided that the best way for us to overcome the perceived barriers was to start to deliver them.”

While he said it was a “positive addition” to student options, he admitted students “feel they know very little” about them.



A picture posted on Twitter of the new £1.2m block at Salesian School, Surrey

The school's “strong tradition” delivering A-levels meant students “ultimately opted for qualifications they know, and think universities and employers better understand”.

On the sole pupil being recruited, he added: “This is not viable for any more than a short period of time, but the potential longer-term benefits of offering this qualification make this a strategic investment.”

Rules on the grant funding provided for the new building require providers to deliver T-levels for two decades. The DfE can reclaim funding if courses cease, or if funding is used for other purposes.

Adam Reynolds, computer science head and T-levels lead at Painsley, said it was doing “everything we can” to promote courses. But he added: “There needs to be a massive drive from government to raise awareness.”

Government has already run an initial £3 million marketing campaign. Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi has more recently vowed to make T-levels “as famous as A-levels” by the next election.

But ministers continue to water down T-level policy. In recent months they have said a chunk of the mandatory industry placement can be carried out remotely for the first two waves, offered employers £1,000 cash incentives to take on students, and removed the English and maths exit requirement for the qualifications.

Reynolds warned many pupils do not want to put “all their eggs in one basket”. T-levels are the equivalent of three A-levels, in one subject.

Not being able to study science or maths alongside digital courses was a “nightmare” as potential students “instantly get switched off”,

Reynolds added. Leaving one-third of each course for other subjects would make them “more appealing”.

Kibble agreed most students wanted to study T-levels alongside A-levels. “It’s a pity it has to be all or nothing.”

Ofqual chief regulator Jo Saxton also said last month she would prefer T-levels to be slimmed down so students can study another qualification alongside it.

The Thorpe St Andrew School and Sixth Form, near Norwich, hit recruitment targets on its digital T-level course, but fell short on education and childcare.

Kate Woodcock, head of Year 13 and T-level co-ordinator, said even students with clear career plans feared choosing one path.

She blamed Covid for lower take-up generally, though it may have helped digital courses. “Nobody had their usual open evenings, which are never as effective online.”

The Thomas Telford University Technical College, in Wolverhampton, did exceed targets, however. It recruited four more pupils than the eight planned for its design, surveying and planning course. It offers placements with employers including Balfour Beatty and St Modwen.

A government spokesperson said it would work with providers to boost take-up. They said student numbers nationally had quadrupled from the first to second year, with no DfE targets. However, there are more than double the number of providers now offering courses.

“T-Levels are off to a great start, despite challenges presented by the pandemic,” a spokesperson said.

NEWS

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Catch-up mentors used as teaching cover, report reveals

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

Dozens of schools used government-funded academic mentors to provide teaching cover last year.

The academic mentors scheme is one of three pillars of the flagship National Tutoring Programme (NTP). Last year, 1,124 mentors were placed in 946 schools across England to support more than 100,000 disadvantaged pupils.

According to the government, mentors are supposed to support "one-to-one and small-group, subject-specific tuition", as well as revision lessons and "additional support for pupils shielding or not in school".

But a report by Teach First, which ran the scheme in 2020-21, said that during "particularly high" staff absences in November and December, "some schools" used mentors with qualified teacher status to "provide teaching cover".

During school closures between January and March academic mentors were also "redeployed to assist with teaching of key worker and vulnerable children attending school".

Teach First said about 20 per cent of schools – about 190 – used their academic mentors "in a teaching or teaching assistant (TA) capacity".

Some reported that they were deployed this way because staff "had not fully understood the programme expectations or role of mentors".

One said the role was "poorly defined" and led to "confusion". Another said they "did not do what I signed up for – teaching small groups and one-to-ones".

Teach First said that while mentors covering teaching or TA duties was not in its agreement with schools, "most justified it as a necessity due to high levels of staff absence caused by illness or isolation".

The charity pointed to "real extenuating circumstances last year throughout the pandemic, which put a huge amount of pressure on schools".

But Lee Elliot Major, professor of social

mobility at the University of Exeter, said it was "concerning" that mentors had been used to teach classes. He said an independent review of "all aspects" of the tutoring programme was needed "urgently".

Teach First said future providers of the scheme should "monitor adherence with greater clarity around the exceptional circumstances under which it is acceptable for schools to use mentors in unintended ways".

The charity confirmed the report, quietly published last week, had been passed to Randstad, which is responsible for the NTP in its second year.

The academic mentors' arm beat its target of recruiting 1,000 mentors and reaching 50,000 pupils last year, and ministers said this week that interest this year was "increasing".

However, Randstad's management of the tuition partners has been criticised as it emerged just 43,000 pupils have started tutoring so far this academic year, against a target of 524,000.

Meanwhile, a group of tutoring charities is due to meet to discuss forming an alternative not-for-profit provider to challenge Randstad for the NTP contract at the end of this year.

Nick Bent, the chief executive of the Tutor Trust, told MPs that Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, should "look seriously at the question of whether he should exercise his break clause in the contract with Randstad".

A meeting with Zahawi has been set up on January 19 to talk about "issues and solutions".

Providers have also warned of a lack of marketing to schools. Bent said he had attended webinars for whole regions "where literally only a dozen schools have been present".



Another provider, who did not want to be named, said more schools were opting for school-led tutoring grants, rather than tuition partners, so they "do not have to engage with burdens of the central platform provided by Randstad".

Another provider said it was already delivering school-led tutoring and tuition partners on a 50-50 split.

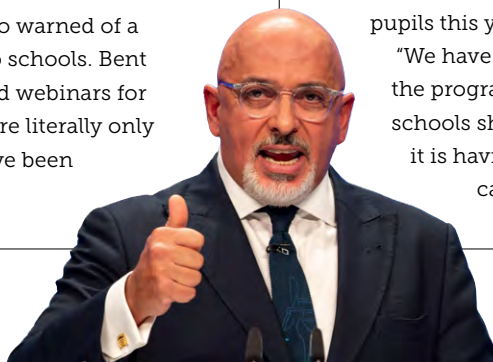
"We've only had one new school contact us through the NTP platform this year, compared to around 30 at the same stage last year. [There's a] concerning lack of interest."

Randstad told *Schools Week* it was confident in its ability to lead the programme and was working "very closely" with tuition partners "to ensure we deliver an ambitious and high-quality programme at pace".

The firm said it had also asked tuition partners to help with testing of its technology platform, and had organised sessions with partners and its technical team to help them with it. The company is also working on marketing and communications to drive engagement.

A Department for Education spokesperson said the NTP was "on track to reach hundreds of thousands more pupils this year".

"We have set high standards for the programme and feedback from schools shows the positive impact it is having in helping pupils to catch up."



Nadhim Zahawi

NEWS

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Trust funds full-time tutors for disadvantaged pupils

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

A large multi-academy trust is recruiting its own full-time tutors as it rolls out one-to-one tutoring for thousands of disadvantaged pupils.

About 5,500 primary and secondary pupils entitled to free school meals in The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT) will receive pastoral and academic support.

It is believed to be one of the most comprehensive trust-wide mentoring schemes. It is also more welfare-focused than the National Tutoring Programme, and more sustainable than initiatives funded through one-off recovery premium funding.

A £250,000 pilot earlier this year, funded by trust reserves, involved six of its schools and about 500 pupils in the south east. It has now been extended for around 1,500 pupils at all 45 schools this year, and will include about 5,500 pupils from next September.

The "A Champion for Every Child", or ACE, rollout has allowed schools to hire "ambition tutors" full-time for about a third of the roles, with existing staff such as teachers or pastoral support workers making up the rest.

One of the new roles was recently advertised with a £21,000 salary.

Karen Roberts, TKAT's chief executive, said: "It's quite simple. You give a child an adult who's their champion, who makes contact with them twice a week.

"If you've got that person in your life, you get that relationship going."

Tutors are trained in helping pupils overcome barriers to academic, social and emotional development.

Roberts said the pilot, conducted while schools were partially closed in the January lockdown, had shown "incredible" results and boosted attendance.

By the end of the trial, participants' attendance was outstripping that of non-pupil premium children, she said.

At Rainham School for Girls in Kent, attendance averaged 80 per cent for year 8 pupils receiving the pupil premium in January, six percentage points behind their



Karen Roberts



David Linsell

better-off peers.

By March, it stood at 98 per cent, one percentage point higher than their peers.

Roberts said another major impact was "closing the gap" in reading and maths between less and better-off primary pupils.

Analysis by the evaluation company ImpactED found a 4.8 per cent rise in pupils' self-reported "goal orientation" and "self-efficacy".

The trust began weighing up initiatives to tackle the disadvantage attainment gap before Covid. "Although the gap's smaller than the national average, we realised we'd hit a plateau," Roberts said.

"We knew we needed to do something else. Then we hit Covid, and a key concern was losing contact with those pupils and erasing everything we've done. Covid was a trigger."

Roberts said regular check-ins with vulnerable pupils during lockdowns had "worked really well", and inspired the personalised, regular contact central to ACE.

"At a time when various national

PUPILS' SELF-REPORTED DEVELOPMENT DURING ACE SCHEME

AREA	% RISE JANUARY-MARCH 2021
Goal orientation	4.8%
Motivation	3.0%
School engagement	0.7%
Self-efficacy	4.0%

organisations were saying give children a laptop, I thought there was more of a human element to this."

While nationally tutors are often not employed directly by schools, David Linsell, ACE's director, said it was "critical" TKAT tutors were part of schools, feeding back issues to teachers.

The programme had boosted awareness of the barriers created by poverty, he added. Issues, including parents struggling to afford shoes or access welfare support, had led the trust to secure shoe donations and help families get the benefits they were entitled to.

The rollout is "self-funding", with schools diverting around a third of existing pupil premium towards it. Roberts and Linsell noted much of this already went into pastoral staff and attendance work, and they had not heard of schools unable to do things because of the shift.

TKAT is one of several big trusts to launch high-profile mentoring schemes in the past two years, although it appears to be one of the only chains taking on tutors as part of its full-time workforce.

Academies Enterprise Trust invested last year in mentoring for 8,000 pupils identified as needing extra help.

The Astrea Academy Trust is similarly offering year 11 pupils who need extra help tuition to "manage lost learning".

It is funded this year via existing budgets, exam fee rebates and catch-up funding.

Summit Learning Trust began offering year 11s an extra hour of teaching a day, a permanent move resourced by cutting staff time on pre- and after-school duty.

EMPOWERING TEACHERS TO CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE WITH THE NEW NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Good teachers make a difference. The biggest determinant of pupil outcomes is the quality of the teaching they receive. The professional development of teachers is therefore critical to the attainment of not just teachers themselves, but the pupils they support.

Earlier this year, the Department for Education introduced a new suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), a national, voluntary set of qualifications designed to support the professional development of teachers and education leaders.

The NPQs are available to teachers and leaders across multiple levels, from heads of subject and department, to senior leaders such as deputy heads and headteachers. Each NPQ programme is fully funded for individuals at state-funded schools and state-funded organisations that offer places for 16-19-year-olds, creating a great pipeline for teacher training and retention.

Education Development Trust, an international charity with a deep commitment to transforming life chances by improving education, has been selected as a Lead Provider for the new NPQs. With a reputation for high-quality, school-led, and exceptionally well-managed professional development programmes for teachers and leaders, Education Development Trust are extremely well-placed to deliver NPQs to an excellent standard.

The NPQ framework builds on the evidence base and expert guidance already established in the Early Career Framework and the ITT Core Content Framework. This framework has a strong focus on equipping educators with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in their roles and now includes more specialist routes for teachers and leaders to develop specific areas of their practice.

The previous NPQ for Middle Leadership has been replaced by the three new specialist NPQs (Leading Teaching, Leading Teacher Development and Leading Behaviour and



Culture). The existing three leadership NPQs (Senior Leadership, Headship, Executive Leadership) have also been reformed to new content frameworks provided by the DfE.

The changes are part of a wider set of teacher development reforms which together will create a 'golden thread' of high-quality evidence underpinning the support, training, and development available through the entirety of a teacher's career.

Education Development Trust are delivering the reformed suite of NPQs by leading a consortium, alongside internationally recognised experts from Sheffield Institute of Education and Evidence Based Education.

Professor Samantha Twiselton, OBE, Director of the Sheffield Institute of Education, commented, "As both a partner in Education Development Trust's NPQ programme and someone who has been heavily involved in helping shape the evolving policy landscape for teacher and school leadership development, I'm so excited that this milestone has been achieved."

"The revised and brand new specialist NPQs are a key part of this. They will help bring a coherence and focus to the ways in which we need to develop and create career pathways for the teaching profession."

"This suite of NPQs will create clear

development pathways that are fit for the evolving leadership needs of our education system," explained Professor Stuart Kime, Director of Education at Evidence Based Education. "The team at Evidence Based Education is excited to work in partnership with Education Development Trust: bringing these qualifications to life helps us continue our mission to support educators in using the best available evidence to improve teaching, leadership and – crucially – learner outcomes."

Education Development Trust is working with a national network of school Delivery Partners to ensure the NPQ course content created is deeply rooted in an understanding of what is needed in schools today. Each programme is built to fit around a busy work schedule and the Delivery Partners enable training to be delivered locally to participants, combining tutoring, face-to-face learning, and both live and recorded online learning.

Education Development Trust's combination of knowledge from schools and expert organisations will support teachers and leaders in their professional development. The suite of NPQs on offer are not only beneficial to those who participate in NPQs – they will also enhance their school environments, benefit their colleagues, and most importantly, make a positive difference to the outcomes of pupils.

Applications are now open for Education Development Trust's February NPQ cohort; the application deadline is the 17th January 2022. Visit www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/npqs to find out more and apply.

NEWS

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Memo to G. Williamson: 'Party? Our Christmas was ruined'

JAMES CARR & FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

School staff have spoken of their "absolute rage" after revelations that former education secretary Gavin Williamson threw a Christmas party to reward officials last December while those on the frontline obeyed rules and battled rising Covid rates.

The party, held on December 10 and attended by the Department for Education's top civil servant Susan Acland-Hood, is now to be investigated by Simon Case, the Cabinet secretary.

He is also looking into two other alleged gatherings at Downing St, on November 27 and December 18, held while London was under Covid restrictions.

The DfE party took place just days before Williamson issued a legal threat to a London council for not following the rules on school closures. Schools nationwide were then ordered to close less than a month later.

Permanent secretary admits attending party

Acland-Hood, the DfE's permanent secretary, told MPs on the Public Accounts Committee that the "gathering" in the office canteen had been instigated by Williamson.

He had "wanted to thank staff together for the work they had done" and said a "few words" to around "two dozen" staff.

Acland-Hood confirmed that if any staff were found to have broken rules, including herself, they would face disciplinary actions.

Williamson was approached for comment.

Nadhim Zahawi, Williamson's successor, later admitted "with the benefit of hindsight" it was a "mistake", but reassured the public the "gathering" was only made up of people "working together day in and day out".

He said that "most days" the staff worked 19-hour days "because of the national emergency".



Gavin Williamson

'It's retriggered feelings of loss and grief'

But Dan Morrow, chief executive of the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, said details of the party, first revealed by the *Daily Mirror*, had "retriggered feelings of loss and grief for last Christmas and the sacrifices made".

Staff had reacted with "absolute rage", he said. "Many of us were in schools on the frontline during the Kent variant and we didn't have the opportunity to do that [have a party] with each other because it wasn't appropriate. It wasn't following guidance, therefore it wouldn't have been ethical."

At the time of the party, 1.2 million pupils were absent from school.

Robert Halfon, the chair of the education committee, has called on the DfE to issue "fulsome apologies to families up and down the country".

On December 10, London was in a tier 2 lockdown that banned the mixing of households indoors. The DfE gathering would have only been within the rules had it been "reasonably necessary for work".

Meetings had to be set up to meet Covid-secure guidelines, and meals to socialise with colleagues were not permitted.

Jude Enright, headteacher of Queens Park Community School in north London, said that last December leaders were doing "everything we could to keep families safe and educate children". Late announcements about January testing "ruined" Christmas for leaders.

"London was in lockdown. What exactly were they celebrating?"

Greenwich council speaks out

Just four days after the party, Williamson used emergency Covid powers to force the London borough of Greenwich to follow existing rules and keep their schools open.

Matt Monroe, Greenwich's cabinet member of children and young people, told *Schools Week* it was "very disheartening... It appears they were breaking the very same rules they were moving to enforce on Greenwich schools."

Morrow added: "You expect ethical standards to be exemplified by the department that leads us."

Johnson encouraging rule flouting in schools

Meanwhile, leaders warned this week the rule-breaking scandals were causing parents to challenge rules for their pupils.

Will Smith, the chief executive of the Greenshaw Learning Trust, tweeted that in "multiple schools" where staff were battling Covid, parents had asked why their children should follow rules and wear masks when "the PM doesn't follow the rules".

Boris Johnson was pictured several times in recent months not wearing a mask indoors.

The government recently reintroduced its recommendation that face coverings be worn by pupils and staff in communal areas.

NEWS



AQA keeps exam fee rises to 'bare minimum' after backlash

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The country's largest exam board has reined in fee rises following a backlash from the sector last year over costs for tests that did not take place.

AQA faced pushback when it hiked exam fees by five per cent last academic year, despite exams being cancelled for a second year running and teachers carrying out in-school assessments.

The board was also challenged over returning just a quarter of its fees to schools, while competitors Edexcel returned 33 per cent and OCR gave schools 46 per cent back.

But AQA, a not-for-profit organisation, has raised exam fees by just two per cent this year – its smallest rise in ten years. This is below the current expected inflation rate of 3.8 per cent.

Exams are due to go ahead with modifications next summer, but a plan B of teacher-assessed grades is ready to roll out should the pandemic worsen.

Tracey Newman, AQA's director of customer and sales, said they "understand the financial pressures the pandemic has created for schools". She added the charity does not "charge more than we need to for our qualifications and services", with this year's increases "the bare minimum".

AQA has hinted at returning more exam fees cash back to schools as a result of government providing funding to run the autumn exams series, which has now taken place.

The board said it will inform schools of any rebate in the new year.

Criticism over cost rises is now likely to be directed elsewhere.

The average cost of fee rises for Edexcel, owned by Pearson, is about 3.8 per cent – nearly double the two per cent rise last year. It means an average-size secondary, with

200 year 11s taking nine of the most popular GCSEs, faces paying an extra £2,900.

If entry rates are the same nationwide for those nine subjects alone, Edexcel would earn an extra £1.2 million this year.

Pearson said it recognises school budgets are "stretched" and it will "always aim" for minimum fee increases while providing "value for money".

For AQA, whose qualifications are cheaper than those of other boards, an average-size secondary entering nine GCSEs faces paying £1,490 extra.

The board will earn an extra £1.4 million this year from price rises in the nine popular GCSEs for which we analysed rises.

Meanwhile, OCR will up exam fees by about three per cent, translating to nearly £180,000 more income this year across those nine subjects. OCR said it knows schools face "challenging times" and has had "very positive feedback" on its services.

Julie McCulloch, policy director at heads' union ASCL, said they "recognise the reality" that exam boards have "rising costs" and they "appreciate the efforts to keep fee increases to a minimum".

But she added: "The trouble remains that exam fees are a significant cost to schools on budgets which are severely constrained. This again points to the need for an improved funding settlement from the government."

Pepe Diiasio, headteacher at Wales High School, in Rotherham, said fees below inflation were "welcome", but added: "It feels like we are over a gun barrel as we do not have a vast range of choice of boards."

"If school budgets were going up by 3.8 per cent inflation, it wouldn't be so bad, but it doesn't feel like that at a time when we are paying more out for Covid costs, supply costs and student wellbeing."

DfE said that it's for exam boards to set their fees.

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Interim Ofqual chair gets full-time gig

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Academy trust boss Ian Bauckham has been appointed as Ofqual's permanent chair.

Bauckham, chief executive of the Tenax Schools Trust, has been the organisation's interim chair for the past year, succeeding Roger Taylor who stepped down last December.

He will begin a three-year term from next month.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi said Bauckham's "extensive experience" of the education and qualifications system "means he is the ideal person to guide Ofqual through the critical work ahead".

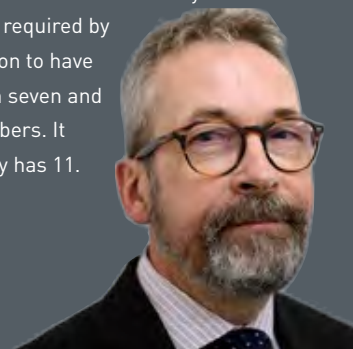
Bauckham said he was "very pleased" to continue the role as Ofqual aims to "act in the interests" of all those taking qualifications.

Former academy trust boss and government adviser Jo Saxton was appointed Ofqual chief regulator in September.

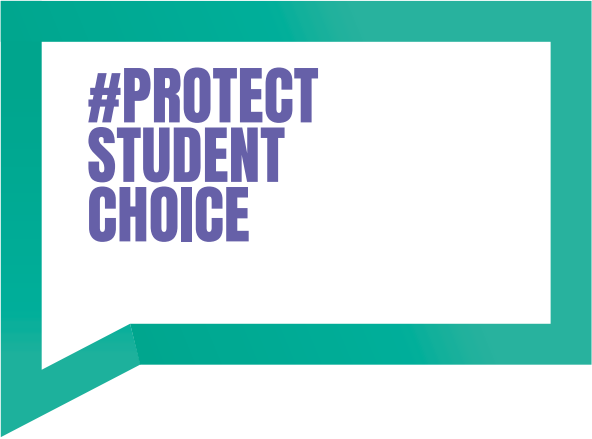
Ofqual is also looking for up to six new "high calibre" board members. The recruitment round will fill vacancies as some existing members' three-year terms come to an end.

The Department for Education, which makes the appointments, said it is looking for "experienced, strategic, pragmatic and collaborative" people who are "comfortable working in a rapidly changing policy environment".

Board members are entitled to up to £6,000 remuneration a year and applications close on January 10. The board is required by legislation to have between seven and 12 members. It currently has 11.



Ian Bauckham



**#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**
- **Write to your local MPs to secure their support**
- **Tweet support for the campaign [#ProtectStudentChoice](https://twitter.com/ProtectStudentChoice)**



FEWEEK



To find out more visit www.protectstudentchoice.org

NEWS

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Leaders question Ofsted's positive spin on inspections

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted has been accused of "cherry-picking" data to give a positive spin on schools' experiences of inspections this term.

Amanda Spielman (pictured), the chief inspector, claimed this week that "well over 90 per cent" of schools had reported positively on visits since September.

The inspectorate, under pressure over inspections while schools continue to face Covid disruption, has refused to release a breakdown of the figures Spielman quoted, which form part of this year's post-inspection survey responses. The survey will be published next week.

However, previous data from these surveys suggests schools given higher ratings are far more likely to respond.

In 2019-20, just 54 per cent of schools inspected responded to the survey. but while 62 per cent of schools graded 'outstanding' took part, just 35 per cent of those rated 'inadequate' gave their views.

About twice as many schools who received the top two grades responded compared to the bottom grades.

Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders, said that if Ofsted made claims that most schools had a positive experience "it should provide the survey data at the same time so that we can see the detail".

She said the union had received feedback



from some schools that had "a very negative" experience, "which should be of most concern to the inspectorate".

Ros McMullen, of the headteachers' wellbeing helpline Headrest, said Ofsted was "cherry-picking" the data.

"It's 90 per cent of 50 per cent – that is not a satisfaction rate it would approve of if it was given to it by schools."

The watchdog has refused to reveal how many deferral requests from schools disrupted by Covid it has turned down, despite Spielman saying this week that "more than three quarters" of requests were granted.

This is a sharp rise on the two-thirds that Ofsted said had been granted as of mid-November.

When asked by *Schools Week* to reveal the figures under the Freedom of Information Act, Ofsted said "disclosing this information is likely to have a negative impact on our inspection activity".

This was because it considered requests

on a "case-by-case basis" and the figures might create "expectations" for outcomes from particular types of requests, it said.

McCulloch said ASCL could not understand the response. "This is an issue of critical importance and we would urge the inspectorate to be fully transparent."

Ofsted refused to comment further.

The watchdog's annual report for 2020-21, released this week, found that "nearly all children" were impacted by Covid-19 and the subsequent disruption.

Spielman explained this meant "for too many, achievements were disappointingly small, despite the tremendous effort" of teachers, parents and pupils.

Pupils "struggled with a hokey-cokey education" in and out of the classroom, she said.

The report lacked the usual data insights as routine inspections were suspended for large parts of the year. Instead, it focused on how the pandemic affected the sector.

Across the year, 33 per cent of pupils moved out of state schools for an "unknown destination" – up from 29 per cent the year before.

Ofsted also highlighted a 78 per cent increase in the number of alternative provision (AP) placements in independent schools, commissioned by councils, over the past ten years.

Nearly two in five pupils stay in PRUs, academy AP or free school AP for more than a year.

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR_93

Don't do your own deep dives, Ofsted says

Ofsted has warned schools against using "overcomplicated" consultants and conducting their own deep dives when developing their curriculum.

The schools watchdog has advised leaders to instead "keep it simple".

Heather Fearn and Jonathan Keay, from Ofsted's curriculum team, told schools that advice from consultants on how to prepare for an Ofsted inspection could hinder a school's progress.

"Unfortunately, this advice can often be overcomplicated and can divert your energy from the simple things that matter," they said.

Instead, Ofsted advises schools to keep

in mind if their curriculum identifies the knowledge pupils need - and whether they have learned that knowledge.

The curriculum team also reassured schools they did not "not need to prepare special documentation for Ofsted on 'intent', 'implementation' and 'impact'" – the three key aspects of a deep dive.

Intent was "simply what you want pupils to learn", the pair wrote.

"There are no extra forms of documentation needed for inspection because all schools already plan curriculum content and teaching activities designed to ensure that curriculum is learned."

"Deep dives", a key feature of the current inspection framework, explore if pupils have been taught the knowledge required.

Pupils might have gaps if knowledge was not taught, given "necessary emphasis" or repeated enough. Ineffective teaching might also be behind any gaps.

However, Ofsted said: "If schools want to drill down to the quality of curriculum themselves, there are probably better ways of doing this than undertaking internal deep dives."

Instead schools could "consider curriculum effectiveness" as an "ongoing conversation".

NEWS

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Covid lockdowns reverse maths GCSE progress ...

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

Progress in GCSE maths has been thrown into reverse by the pandemic, the latest national reference test data shows.

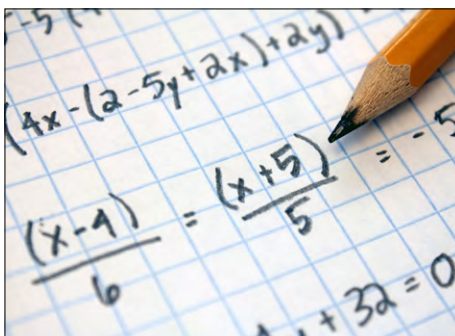
The findings come in spite of a jump in top results following last summer's teacher-assessed grades.

The national reference test (NRT) was designed to monitor pupil performance over time and inform GCSE grading in English and maths. However, with exams cancelled, it has this year been repurposed to inform Covid lost learning.

Analysis of the 2021 tests, published yesterday by Ofqual, found that three years of progress in maths since the test's introduction in 2017 have been "reversed".

Performance is now "closer to the level seen in 2017", when GCSEs were reformed.

National Foundation for Educational Research analysts, commissioned by exam chiefs, said this was "not surprising, given the disruption to students' education caused by the pandemic".



However, the analysis found "no statistically significant difference" from previous years in English.

Authors Ming Wei Lee and Jamie Cockcroft called this "a little surprising", given Covid disruption and declines in maths.

Participants had reported spending more time on homework, but "much less time on maths-related school activities outside class" than their 2020 counterparts.

The NRT student survey found that 37 per cent of participants felt "behind" in maths, although 52 per cent were "where I expected to be" and 8 per cent even felt "ahead".

The average student reported feeling about six weeks "behind".

Pupils were also less likely to say they found the subject "useful" and "important" than their 2020 counterparts, and less likely to report enjoying it.

The research is the latest in a string of studies highlighting the impact of learning lost during partial school closures. It comes in spite of 6 per cent of maths students securing top grade 9 results this year, up from 3.7 per cent in 2019.

Researchers said while disruption meant "less practice in maths, they will have continued to use and respond to written and spoken English, in school in English as well as in other subjects, and outside school".

A slightly higher proportion of students in English, 59.3 per cent, reported being "where I expected to be" than in maths. But 30.7 per cent said they felt "behind", with an average learning loss of 1.1 months perceived by pupils themselves, while 8.6 per cent felt "ahead".

Researchers said self-reported learning progress had "reasonable validity in predicting test performance".

TOM BELGER | @TOM_BELGER

... but places offered by top universities soar

The number of places offered by top universities has soared by almost a third in two years, after A-level results hit a record high.

The increase at the most competitive universities comes after two years of teacher-assessed grades sparked grade inflation.

Data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) shows 103,010 young people secured places at "higher tariff" universities – which have stricter academic entrance criteria – at the end of the 2021 admissions cycle.

It marks an 11 per cent increase on the 92,650 accepted in 2020, and a 28 per cent rise on the 80,380 accepted before the pandemic in 2019.

The increase over the past year significantly exceeds the 3 per cent rise in the size of the 18-year-old population.

UCAS said its new figures revealed the most detailed insight yet into the impact of awarding grades based on teachers' assessments after Covid forced exam cancellations.

It noted the number of applicants who had

achieved three A* or equivalent grades at A-level, at 19,595, had almost doubled on 2020 levels and almost quadrupled on 2019 levels.

Clare Marchant, the service's chief executive, said thousands more students were benefiting as their "hard work throughout the pandemic has been rightly recognised" by teacher assessments.

The "flexibility shown by universities and colleges" had also boosted numbers, particularly at the most competitive institutions, she added.

Many other high-achieving students were also choosing to reapply in the current admissions cycle.

Marchant has previously highlighted the

"squeeze on available places", particularly for competitive courses, amid increased demand and continued growth in the number of 18-year-olds.

Some Oxbridge colleges slashed offer numbers by as much as 15 per cent to avoid an admissions bulge this year.

Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute, said it was "yet more evidence that the huge value of higher education has never been so treasured as it has been during the pandemic".

But he said universities needed to be careful that they did not expand so fast that their student experience suffered.

THE OTHER UCAS STATS

- 38 per cent of all 18-year-olds had a confirmed place, up from 34 per cent in 2019
- 81 per cent secured their first choice, up from 75 per cent last year
- Applications overall rose by 3 per cent, although numbers with confirmed offers actually fell by 1 per cent
- The number of 18-year-olds deferring places soared 15 per cent to 24,855

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Ofsted to assess teacher trainer reaccreditations

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted will assess applications to judge which teacher training providers make the grade for reaccreditation, leading to warnings the involvement creates a "conflict of interest".

Under controversial reforms to initial teacher training (ITT), all providers must reapply for official approval to run courses from 2024.

Schools Week can reveal that Ofsted will join the Department for Education in assessing reaccreditation applications.

James Noble-Rogers, the executive director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), said it was "clearly a risk of a conflict of interest".

Ofsted would "in effect be inspecting the quality of its own decision taking," he said. "Issues concerned with accreditation should be kept separate from those of quality."

"The Department for Education will of course need some specialist input into the accreditation process, but that cannot come from Ofsted."

In a "frequently asked questions" document, seen by *Schools Week*, the DfE said "applications for accreditation would be assessed by DfE officials, supported by Ofsted".

It added: "This assessment will be based on the content of applications against the questions and scoring criteria and will not take into account Ofsted inspection outcomes from the current inspection cycle."

But the DfE went further, saying Ofsted would "assess" the applications. This would be based on individual merits, and assessments would be moderated to ensure the scoring criteria were fairly and consistently applied.

The DfE claimed there was "no conflict of interest in Ofsted

supporting with applications".

However, provider representatives have warned about the overlap – with Ofsted also responsible for grading provision.

Emma Hollis (pictured), the executive director of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NABSTT), said its members had raised concerns about the "potential" conflicts.

The organisation has asked the DfE for "reassurance" that applications would be blind reviewed – meaning they would be anonymous before being scored.

"We believe that this will ensure a fair, open and transparent process which will mitigate any potential risk around bias, whether perceived or actual."

In a consultation of the reforms, the government said it anticipated "significant market reconfiguration". There are currently about 230 teacher training providers.

But in its response last week, the DfE said it recognised "the importance of enabling providers of different types and sizes, and in different contexts, to operate in the market".

The department has delayed the implementation of the reforms by a year, and added a second accreditation round.

But smaller providers have warned that with only nine weeks – including two for Christmas – until the first deadline, the timeframe is too short.

Noble-Rogers told schools minister Robin Walker in a letter that in more than 30 years he had never seen ITT colleagues "faced with such pressure" and that "things are at breaking point".

The DfE said the ITT application process and Ofsted's inspections would remain separate. Ofsted did not respond to a request for comment.



DfE ordered to release school condition reports

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The government has been ordered to release reports on the condition of schools prioritised for rebuilding projects.

In a major transparency victory, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has ruled in *Schools Week's* favour and ordered the Department for Education to turn over condition data collection (CDC) reports for the first 50 schools in its school rebuilding programme. The department has 35 days to comply.

Ministers have pledged to rebuild 500 schools over the next decade, and said the first projects were selected based on surveys carried out between 2017 and 2019.

But the DfE was accused of "knee-jerk secrecy" in March after refusing to release reports from the survey, leaving headteachers in the dark over future funding.

Heads have argued that having access to the reports would give them a better sense of where they stood in the queue.

But officials claimed that releasing the reports would breach "confidentiality of commercial or industrial information".

The DfE also claimed that publishing the reports would let construction companies "develop pricing models" before bidding for work. It would also "compromise the department's ability to secure good value in their future discussions with contractors and other third parties".

However, the ICO this week ruled that the DfE had failed to demonstrate that releasing the reports would have an adverse effect on schools, and that the reports were "not commercial in nature".

Framwellgate School, in Durham, has been waiting for a rebuild for more than a decade after work planned under the Building Schools for the Future programme was scrapped in 2010.

Andy Byers, the school's head, has been campaigning to have access to all CDC reports. He said the ICO's report was "really welcome news".

"All we've asked for throughout this process is some transparency so that we know where we stand in the queue."

A spokesperson said the DfE was "reviewing the information commissioner's decision and will set out our next steps in due course".

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF EVERY PUPIL

BY RACHEL BUTLER,
PRODUCT MANAGER AT NCFE

When people ask me why vocational education is so important, I'm always happy to share my answer on a topic that I'm so enthusiastic and passionate about. Vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) - which offer pupils the opportunity to experience real-world tasks and projects - are crucial in helping to build curriculums that meet the needs of every pupil, no matter their background or their level.

They allow pupils to explore and experience different forms of education, giving them a solid base to understand their own strengths and skills, their passions and talents. Plus, VTQs can also help ensure that pupils make the right choice about which of the many future study or career paths they should follow.

Here at NCFE, we're experts in the field of vocational and technical education, helping to spearhead the movement towards vocational education for all. A key part of this process is ensuring that we're always reviewing and improving our qualifications and our offering, by listening to the requirements of stakeholders across the sector to deliver VTQs of the highest quality.

Change in the technical awards space

In late 2019, Ofqual and the Department for Education (DfE) consulted on the introduction of Qualification Level Conditions (QLCs), and requirements and guidance for Key Stage 4 performance table qualifications (PTQs). Topics discussed included non-exam assessment, assessment by examination, assessment availability, grading and more.

During the discussion, the DfE noted questions around the reliability of some VTQs on Key Stage 4 performance tables,

as well as the potential for grade inflation, in relation to the non-exam assessment nature of most VTQs.

In response, Ofqual and the DfE committed to regulating VTQs in performance tables with the same rigour and focus as they do general qualifications (such as GCSEs), releasing new technical guidance for 2024 performance tables to help govern this.

Alignment of V Certs with GCSEs

Since the release of this new guidance, we've gone the extra mile to address changes in the technical awards space and improve on our previous model of our core 14-16 qualification: our V Certs. A vocational equivalent to GCSEs, V Certs are designed in collaboration with employers and practitioners to help prepare pupils for a career in their chosen industry.

Following the changes we've made, our V Cert technical awards are now more aligned with GCSEs, making them more accessible to schools than ever before. We've aligned the assessment timetables between the two, with the external examination now taking place at the end of the programme - which can only be taken once the non-examined assessment (coursework-style element) is complete.

On top of this, we've also refreshed course content, streamlined the structure of the courses, and kept the qualifications up to date to meet ever-changing industry needs.

The benefits of technical qualification study

As educators, delivering world-class vocational qualifications such as V Certs to pupils of all abilities and from all backgrounds can only have a positive impact, empowering them by giving them a taste of what it's like to complete real-world tasks and

NCFE

projects, and delivering sector-relevant skills and knowledge.

At NCFE, we strongly believe that every school should be offering technical and vocational qualifications at KS4, helping to improve the quality of education in schools and the outcomes for individuals.

It also introduces vocational learning to pupils at a young age, opening doors to technical education progression opportunities such as **T Levels** - new work-focused alternatives to A Levels for those aged 16-18 - at KS5.

We offer a range of support to make it as easy as possible for schools to adopt vocational qualifications, including continuing professional development (CPD) webinars and ready-to-go teaching and learning materials.

To find out more about our V Cert qualifications and supporting resources, please visit our [website](#), call **0191 239 8000** or send us an email at vcerts@ncfe.org.uk.



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School leader supply 'on brink of collapse'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Aspiration to headship has "plummeted" and serving heads are less likely to encourage others to follow in their footsteps, prompting fears leadership supply is "teetering on the brink of collapse".

A survey of members of the NAHT school leaders' union found the proportion of deputy and assistant heads and middle leaders who do not aspire to headship has shot up. It has risen from 40 per cent five years ago to 53 per cent today, a rise of 32.5 per cent.

Recent research by Teacher Tapp found a similar trend among teachers, with the proportion who said they wanted to become a headteacher falling between 2018 and the present day. This aspiration dropped for both men and women, though women are less likely to aspire to headship.

The NAHT also found the proportion of heads who said they would recommend school leadership as a career goal for others fell from 47 per cent in 2020 to 30 per cent in 2021.

The figures have prompted warnings over leadership supply after almost two years of the pandemic, with the survey showing 93 per cent of leaders felt the government's support for their wellbeing was ineffective.

Paul Whiteman, the NAHT's general secretary, said school leadership supply was "teetering on the brink of collapse". He said the government's



Paul Whiteman

"confused and chaotic handling of the Covid response in schools has further deepened the existing crisis in school leadership".

However, Covid wasn't the only contributor to leaders' disillusionment, with the report warning the pandemic "exacerbated already unrelenting workload pressures on school leaders".

Seventy-four per cent of respondents said keeping pace with government guidance had had the greatest impact on their workload over the past 12 months.

Fifty-seven per cent cited protecting the health and safety of staff and pupils as a leading source of workload.

Pay was also a factor. Eighty-three per cent of leaders surveyed said this year's pay freeze had negatively impacted their morale.

Asked what would improve the attractiveness of school leadership, 86 per cent of respondents said greater recognition of school leaders as professionals, while 70 per cent said a reduction in workload.

The survey results also suggest large numbers of heads want support with their wellbeing or

mental health, but either don't know how to access it, or found that it is not available.

The government launched an £800,000 wellbeing service for school leaders. However, as revealed by Schools Week, this is only going to offer support to around one in ten headteachers.

In contrast, NAHT's survey found that 38 per cent of assistant and deputy heads and 35 per cent of middle leaders said they needed support, but only 26 and 23 per cent respectively said they had accessed it.

The report called for reform of school inspection and accountability measures to remove "drivers of unnecessary workload, fear and stress". Leaders' pay should also be restored in real-terms, the report stated.

A report this year from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found heads in England were among the highest-paid in the world. The gap between leader pay and teacher salaries in the country was also among the biggest.

A Department for Education spokesperson said the government was "incredibly grateful for the efforts of teachers and school leaders over the course of the past 18 months, supporting their pupils through the challenges of the pandemic".

The DfE said action taken included mental health support for leaders, £250 million invested in training opportunities and committing to reducing workload.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

Mental health support teams 'should be in all schools by 2027'

New support teams to link up education and mental health services should be rolled out to all schools in six years, MPs have said, after finding the ambition for the new units was "too low".

The government should also ensure that mental health support teams, unveiled four years ago by Theresa May, are trained to deal with eating disorders, suicide prevention and self-harm.

A report by the parliamentary health and social care committee called for "urgent

action".

Jeremy Hunt, the committee chair and a former health secretary, said demand for mental health treatment was pushing NHS services to breaking point.

"Whilst we recognise that capacity to provide such services is increasing, we are not convinced it is happening at a fast enough rate."

Mental health support teams, run by the NHS, are a key strand of the government's 2017 green paper, with an aim of reaching at

least a fifth to a quarter of the country by the end of 2022-23.

The teams work between schools and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to provide early intervention on mental wellbeing and emotional wellbeing issues.

It is expected they will reach just under half the country by 2023-24, but the health committee said this ambition was "too low". Instead, they should be fully funded to reach all schools by 2027-28.

POLITICS

Labour finally completes reshuffle: meet the new team

Labour MP Stephen Morgan has been named as the new shadow schools minister, with Helen Hayes given the children's brief following a reshuffle.

Morgan, MP for Portsmouth South and a former shadow defence minister, tweeted that it was a "huge privilege" to be appointed to the role, left vacant by the promotion of Peter Kyle in last week's reshuffle.

"Nothing is more important to our future than giving children the opportunities they need. I

want schools to be the place where children aim high, work hard and achieve their dreams, regardless of their background," he added.

It has also been announced that Tulip Siddiq, who has served as shadow children's minister for most of the past six years, has moved to a role in the shadow Treasury team. She has been replaced by Hayes, the MP for Dulwich and West Norwood.

The appointments complete the shadow education team, now led by Bridget Phillipson,

who replaced Kate Green as shadow education secretary last Monday.

Phillipson said the team would "work every day to secure a Labour government and deliver a better future for education for us all".

However, Labour has not announced a replacement for Wes Streeting as shadow child poverty secretary. Streeting was promoted to shadow health secretary last week. Labour has been approached for clarification on whether the role still exists.

Bridget Phillipson

SHADOW EDUCATION SECRETARY



The MP for Houghton and Sunderland South in the north-east since 2010, Phillipson had served as shadow chief secretary to the Treasury since last year.

She replaces Kate Green, who was removed from the shadow cabinet last week.

Stephen Morgan

SHADOW SCHOOLS MINISTER



Morgan has been the MP for Portsmouth South since 2017. He served as a shadow communities minister, before becoming a shadow defence minister last year.

He replaces Peter Kyle, who has been promoted to shadow Northern Ireland secretary.

Helen Hayes

SHADOW CHILDREN'S MINISTER



The MP for Dulwich and West Norwood since 2015, Hayes has been shadow minister for the Cabinet Office since last April, and was previously an opposition whip.

She replaces Tulip Siddiq, who has a new job in the shadow Treasury team.

Lord Mike Watson

SHADOW EDUCATION MINISTER



A former MP, Lord Watson of Invergowrie has been a shadow education minister since 2015.

He represents the party in education debates in the House of Lords.

Toby Perkins

SHADOW SKILLS MINISTER



The MP for Chesterfield since 2010, Perkins kept his job as shadow minister for apprenticeships and lifelong learning in last week's reshuffle.

He has served in the role since last April, having previously been a shadow business minister and shadow defence minister.

Matt Western

SHADOW UNIVERSITIES MINISTER



Western has been the MP for Warwick and Leamington since 2017, and also kept his job as shadow minister for further education and universities in the reshuffle.

He joined the shadow education team in March of this year, having been an opposition whip.

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Zahawi unveils 'attendance alliance'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The education secretary Nadhim Zahawi has unveiled a new 17-member "attendance alliance" which will work to reduce absence from schools.

The group, chaired by Zahawi, includes schools minister Robin Walker, Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman children's commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza and chief social worker Isabelle Trowler. It met for the first time today.

It comes after analysis obtained by Schools Week revealed almost one in five pupils is effectively missing a day a week in the worst-hit areas.

Zahawi recently ordered councils to tell parents that keeping their children off school has "repercussions" as he attempts to tackle rising absence rates.

Members pledged to work with their "members, stakeholders and the professionals they represent to make sure they are following best practice in improving attendance within their day-to-day work".

Although Covid has had a big impact on attendance levels over the past two years, ministers are also concerned about non-Covid-related persistent absence, which rose to 16.3 per cent in secondary schools last autumn, up from



the same period in 2019.

The members also issued a "joint call on all those that engage with children, whether as a parent, teacher, GP, police officer, social worker or anything else – to work together to break down any barriers they find to them being in school for every possible day".

At its first meeting, the alliance looked at analysis of data and evidence compiled from member organisations, and consideration of "how members can exert their combined influence to address the issues identified".

Departmental data was presented that showed persistent absence "can vary significantly across single

areas, with some neighbouring local authorities having very different rates from each other".

de Souza presented insights from her "big ask" consultation, while Spielman spoke about draft findings of an Ofsted review of best practice by schools due out in the new year.

The Northern Education Trust and Confederation of School Trusts, supported by leaders of special schools and alternative provision, will convene a new sub-alliance working group of trust leaders to "identify the best practice in supporting children to attend school regularly".

Zahawi said: "Where children aren't in school without good reason or don't want to be in school something has gone substantially wrong and needs fixing. This new attendance

alliance includes the people with the power to do just that.

"They will be working over the coming months to make sure everyone working on the ground with children, as a teacher, football coach, mental health worker or in any other role, has the tools and resources they need to break down barriers to children attending school."



Nadhim Zahawi

Attendance alliance: The members

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP	Secretary of State for Education (Chair)
Robin Walker MP	Minister of State for School Standards
Dame Rachel de Souza	Children's Commissioner
Isabelle Trowler	Chief Social Worker for Children and Families
Amanda Spielman	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
Leora Cruddas	Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts (CST)
Geoff Barton	General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
Paul Whiteman	General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers
Charlotte Ramsden OBE	President, Association of Directors of Children's Services
Dame Christine Lenehan	Director, Council for Disabled Children
Sir Peter Wanless CB	Chief Executive, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Susan Douglas CBE	CEO, Eden Academy Trust
Rob Tarn	CEO, Northern Education Trust
Professor Dame Clare Gerada	President, Royal College of General Practitioners
Professor Peter Fonagy	National Clinical Advisor on Children's Mental Health, NHS England
Ade Adetosoye OBE	Children and Families Spokesperson, SOLACE
Commander Catherine Roper	Head of Profession for Crime Prevention, Inclusion and Engagement

EDITORIAL



DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Rolling with the punches - but how many more?

A year ago, as Gavin Williamson was threatening to take councils to court for closing schools amid the alpha wave (and, it turns out, hosting a morally questionable Christmas do), our end-of-term special focused on finding the positives amid unprecedented disruption.

This year, we couldn't have hidden the exhaustion and the anger bubbling across the system if we'd tried.

As it is, the optimism and resilience in these school leaders' reflections are remarkable (see page 24). That they made the time to write is even more so, until you realise it's a rare opportunity to have a voice in a system that feels like it has devalued their expertise.

And the consequences are on show: from a fading recruitment boom to an escalating retention bust, from anger at Ofsted to frustration at the timing of a white paper on literacy.

Rightly, leaders just wish there was some recognition for their two-year effort, some acknowledgment that the pandemic is still a live

issue and, if it's not too much to ask, a chance to down tools for a proper break.

Instead, denial, pressure and uncertainty over Omicron mean "it's beginning to look a lot like last Christmas".

None of which is to neglect the positives.

After all, children have played and learned together - and even learned to ignore classroom CO2 monitors.

Teachers are making the most of their new digital skills in classrooms, and reforms at least hold the promise of career-long development.

And the DfE has committed to action on sustainability. Nadhim Zahawi looks set to act on leadership diversity too.

But finding those positives and holding on to them is as tricky as the GCHQ puzzles on pages 29 and 30. So we hope the next few pages are cathartic for teachers and school leaders, and informative for decision-makers.

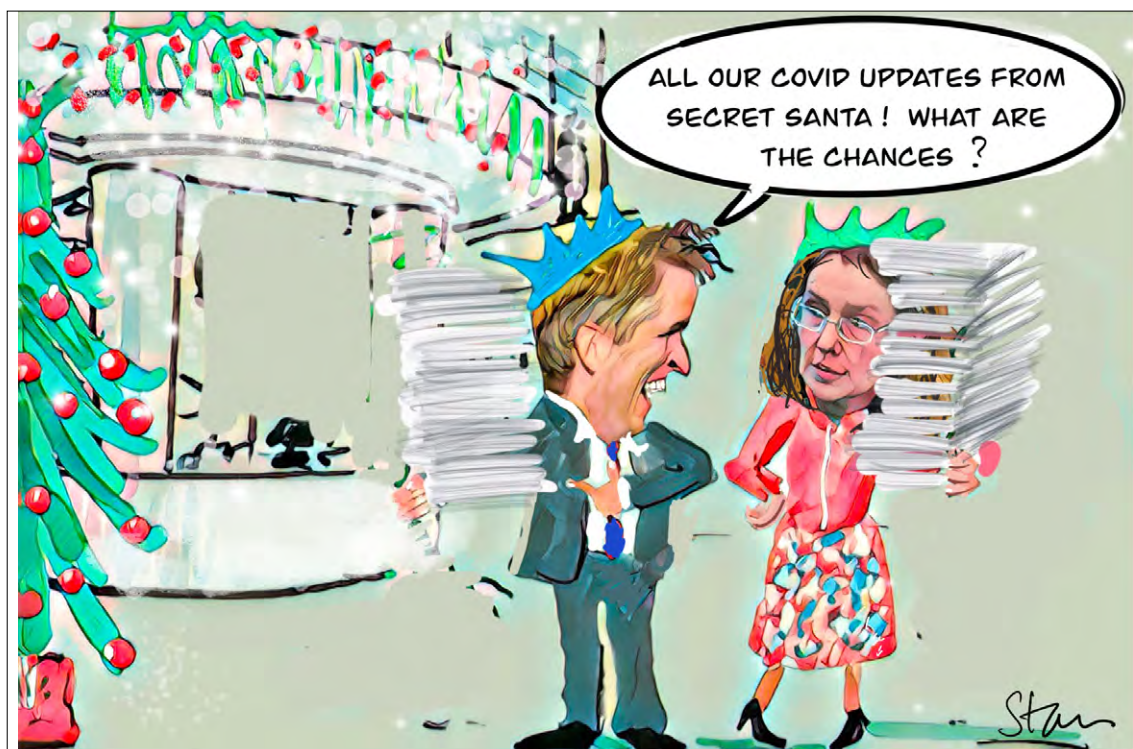
And that Omicron doesn't stop your Christmas party (though it's hard to see how ministers could).

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The Big interview

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERG.J



‘Schools have focused too much on observable behaviour’

Doug Lemov’s first two editions of *Teach Like A Champion* have had huge influence. But now he explains why he is rethinking his approach to behaviour ...

Doug Lemov has been at the forefront of three education ideas that have sparked some of the most heated debates in the sector.

The first is “zero tolerance” or “no excuses” behaviour (usually termed by its supporters as “high expectations”). The second is the cognitive science approach to learning, involving a teacher-centred, knowledge-recall model. And the third is the charter schools movement in the US, which East Coaster Lemov played a big part in and

which inspired academy trusts in England.

“It’s remarkable to think how much has changed in the past 20 years,” he says, shaking his head as we talk via video link across the Atlantic.

Lemov started as a school principal in Boston at the age of 28, before joining the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute, helping to set up charter schools that receive government funding, but operate independently of the state’s board of education.

He then moved to Uncommon Schools, a network of charter schools, and is still there 17 years later.

His best-known book, *Teach Like a Champion*, is a bible of pedagogy reform for many, while others accuse it of being too focused on uniformity. One suspects Lemov would consider some of those who aren’t convinced as “sentimentalists”. In a new 3.0 version of the book he describes them as teachers who “mean well but love to be loved”, and who see being both demanding

Interview: Doug Lemov



Lemov and his wife Lisa

“Schools do not value intellectual risk-taking”

and caring of pupils as mutually exclusive.

Lemov feels English teachers have responded more than in his home nation. He was an adviser to Ark Schools and has worked with many more trusts since, while his “evidence-based strategies” have been integral to education reform in England, winning praise from former schools minister Nick Gibb.

“The charter school movement profoundly influenced trusts over here,” he says, but adds “the quality of schools and trusts that were founded in the UK” may have “actually surpassed the US”.

That’s because, he says, teachers in England are more responsible for and receptive to using cognitive science.

“I feel really optimistic for your country, and less so for mine.”

But if many English educators and policymakers have enthusiastically embraced Lemov’s approaches, there are signs that some converts are reconsidering. More importantly, Lemov has been rethinking things too.

Take what’s happened across the pond. In 2004, Lemov joined Uncommon Schools, which runs 57 public schools across the northeast US, as its regional director for upstate New York. His area covered small post-industrial cities such as Rochester and



Lemov and his family

Troy.

By 2011, a year after *Teach Like a Champion 1.0* came out, he found himself pulled in two directions – improving schools in these isolated areas, or researching pedagogy and being a teacher-trainer. He chose pedagogy.

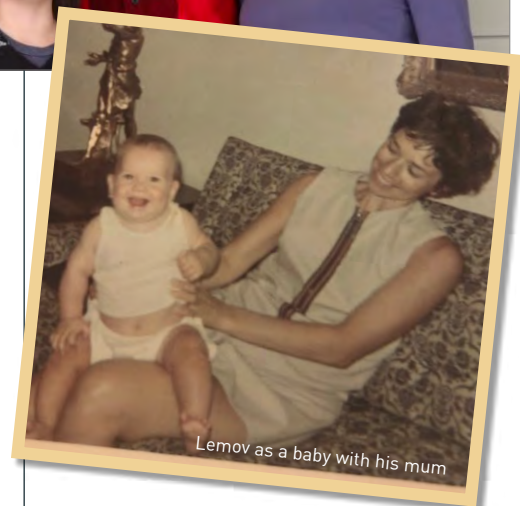
Since then, his team operates as a “kind of research and development” branch within Uncommon Schools.

Winding forward to August last year and Uncommon Schools published an open letter to parents, abandoning a core behaviour management method proposed in *Teach Like a Champion 1.0*, called SLANT (sit up, listen, ask and answer questions, nod your head and track the teacher).

“In response to feedback” from pupils and staff, it said the schools would “provide students with more flexibility in how they engage in learning in the classroom”, and would “remove undue focus on things like eye contact and seat posture”.

SLANT would be “eliminated”, it promised. The move split open the debate around behaviour management once again, with progressives claiming it as proof the traditionalist approach didn’t work. One blog in *Schools Week* said staff were now arguing “about whether Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like a Champion* is pragmatic or fascist”.

And Katharine Birbalsingh, headteacher and now chair of the Social Mobility Commission, tweeted: “A titan in the world of education falls to progressive pressure. Uncommon, you have just let hundreds of thousands of children down.”



Lemov as a baby with his mum

What happened?

Lemov sighs. He really wants to talk about brilliant teaching, not culture wars. “It is sometimes frustrating to me. In the 3.0 version, there are two chapters on managing behaviour and there are ten on everything else.”

But he answers graciously, admitting that SLANT has been misunderstood - and taking some responsibility.

“The first version of the book was almost too directive about what to do, that it caused people not to think enough about the why and how.

“Have I seen SLANT used badly? Yes, I have. If you know it’s about pro-social, non-verbal attention between students, teachers use it well as opposed to poorly.”

Lemov explains what he means by “pro-social, non-verbal attention” with a picture of some students. In it, a girl has started answering a maths question, but “made the hugely brave decision” to reconsider her answer halfway through, looking carefully at

Interview: Doug Lemov



Lemov visiting teachers in Lebanon working with Syrian students

her three other students.

Lemov leans forward: this he really cares about.

"In a typical classroom when a student speaks, there is no working theory on what her classmates should be doing. So she has taken the risk to make the observation, and around her, she sees the body language of people slouched in chairs, looking away – their body language communicates extreme disinterest."

Evolutionary science theory, Lemov says, tells us that humans are the only animals with big whites of their eyes, as to be a successful species we are hyper-alert to "the hidden drama of whether we are accepted into a group". This drama plays out in classrooms all the time, he argues.

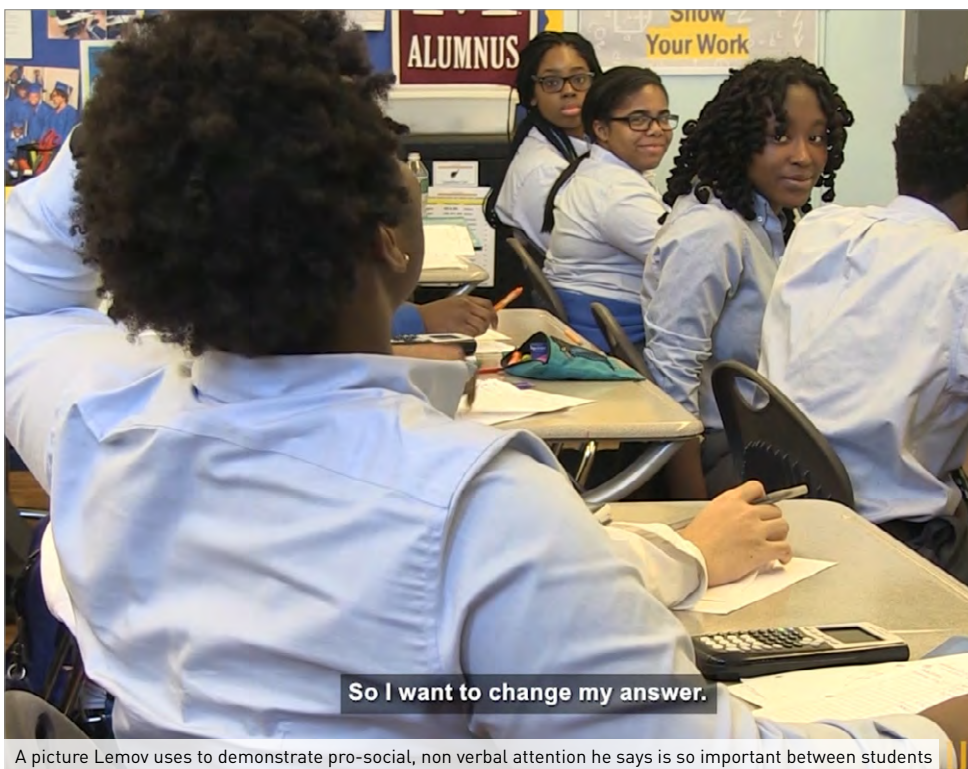
"Schools haven't seen it as their role to shape the social environment in how pupils participate in class. Without realising it, our children spend their lives in environments that do not intentionally build cultures that value intellectual risk-taking."

But must students really have their arms folded and eyes fixed?

"There is nothing about arms being folded for SLANT," he says. "It's reasonable to tell students, place your hands on the desk, but that should be up to the discretion of teachers."

"Motivation is profoundly social, and people will tell you that the act of making that happen in classrooms is controlling black or brown bodies, or that it's an act of violence. It's engineering classrooms so they are loving, supportive and fully intellectual." So it must be frustrating that Uncommon Schools said it would be "putting greater focus on increasing intellectual student engagement".

He says: "I do think SLANT was so focused on observable behaviours that it caused teachers to overfocus on that." So in the book



So I want to change my answer.

A picture Lemov uses to demonstrate pro-social, non verbal attention he says is so important between students

"I feel optimistic for your country, less so for mine"

he has renamed SLANT "habits of attention". It's still about "eye-tracking", so no change there, and there is a new acronym: STAR – sit up, track the speaker, appreciate your classmates' ideas, and rephrase the words of the person who spoke so they know you were listening. This is to "emphasis purpose more clearly", Lemov writes. (It's worth noting Uncommon Schools says it is eliminating both SLANT and STAR.)

However, although Lemov is clearly doubtful about the open letter with Uncommon Schools' proposals, he agrees he and the organisation "independently went through parallel processes" about rethinking their core behaviour strategies.

Does this mean a move away from zero tolerance and no excuses behaviour cultures is needed?

"There are a thousand steps a teacher should take before a situation reaches isolation, for example," he says. "The best solution is prevention. It's about not ending up in a situation where the best solution is

something like isolation."

The change also prompts the question whether some vulnerable students, such as those with special educational needs, have badly struggled in classrooms inspired by Lemov's approach over the past ten years (not to mention whether the academy-local authority split has caused issues with support systems for them).

"With people with SEND, people underestimate the power of habits," Lemov says. "If everyone is distracted from thinking, that's important for all students, but it's doubly important for SEND students. People look at predictability as boring, but it sets you free to focus on content. You can multiply that statement for pupils with special educational needs."

Either way, Lemov cannot be accused of simply ignoring the debate. Rather than turning his back and showing the whites of his eyes, he has tried his best to sit up and listen.



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2021 politics review

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ANNA
MC SHANE

Education policy specialist and former
assistant headteacher

The year we forgot all about Gavin

A new education team and a new shadow team will eventually have to tackle old and worsening problems, says Anna McShane

Who remembers Gavin Williamson? So much has happened in the past 3 months alone that his tenure already feels like a very distant memory.

It's hard to believe that it was only last Christmas that the education secretary was threatening councils with legal action if they refused to open schools — only to order them closed 48 hours later to “protect public health and save lives”.

Tough talk in the tabloids may seem like a great idea in the heat of a crisis, but it doesn't do much to educate Britain's kids. As it turns out, it isn't always a sure-fire way to secure your ministerial career either. I won't be the only one hoping that if Omicron turns out to be as disruptive as the waves before it, Nadhim Zahawi will do what he can to support the sector rather than repeat the political games of his predecessor.

While schools were more at ease with remote learning second time around, I don't know a single

teacher who didn't feel this spring's return to school was more of a challenge. The exhaustion from over a year of stress, high workloads and that general uneasiness about the future had begun to take its toll.

Come the summer, exam results day may have been better than in 2020 (a low bar!), but the path to it was (for many teachers and heads)

“The exhaustion from over a year of stress has begun to take its toll

unnecessarily winding.

This has certainly been a year that has tested schools beyond measure. And while retention of teachers has been a longstanding problem, Covid has turned it into a genuine nightmare. The number of teachers looking to leave has doubled since the start of the pandemic; stories of headteachers at breaking point have become ever more frequent; and the surge of new teaching applications we saw in the summer of 2020 was all too short-lived.

We know a large part of this impending exodus is down to the increasing number of hats teachers are expected to wear. From delivering food parcels to setting up



Covid testing centres and contact tracing-schools have been critical in every community's response.

But even before the pandemic hit, schools were becoming the first port of call for everything from supporting families in poverty, to dealing with gang-related violence and rising mental health issues among pupils. Without the requisite

increase in funding and support, much of this burden is being placed on teachers, and like water building behind a dam, it's eventually going to give.

The idea that any teacher is grappling with all this, while simultaneously getting to grips with the latest cognitive science research is quite frankly pie-in-the-sky.

So before any minister tries to make their mark in politics with structural changes or accountability measures, I'd urge them to take a step back, reflect and then articulate what schools are actually for. That requires fundamental rethinking about what role teachers and the wider school community can and should play.

In the eyes of many teachers and parents, Zahawi failed his first test when he allowed education to be sidelined in the autumn budget. The upcoming white paper on schools, due early next year, is arguably an opportunity for him to redeem himself. That said, if the rumoured 'back to the 90s' focus on literacy and numeracy is all he has to offer, then attitudes towards him are unlikely to shift significantly.

And 2021 has also brought us a new shadow education secretary. So what of Bridget Phillipson? In truth, education is unlikely to be a dividing line in any future election, so there's little to be gained by competing with the Tories on grand policy announcements. If the party of education, education, education wants to show it understands the sector, it wouldn't do her any harm to make a Labour commitment to support teachers in doing what they do best — teach.

Kids can't catch up if they can't concentrate, and teachers can't teach if they are being pulled in too many directions. Politicians of all stripes would be well served to remember this.

If they want to be remembered better than Gavin Williamson, at least.

2021 primary review

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Keeping children safe, happy and well was and remains our priority – and that isn't measured in data or inspection reports, writes Sarah Gallagher

Like swans who look graceful above the surface as they paddle furiously below it, we have had to go on pretending everything is OK throughout another tumultuous year. And as 2021 comes to a close, it's with an enormous sense of déjà vu. A new Covid variant looms, and the DfE and Ofsted insist everything is back to normal, largely thanks to our wondrous ability to roll with the punches.

And there have been plenty of punches, many of them at the expense of school leaders. Stories are already being written about the global lockdown of 2020, and they make for dramatic reading. But none comes close to accounting for our experience. While wider society is processing those events, we are still living it. We haven't had the opportunity to pause, let alone reflect, and it seems like many are happy simply to gloss over that.

I'm the headteacher of a very small school. The support around us is best described as patchwork, so everybody has had to play an enormous part this year. Adapting to home learning while continuing to teach 'live' lessons is no mean feat. So it's no exaggeration to say I remain in awe of our staff, children and families, who entered the second 'unexpected' lockdown last January with positivity and community spirit.

We've all been impressed with the children, above all. We've adopted a whole new educational language of bubbles, virus, masks and social distancing, and they've just accepted



SARAH GALLAGHER

Headteacher,
Snape Primary School

The year we failed to treasure what we couldn't measure

those changes. They've smiled. They've kept apart. They've got very clean hands. And they've tried to learn despite navigating a previously unimaginable learning landscape.

Sadly, we seem somehow to have missed this out of our educational

'catch up'.

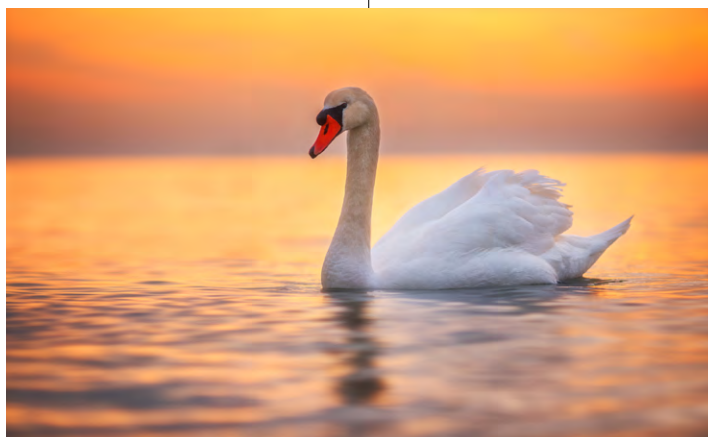
A lot of words have been written and spoken about owing it to the children to make sure schools are up to scratch, and the solution it has all led to is to invest time and resources into inspecting them. "It's

“While wider society is processing the events of 2020, we are still living it

rhetoric this year, and it saddens me that the great machine of education grinds on, seemingly without a care for how all this must feel to the children. It began last year when we talked endlessly about them being 'behind'. This year, it's all been about

for the children," we are told. But I don't see that. We and our families are forever changed, some in a much more devastating way than others, yet citing our experience is branded as an excuse.

For us as a small rural school,



the year started with zoom art lessons, home delivery of books and materials, a snow activity week, and closing bubbles because of positive cases. We didn't experience the joy of sharing assemblies until it was warm enough to hold them outside. The 'return to normal' after March 8 didn't exactly go as billed either. We ended the summer term with the disappointment of closing a bubble just as were about to put on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But on with the punches we roll, so we reconvened in the holidays to do it.

But we missed more than dates because of the bubble regime. Children missed out on seminal moments, like the responsibilities and kudos that come from being an older child in a village school playground. The best bit of the year for us was when our children were finally able to play together. They rose to the occasion and supported each other when they started mixing with different ages once again.

So my hope for 2022 is that we can learn from them. We've been polarised for so long, and what we need to get through this new Covid onslaught is to listen and learn from each other across sectors and pedagogical divides.

As we face up to a likely fourth wave, my biggest wish is that we have a genuine conversation about what learning is and what schools are in 2022.

Because what has got us through the first three is the heart and soul we've put into keeping children safe, happy and well. And that isn't measured in data or, evidently, inspection reports.

2021 secondary review

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EVELYN
FORDE

Headteacher, Copthall School

The year 'back to normal' only got further away

Every positive development in the secondary sector across 2021 took place in the context of an onslaught of negatives, writes Evelyn Forde

One usually starts a new year with optimism, excitement and hope because we never know what it will bring. School leaders have had to remain resilient and optimistic for the best part of two years to buoy each other, our staff and students in the face of the madness surrounding us. But how do we review a year that appears to be ending exactly where we started the last one?

In January 2021, after closures we'd been told would not happen happened after all, plans had to be put in place for another reopening while ensuring our online offer was substantial and accessible to all. We wouldn't see most of our students again for face-to-face lessons until March.

By the time we fully reopened, for some reason all that hard work and all the fine words recognising teachers' efforts had failed to translate into an increase in school budgets. In February, schools had been told of a funding boost to help get students back on track. But as

always the 'devil is in the detail', and we quickly realised any increase would soon be eaten up by rising costs.

As the weather improved, the third wave of Covid was still in full flow and mask wearing remained mandatory until mid-May. But at

“Don't they know school leaders are busy people?”

least we were not back to bubbles, zones and staggered starts, so for the most part our community didn't see it as an issue. A low threshold, perhaps, but it was grounds enough for our optimism to continue.

Meanwhile, as parents anxiously waited to find out what secondary schools their children would be going to, we found out there was a teacher shortage. And that's been 2021 in a nutshell. Every positive development happens in the context of a constant onslaught of new and sometimes harrowing negatives, and it's just as true for young people.

So June saw the publication of Ofsted's sobering report on sexual abuse in schools. Our role as school leaders is to protect pupils, so to



find this had been happening, in many cases unbeknown to teachers and leadership teams, was deeply upsetting. Like my peers, my leadership team and I quickly got under the skin of the guidance and put in place systems and processes

resume full inspections but ignore the fact we were still edging our way out of a pandemic.

And this Ofsted theme has continued right through to the end of the year, though things are not normal in any way. The past three months have seen national attendance figures drop while we've been busy rolling out a vaccination programme with anti-vaxxers protesting at school gates. Don't they know school leaders are busy people?

I liken our current situation to being on a paddle board in choppy tidal waters. And if that doesn't sound as scary as walking a tightrope, just consider the water temperature in December! School leaders are remarkable people, as are teachers and our young people. It perplexes me that those who make decisions about funding and the inspectorate are unable to truly recognise it.

Nearly two years since the pandemic reached our shores, I am looking forward to downing tools for the festive period (if that's allowed this year). But while I maintain my professional optimism, the truth is that I'm anxious about what 2022 will bring.

2021 SEN review

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Staying optimistic as the virus rips through our special school is hard, writes Frances Akinde, but more than ever we must be the change we want to see

Rivermead's primary designation is autism and associated difficulties. As I write this, we are dealing with an outbreak of 20 positive Covid cases in our main school. Like every special school, our offer is complex. And like them, the virus has ripped through us.

Our learners are exempt from wearing masks. And because they have speech and language needs and disabilities, our staff also find wearing them in the classroom challenging. Our learners struggle with rules around proximity too, and several require intimate care. In addition, our space is very limited. We occupy an old infant school, and we are the only special school in Medway that has not been earmarked for rebuilding or expansion. Leaky roofs, unexpected heating bills and inadequate ventilation are daily struggles.

Staffing challenges and budget constraints almost go without saying, but what we will remember 2021 for at Rivermead is the loss of one of our year 11 students from SADS. The impact on our school community has been indescribable. For the sake of all our other students, however, we have had to keep finding the 'sunshine moments' among these grim realities, and my staff have truly earned the title of 'superheroes'.

There was our whole-school beach trip to Margate, with our own reserved carriage, our summer barbecue, our Christmas concert and charity days. There were awards and accolades too, but most importantly our learners have continued to make small steps



FRANCES AKINDE

Headteacher,
Rivermead Inclusive Trust

The year getting into 'good trouble' became necessary

every single day. We have learners who have not been to school for years due to anxiety, but who are now attending and enjoying school. Nothing brings me more joy than that, and I feel humble to be part of their educational journey.

the support of the Rivermead inclusive trust team, my coach (ex-Paralympian, Liz Wright) and the NAHT. When the ever-constant challenges could have worn me down, I have grown in confidence and resilience instead.

“Like every special school, the virus has ripped through us

Still, I am fortunate that my trust has made wellbeing a genuine priority. All leaders receive coaching from the trust and I also started private coaching with the Academy of Women's Leadership this year. The truth is that I could not have got through these 12 months without

So this year, I took the opportunity to fight for something I care deeply about. During the summer, I joined the NAHT's Leaders for Race Equality network. It was a massive relief simply to find a group of and for leaders like me, who genuinely understand the microaggressions



we face every single day. But through it I also got to ask our new secretary of state for education a question.

He'd been in post mere weeks, and still had the attention of the national media upon him, when I put to him that in nearly every room I enter, I am the only leader who looks like me. (This is even truer in special education!) Around only 0.2 per cent of headteachers are black and female. So I asked Mr Zahawi – our first non-white secretary of state – what he was committing to do to remove barriers and increase diversity at leadership level.

It is the same question I ask when I get the opportunity to meet anyone who has the power to make changes. I have asked Gavin Williamson and Amanda Spielman the same thing and, sadly, Zahawi's answer was the same standard one I've heard time and time again. But it has sparked a conversation, increased awareness and will ultimately hopefully start a change.

So my lesson learned this year is to hang on to my optimism. As Georgia Congressman John Lewis has said: "Do not get lost in a sea of despair [...] Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year; it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

I am looking forward to 2022 and getting into as much "good trouble, necessary trouble" as I have to in order to tackle educational inequalities and ensure my learners, colleagues and peers receive their equitable right.

2021 governance review

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SHARON WARMINGTON

Founder, National Black Governors' Network and National Association of School and College Clerks

The year we took strides towards professionalism

The ongoing exposure to fluctuating challenges has seen governors' roles adapt and increase, says Sharon Warmington

Like so many governors and trustees, our collective hope was that in 2021 the challenges and difficulties experienced in 2020 would be behind us and we'd be back in our respective schools, with some sense of 'normality'. However, when the UK announced its third lockdown, our well-planned and strategic focus for the spring and summer terms were again overthrown by Covid, with more robust risk assessments and even more absences, due to outbreaks or the need for isolation.

As governors, we again dug deep and rose to the challenge of continued virtual meetings and governing from a distance. Evidence of more engagement and better attendance at virtual meetings started to come through, and so did the question, "Do we really want to go back to meetings in school?"

For me, not only as a governor but also a clerk and a corporate governance consultant, virtual meetings won my vote. The ability to click into and then out of a meeting (and to go from meeting to meeting!)

without the burden of dealing with traffic and bad weather conditions can't be underestimated or shouldn't be undervalued in terms of time management and enjoying an improved work/life balance. There is no question of having been anything but fully present and fully engaged

"Diversity is not a new issue, but it must be a strategic one"

in ensuring the school is moving forward in line with its plans and decisions made at a strategic and operational level.

During 2021 our focus on governance remained, although we occasionally needed to dip into operational discussions. But there has been a definite change in our work. Not only are we setting strategic direction, upholding financial probity and holding the leadership to account as before, but our continuing exposure to the ever-changing challenges and demands on leadership teams has meant governors are increasingly concerned and monitoring the physical and mental health of staff too, not to mention checking the impact of the pandemic and lost



education on the children.

Twelve months after the brutal murder of George Floyd, the governance sector shone a much-needed floodlight on itself, recognising the need for governing boards to become more racially diverse. The usual surveys were conducted, all revealing what we

already knew: diversity of race at a governance level across UK schools does not reflect the diversity seen at pupil level. Less than one per cent of governors/trustees come from a Black background.

Meanwhile, the National Black Governors' Network (NBGN) saw a huge increase in enquiries requesting support and training on "how to diversify governing boards", with a welcome focus on race and age. Diversity is not a new issue, but going forward it must be a strategic one, discussed, monitored, and embraced across the whole sector.

No governance review of 2021 would be complete without highlighting the strides taken in professionalising the sector. The relaunch of the National Leaders of

Governance scheme sees them paid and their work clearly defined for a heavily reformed sector since its inception.

And while chairs are sadly no longer recognised in the new framework, clerks too have seen their role achieve greater recognition and support. They are the hidden gems holding the strategic body together by ensuring we comply with legislation and policy changes. And although this vital professional service is still significantly underpaid, it is great to know that they now have their own free regular newsletter and a professional membership body, the National Association of School and College Clerks, to provide them with CPD, support and advice.

As we move into 2022, we should continue to look forward as governing boards rather than looking back. Some of us are expecting Ofsted to come calling. Some of us are seeing an increase in vacancies on our boards as volunteers leave. Many of us are looking to Omicron with foreboding.

But as governors, it's not for us to worry. Instead, we must continue to be the change we want to see. For the benefit of the children in our schools and those yet to enter, if our effective governance can't secure 'normality', it can certainly support sustainability.



A festive secret mission from GCHQ. Shhh!

Today, *Schools Week* readers get an exclusive first look at a festive challenge from GCHQ. The security, cyber and intelligence agency traditionally hides a puzzle in the annual Christmas card from director, Jeremy Fleming, to national security colleagues.

This year, the card is aimed at young people for the first time. But shhh, this is only for *Schools Week* subscribers and their pupils! The seven puzzles won't be officially released until Monday.

So, sneakily print out the puzzles and share with your students in class today. They must find all the answers to uncover the hidden festive message.

Visit the [GCHQ website](#) on Monday to sign up for the challenge and find more puzzles to solve.

Solve the puzzles, which increase in difficulty. Link each answer to the glowing node on the tree that best matches the question or answer. Once complete, discover the hidden message, reading from top to bottom. Good luck!

TURN THE PAGE
FOR THE TREE



11-12 years

Clue here: reading initials spells this message's answer. Simple!

12-13 years

Enter your four-letter answers in the grid.

1. This is the word you want
2. Noise made by owl
3. US state with capital Des Moines
4. Adult male deer

1	2	3	4
2			
3			
4			

13-14 years

What completes the sequence: GRYFFINDOR, UFFLEPUF, VENCL, ???

14-15 years

Within the grid are a number of hidden mines. The numbers indicate how many mines are in the squares adjacent to each number. Locate the mines to reveal a four-letter word

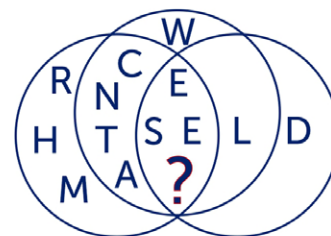
1		2		1			2			2	
					1						
3	4		3	2			4	4		4	4
					2						
2		1			2	2			3	2	

15-16 years

Do Kindly Place Cover On Fresh Green Spring Vegetables is a mnemonic meant to help you remember a list of scientific words. Which word does Kindly help you remember?

16-17 years

What six-letter word does the ? represent in this Venn diagram?



17-18 years

Solve the code; answer the question; encode the answer:
Cwog og cwi 7^{cw}ahigcoet: xiexui kent kiczit toticiit lencj gov stf
toticiit govcl lehn sni yeppetuj dtezt sg kskj zwsc?

#GCHQChristmasChallenge

Follow @GCHQ - GCHQ to find the answers soon



PRINT OUT
FOR YOUR PUPILS



GCHQ | FESTIVE CHALLENGE



Season's Greetings

PRINT OUT
FOR YOUR PUPILS



FEWEEK aelp



APPRENTICESHIP
AWARDS

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Nominations are now open for the
FE Week & AELP AAC Apprenticeship Awards 2022.
Submit your nomination for the biggest celebration
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Open to all apprentice employers and providers
in the UK.

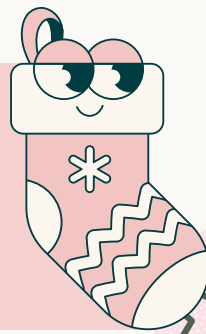
NOMINATIONS CLOSE AT 23:59 ON
FRIDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2021.

AWARDS PARTNERS:



Books for Christmas!

Stuck for a present for a teacher? Try our books for Christmas list.

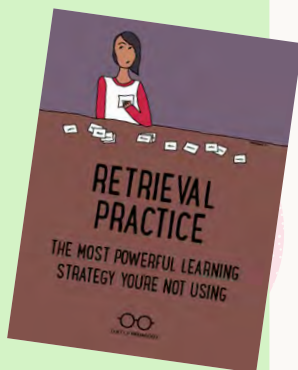


For the classroom teacher

Retrieval practice

By Kate Jones
John Catt Educational

"Crammed full of practical tips, ideas and takeaways, it's perfect for busy classroom teachers looking to introduce a new dimension to their teaching immediately," wrote reviewer, Emma Cate Stokes. At under 100 pages, it's the perfect short read over the Christmas period to inspire some January classroom resolutions.



For the pedagogue

Organise ideas

By Oliver Caviglioli and David Goodwin
John Catt Educational

"When it comes to graphic organisers, I'm about as nerdy as it gets. So to say I was excited about reading this book would be an understatement. Fortunately, I wasn't disappointed," said Steve Turnbull. At 336 pages, it's not a small book, but the highly considered presentation (as you'd expect) makes the text highly accessible and easy to dip in and out of in between celebrations.

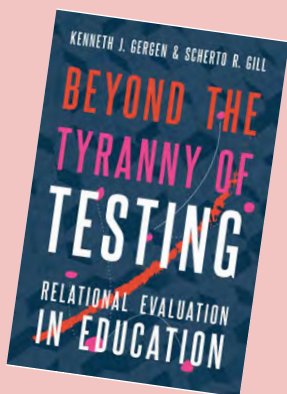


For the system reformer

Beyond the tyranny of testing

By Scherto Gill and Kenneth Gergen
OUP USA

"Educational conservatives will find plenty to criticise," wrote James Mannion, "but you're never going to satisfy everyone with a word like 'tyranny' in the title – and nor should you try." Readers will, however, find a plethora of tried-and-tested exam alternatives here, with a focus on relational assessment they can perhaps begin to try out on their relatives over Christmas dinner.

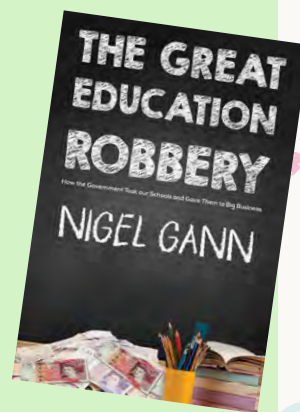


For the subversive

The great education robbery

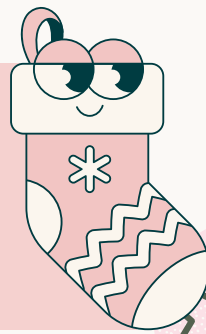
By Nigel Gann
Austin Macauley Publishers

"You won't find some crank conspiracy in these pages but a carefully unfolding analysis of the academisation programme," wrote MAT CEO Dan Morrow. Not just a book for the politically enraged, then, but a challenging look at what we mean by democratic accountability in a (mostly) re-imagined system, whether you work in an academy or local authority school.



Books for Christmas!

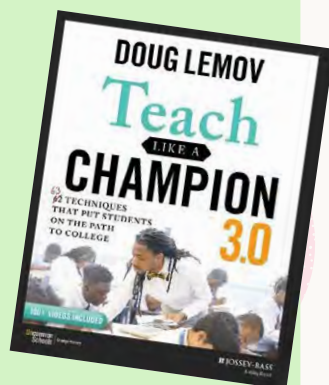
Stuck for a present for a teacher? Try our books for Christmas list.



For the trad

Teach Like A Champion 3.0

By Doug Lemov
Jossey-Bass

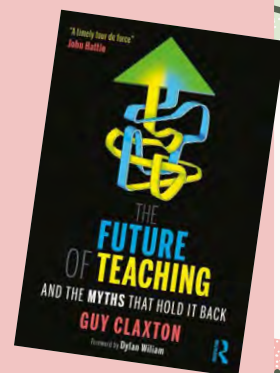


"Whether you're a trainee, middle or senior leader, you will find a veritable treasure trove of useful strategies here." Reviewer Shivan Davis trained when the first iteration of this book was making pedagogical waves here and abroad. Today, its third iteration – which meets its critics head-on and makes concessions when justified – is just as relevant and just as provocative.

For the prog

The future of teaching

By Guy Claxton
Routledge



It's fair to say that reviewer Mary Hind-Portley was not taken with Guy Claxton's latest tome. "Overall," she concluded, "it is a diatribe against 'DIKR' [direct instruction and knowledge rich] rather than a positive exposition of its author's approach." However, she concedes that it is right to challenge current dominant ideas. As a stalwart champion of the progressive movement, Claxton is among the best-placed to do that. One teacher's Christmas treat is another's stimulus for new year's reflection.

For the senior leader

Back on track. Fewer things, greater depth

By Mary Myatt
John Catt Educational

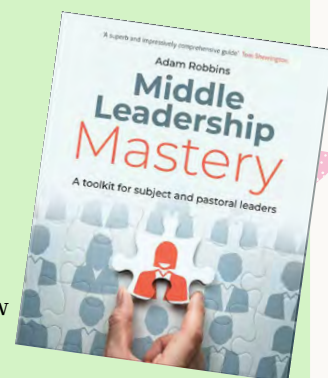


"Surely better doesn't have to mean more." Reviewer Sarah Watkins' musings on workload are surely familiar to many. To her satisfaction, she found that, commensurate with its subtitle, *Fewer Things, Greater Depth*, Myatt's book was a "quick, easy read whose concepts and ideas are far-reaching". An ideal Christmas read to inspire any leader worried about the pandemic's toll on workload.

For the middle leader

Middle Leadership Mastery

By Adam Robbins
Crown House Publishing



Kristian Shanks opened his review by acknowledging the lack of transitional support between the frying pan of the classroom and the fire of middle leadership. He concluded it by saying that although no single book could do justice to all that middle leadership entails, "with this book at least, middle leaders have a practical and accessible guide to their core mission". What better way to begin to look ahead to the new year?

Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is **Dan Morrow**, CEO, Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust

@MoreMorrow

Dear national director of Ofsted
@Headrest_UK

A group initially set up to provide pastoral support and care during the pandemic, Headrest has pivoted to an advocacy role due to the consistent messages it is hearing from leaders regarding Ofsted. Here, in an open letter to its national director, the team details a case where a school was refused deferral despite its headteacher needing to attend a funeral.

The letter goes on to exemplify why a claim that 90 per cent are currently supportive of inspection is at best misleading, with myriad examples of the stress and anxiety wrought by the current inspection regime during an ongoing pandemic.

The piece finishes with a sentiment many of us readily identify with: "In October we felt the situation was becoming serious; it is now grave." It's beginning to look a lot like last Christmas.

Grandmothers sucking eggs, or the next Big Thing?
@greeborunner

Zoe Enser's ability to present current thinking in a balanced and reflective manner is increasingly rare in our polarised times. Here, she looks at controversial educationalist Doug

TOP BLOGS of the week

Lemov's *Teach Like A Champion 3.0*. While in agreement with a number of the book's principles and recommendations, she wisely unpicks how the implementation of such strategies needs to be carefully thought out.

She argues that treating Lemov's concepts as quick fixes could detract from subject fidelity as well as teacher agency. Schools and teachers, she says, should take a discerning and bespoke approach to adoption, rather than allow these techniques to become a prescriptive straitjacket.

Thought-provoking as ever, it's refreshing to read an author so adept at removing the ego and posturing out of what are important discussions.

The interconnected curriculum
@emma_turner75

This from Emma Turner is an incredibly thoughtful proposition on the importance of sustaining rich cross-disciplinary connections rather than allowing subjects to become silos, as the education inspection framework does.

You won't find any arguments here for a topic-based approach, though. On the contrary, Turner embraces the power of subject knowledge while rejecting the application within many primary settings of treating individual subjects as islands. Teaching each subject as a brick doesn't help pupils build a house.

Citing Furst, she presents interconnectivity as intrinsic to learning and setting firm foundations for progression rather than a tokenistic afterthought. Turner then goes on to consider the three elements

of interconnected thinking, developing these to expose current expectations as potentially reductive, especially in primaries. Just looking to booklets, knowledge organisers and the like without a thoughtful exposition of interdisciplinary schema, she warns, will not create the complex web of understanding needed by our young learners.

"Excellence in primary practice is underpinned by the creation of rich and deep understanding, not just the shallow replication and remembering of curriculum subjects," she concludes. Amen to that.

Quality assurance through lesson evaluation
@MrMountstevens

In this excellent post, Jonathan Mountstevens paints a grim picture of the outcomes of evaluating teacher performance through lesson observation. Unavoidable variation and the creation of winners and losers, he posits, are conducive to school cultures that lead many to exit the profession. With two simple questions, Mountstevens completely unpicks this cherished educational practice: can they be done accurately?; and are the consequences desirable?

Referencing a study by Strong and others that showed observation is a poor predictor of pupil performance (taken here as a proxy for learning), he shows how judgment (and therefore bias) is entrenched in this form of quality assurance, resulting in a misguided and counter-productive evaluative mindset. And even if accuracy could somehow be improved, Mountstevens debunks the idea that the outcomes would be any more desirable.

So what to do? Well, this wouldn't be a Mountstevens blog without compelling concrete solutions and an infectious professional optimism. His answer is to ground quality assurance within formative approaches, codified within a coaching culture that prioritises development over judgment and professionalism over compliance. Acknowledging that this is no easy, quick fix, his redefinition of the approach as 'quality nurture' rather than quality assurance is the phrasing that I didn't know I was looking for, but can't wait to use.

CLICK ON REVIEWS TO VIEW BLOGS +

Research



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

How can we ensure teachers take up and benefit from CPD?

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

The barriers to teachers accessing CPD are clear. In response to a DfE survey, 70 per cent said that cost was an obstacle, while 51 per cent said they had insufficient time to take it up. In fact, nearly one-third (32 per cent) did not even have time to look for CPD.

So with the government now offering fully funded places for all teachers on the new NPQs, and an influx of free or low-cost CPD popping up online, will CPD take-up be substantially higher than in the past?

Perhaps not. While the removal of the cost barrier is hugely welcome, the problem of time appears greater than ever. For example, those qualifying under the new ECF, as well as their mentors, have already flagged the challenge of finding time for the more extensive learning they are expected to undertake.

When pressure is on, there is a risk of CPD feeling like a burden, not an opportunity, potentially limiting its impact. So how can we change this dynamic?

1. Recognise the importance of CPD

First and foremost, CPD shouldn't be treated like a 'nice-to-have', only to be done once the to-do list is complete (because it rarely is). High-quality CPD is associated with improved pupil outcomes and teacher retention. It is fundamental to being a teaching professional, and cannot be an afterthought.

Nor should it be something teachers are expected to do in their own time. With excessive workload a major cause of teacher attrition, we must avoid exacerbating this. A simple mantra is that whenever something new is added to a teacher's plate, something must also be taken away. Well-implemented CPD is an investment in teachers, pupils and the wider school system.



2. Look for time-efficient CPD

One thing that we've learned during the pandemic is how to deliver high-quality CPD at a distance. This cuts not just travel time but expense too, because the cost of CPD is not just the price of the training itself. And with more flexible CPD, there may also be a reduction in cover costs. For example, many NPQ providers have designed their programmes to require very little cover time.

But a note of caution: this flexibility should be used so that cover requirements can be spread out, or for teachers to be released from non-teaching commitments to complete online elements of training, not to just push CPD beyond 'normal' work hours.

Time-efficient CPD can also seem to be in tension with the need for CPD to be 'sustained over time' in order to be effective. But 'sustained' doesn't necessarily mean it has to take longer overall; a day-long CPD course could become multiple short sessions over a couple of months. It's less about the specific time involved and more about the practices it enables.

The recent EEF guidance report on effective CPD identifies the 'mechanisms' associated with it, and programmes that take place over time certainly seem to enable many of these: revisiting prior learning, setting and agreeing goals,

providing affirmation and reinforcement after progress, monitoring and feedback, and all the mechanisms associated with 'embedding practice'.

Making sure CPD feels manageable also seems important. A shorter programme may feel less of an overwhelming commitment. This is why we've adapted our model for how teachers and school leaders can work towards becoming Chartered, creating a more flexible pathway that can be completed gradually over time.

3. Select appropriate CPD

Finally, it's important that the CPD we undertake is not just time-efficient, or effective in the abstract, but that it is matched to teacher needs. Giving teachers autonomy over their professional learning goals appears still to be somewhat uncommon, yet is associated with improved job satisfaction and retention.

CPD also needs to meet the needs of the school and its context. As the DfE rolls out its golden thread of professional development, this is an area that will need careful focus, balancing the needs of individual teachers and schools with a move towards consistency, to ensure that all teachers, in all schools, get the support they deserve.



Week in

Westminster

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

FRIDAY

After a week of fighting the good fight against the all-powerful Ofsted, NAHT's Paul Whiteman wrote to members declaring victory.

He had received word that "Ofsted will be much more sympathetic to requests for deferrals" following crunch talks with Queen Amanda.

Odd, as when Ofsted's updated deferral policy dropped it led to some serious head-scratching as we tried to unpick what exactly had changed.

And what did Ofsted say? Well... apparently the deferral policy itself hasn't changed...they've just made things clearer.

Clear as mud!

MONDAY

Wes Streeting was appointed shadow child poverty secretary in May this year, and spoke at the time of "giving child poverty the attention and profile it deserves".

It seems his party didn't feel the same way, though. Upon Streeting's promotion to shadow health secretary in Sir Keir Starmer's latest reshuffle, Labour promptly scrapped his old job, which was only created in May.

The party said there would still be someone "responsible for child poverty" – shadow work and pensions secretary Jon Ashworth – but "it will no longer be a position in Shadow Cabinet".

It's just as well, then, that there is no need for scrutiny on the government's work in this policy area.

Oh no wait, ministers just rejected calls from the work and pensions secretary to commit to a cross-departmental strategy to reduce the number of children living in poverty in the UK!

As the government's flagship T-level programme is watered down left, right and centre, ministers are increasingly desperate to raise brand awareness.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi was sporting a snazzy 'TL' lapel badge in the Commons this week.

Zahawi told the house of his desire to "make T-levels as famous as A-levels" and to give the speaker of the house "a T-level pin like mine".

Sadly, it appears the general public are not quite on board yet.

Zahawi appeared on Peston a couple of days later to defend the DfE's Christmas 'gathering' (PARTY), and viewers took to Twitter to question the ed sec's new "brooch".

One viewer suggested it might stand for "Tory Liars", while another suggested "Total Loser". We will leave it up to Zahawi to decide.



TUESDAY

New Schools Network continues to lose staffers for the bright lights of academy trusts.

It was announced today Samuel Skerritt would be joining the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) from February as head

of policy.

This comes on the heels of former director Unity Howard's departure for Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) earlier this year.

WEDNESDAY

Following his promotion, Streeting has wasted little time in making a name for himself as a boisterous front-bencher.

During this week's prime minister's questions, he was ticked off by the speaker for yelling at PM Boris Johnson.

Sir Lindsay Hoyle scolded him like a misbehaving schoolboy and urged him to "behave like you are meant to be" on the frontbench.

But Wes couldn't resist answering back. "I shouted at the prime minister today," he tweeted. "We put public health before party politics. I am angry that he doesn't do the same and furious at his lies and double standards."

THURSDAY

Ofsted tried once again to convince the sector it has a heart (not a lump of coal) by suspending inspections for the final week of term.

But despite everything going a bit Christmas 2020 again, schools will no doubt take solace in the fact that Boris has confirmed nativities and exams can still go ahead.

Elsewhere the government couldn't even secure a full roll-call at the unveiling of their new "education alliance".

Four of the 17 members, appointed to tackle school absences, couldn't make it to the first meeting. We wonder if the DfE will be sending a letter home?





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Closing Date: 12.01.2022



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Many Minds, One Mission

Deputy Headteacher - Pastoral

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As Deputy Headteacher, you will benefit from a very supportive and dynamic senior leadership team with diverse backgrounds and skills and a deep passion for learning. Our students behave well and are keen to learn; our staff body is very supportive of each other.

The Governing Board is very enthusiastic and works collaboratively with the Leadership Team.

Colton Hills is an excellent school set in beautiful surroundings. We embrace all of the benefits a medium-sized maintained school brings, such as; a genuine family atmosphere; you can be assured of a very warm welcome from staff and students alike.

Closing Date: January 7th 2022

[Click here for more information and to apply](#)



Athelstan Trust School Improvement Lead

L11-L15 (£54,091-59,581)

From Easter 2022 ideally or September 2022

We are looking to recruit an outstanding teacher to work as a School Improvement Lead.

Your support to our leaders and teachers will be vital in ensuring that all our schools achieve the same successes. Joining a school improvement team led by the CEO, you will use your passion, subject knowledge to drive forward the quality of teaching and learning across the Trust. This will suit individuals who want to take a step-up and work at a more strategic level across a range of schools.

The successful candidate will:

- be an outstanding teacher with a proven track record of securing sustained excellent outcomes
- have up-to-date knowledge of subject curricula and assessment requirements
- be an experienced leader at either primary or secondary level
- have proven experience of identifying and implementing effective strategies for improving attainment in challenging schools
- have a highly effective style that is both consultative and influential
- be able to demonstrate resilience, motivation and commitment to

driving up standards of achievement

- be able to work across a group of schools and show significant impact in developing capacity and improving outcomes for young people

The Athelstan Trust is a family of schools in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire incorporating 5 secondary schools. Details about the Trust can be found on The Athelstan Trust website.

Closing Date: 12 noon on 5th January 2022

Interviews on 18th January 2022

Please send an application form together with a letter, no more than two sides of A4, outlining how your skills and experience make you a suitable candidate for this post. An application pack is available on the Athelstan Trust's website.

Further information:

Sian Jones, Athelstan Trust - sjones@theathelstantrust.org
The Athelstan Trust, Lowfield Road, Tetbury, GL8 8AE

We are a flexible working employer and we are willing to make any reasonable adjustments you require during your interview so please ask us.

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Rocklands



Manor Hall
Academy Trust

Rocklands School is a Primary generic special school providing education for children aged 2-11 years with a broad range of special educational needs.

Following the retirement of the dedicated and very well- respected Head Teacher we have an exciting opportunity to offer the right candidate. We are looking to appoint a passionate and forward- looking Head Teacher to lead our dedicated and skilled staff and support team from September 2022.

Our aim at Rocklands is to create a learning environment where the child is firmly at the centre of all we do. They will be inspired to believe in themselves and strive to become the best they can, ready to take the next steps on their journey through life. Visits to the school are welcomed and strongly encouraged.



Rocklands School is looking for someone with the:

- **Aspiration** to continue our journey to the next level
- **Passion** to focus relentlessly on what is best for every pupil in our context
- **Ambition** to sustain a rich and varied curriculum which engages and inspires every child
- **Ability** to further develop outstanding educational provision, whilst securing what works well, that results in outstanding outcomes
- **Compassion** to support all members of the school community
- **Character** to exemplify the school's vision and values
- **Willingness** to understand what the team has to offer and get the best from them
- **Inspiration** to take us with them on the journey
- **Insight** into the challenges specific to special educational needs provision
- **Vision** to cultivate collaborative relationships with all stakeholders

Further information about Rocklands School is on our website www.rocklands.manorhall.academy or telephone 01543 548700.

Applications should be sent to bursar@rocklands.manorhall.academy

Closing date: Wednesday 5th January 2022 12 noon

Shortlisting: 10th January 2022.

Interviews: Week commencing 17th January 2022

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£4000

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