

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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

'The NTP could be as loved as the NHS'



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FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

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# SCHOOLS WEEK

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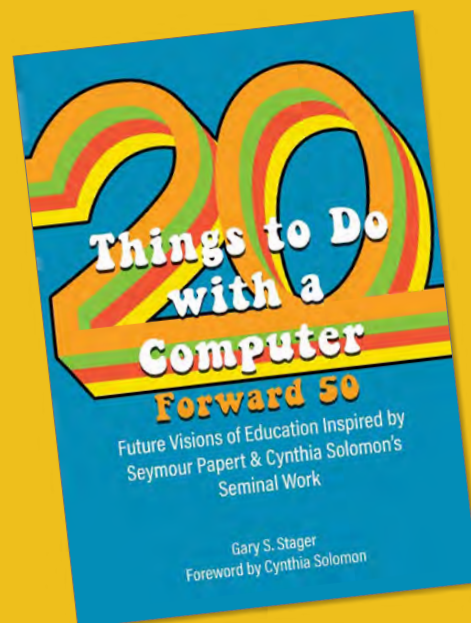
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## NEWS

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# Plan to remove teacher hours cap ditched from white paper

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

Ministers have abandoned proposals to scrap the cap on teachers' annual working hours in their forthcoming white paper, believing they can achieve a longer school day through less drastic measures, *Schools Week* understands.

It comes after schools minister Robin Walker also appeared to rule out reintroducing SATs at key stage 3 earlier this week. Two of the most controversial policies considered for the white paper by former education secretary Gavin Williamson have now been ditched.

In September, *The Guardian* reported that the government was considering axing the 1,265-hour directed time cap for teachers, ahead of a schools white paper due out this year.

But the idea met with pushback from unions, with National Education Union joint general secretary Dr Mary Bousted warning delegates at last year's Conservative party conference that such a move would be "met with fury in the profession".

Directed time is the number of hours in a year during which school leaders can direct teachers to be at work and available for work.

Many teachers already work more than these hours. A 2019 report found that they work an average of 47 hours a week, with one in four working more than 59 hours.

Rumours that scrapping the cap was on a list of draft policies being drawn up under Williamson came as the government considered measures to implement a longer school day.

Although recommended by former education recovery commissioner Sir Kevan Collins last year, measures were not included in subsequent school catch-up announcements.

A study published by the government found that extending the school day would involve "significant delivery considerations" including teaching capacity, new legislation and accountability measures to ensure quality.

However, Nadhim Zahawi, who succeeded Williamson in September, said he would "like to see" all schools move "towards"



Robin Walker

a six and a half-hour day, which is the current average. *Schools Week* understands ministers think they can achieve this without scrapping limits on teachers' hours.

A *Schools Week* investigation in October revealed how some schools have introduced two-week half-terms and slashed meeting times so they can extend the day without breaching the cap.

Williamson had also been considering the reintroduction of SATs for 14-year-olds. The tests were scrapped by the Labour government in 2008.

Walker appeared to rule out the move when he appeared in front of the education committee this week. However he did suggest that internal tests could be used to help boost literacy.

He said testing needed to be used "effectively" and warned that "some of the challenges" seen at key stage 3 currently were "to do with the pressure from tests at key stage 4".

He added: "So therefore I'm not sure that more testing – certainly not more testing in public exams and direct qualifications – is the answer to that particular problem."

He said the government would look at "how we make sure that we drive up numeracy and literacy through the whole of schools".

He added: "What I'm very keen to do is [ensure] that we do have the tools necessary to improve literacy and keep on improving literacy through the

whole of schools.

"Some kind of internalised testing process, I think, could be part of the solution, but I don't think it would be about reinstating a big major public exam at key stage 3."

Internal tests at key stage 3 are already the norm for many schools across England. Some large assessment companies provide standardised tests for schools to use.

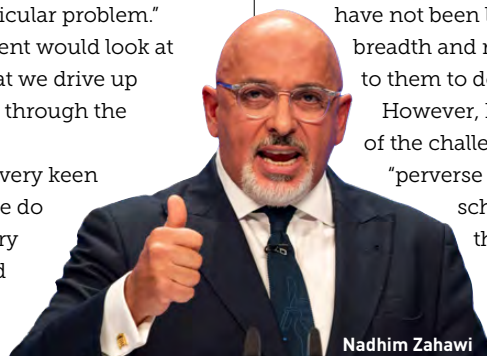
Geoff Barton, from the ASCL school leaders' union, said any proposal from government must "not be a new accountability measure by the back door or be used to penalise schools or individual students".

"We would not want to see any formalisation of these processes which takes away the autonomy of schools to decide on the best approach to learning for their pupils."

Ofsted has been critical of schools narrowing key stage 3 curriculums in favour of spending more time on exams.

Walker said the key stage should be a "real opportunity for schools to teach a breadth of curriculum". But "in many cases schools have not been looking to provide that breadth and richness which it's open to them to do at that stage".

However, he accepted that "one of the challenges" was not to create "perverse disincentives for schools to focus on other things".



Nadhim Zahawi

## NEWS

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## Silver linings: Big trusts see reserves boosted by Covid windfalls

TOM BELGER

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INVESTIGATES

Large academy trusts have racked up multi-million-pound surpluses during the pandemic, as savings from school closures and extra DfE cash boosted reserves.

Schools Week analysis of trust accounts highlights significant Covid windfalls, despite schools' extra costs and widespread calls for more funding.

One trust boosted its reserves by £9 million, while another moved from a deficit to a £6 million surplus.

The findings challenge the narrative that Covid pressures have squeezed budgets across the sector.

It is also likely to strengthen ministers' belief that schools can afford to use reserves to meet new Covid costs.

**Accounts reveal Covid silver lining**

Covid has heaped pressures on schools, but the first tranche of trust annual accounts for 2020-21 reveal financial silver linings.

Outwood Grange Academy Trust's operating surplus rose from £5.5 million in 2020 to £9.8 million last year, accounts show.

The 38-school trust boosted its overall reserves from £22.8 million to £31.9 million.

The trust, known for its expert financial management, was one of several highlighting "operational savings" during lockdown.

An OGAT spokesperson said it plans to reinvest £4 million in revenue projects "focused on helping students catch up". It also has a "very significant" capital programme to address a "legacy of under-investment" in schools before they joined the trust.

The spokesperson added: "In combination, these plans aim to invest available reserves for the benefit of students and only retain the recommended reserve level as a contingency."

The trust's excess of income over expenditure actually shot up from £8.3 million in 2020 to £21.5 million last year – a rise of 160 per cent.

But accounts state this was driven "primarily" by three new schools joining.

**Reserves boosted by 'well-managed budgeting'**

Meanwhile United Learning's accounts highlighted reserves from restricted and



unrestricted general funds, which cover most day-to-day spending, of £31.8 million. They had stood at £17 million a year earlier.

The trust, the country's largest, with 75 schools, said this was down to government Covid support alongside "clear and well-managed budgeting and financial controls".

It received £6.7 million Covid funding, including the catch-up premium, testing and furlough grants.

The trust spent £1.7 million of reserves on Chromebooks during the year, and has earmarked £2.9 million for catch-up this year.

Nearly £5 million from operating surpluses is also for capital projects.

Stephen Morales, chief executive of the Institute of School Business Leadership, said trusts should be "held to account for the reserves they've got". But he said surpluses are "not universal", and many standalone trusts' finances are "precarious".

"Sensible contingency pots make sense, and you might have growth or infrastructure ambitions," he added. "But I'm an advocate for funding today meeting needs of children today."

**Warning over judging size of reserves**

Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said the reasons behind rises in reserves are "complex", citing, for example, that building projects planned from reserves could have been delayed.

"I would be very cautious about concluding that trusts hold too much in reserves," she added.

Plymouth CAST plans to spend

£2.5 million of its reserves on building work. Its accounts say Covid helped it make savings on teaching supply costs and "general consumable purchases", boosting its revenue surplus by £1.3 million.

The 35-school trust carried over £5.2 million in revenue funds into this financial year, up from £2.8 million a year previously.

But Laura Fox, chief finance officer at Plymouth CAST, said the year also saw "substantial investment" in IT.

Accounts say the trust is "anticipating a more challenging financial year" in 2021-22, with schools fully open and cover needed for staff who are ill or isolating.

Delta Academies Trust's accounts did not offer commentary on Covid's overall impact, but it saw its reserves rise from £12.4 million in 2020 to £14.1 million in 2021.

Lettings income and other trading income fell amid lockdowns, but it received £2 million in extra Covid funding to cover exceptional costs.

Accounts also state pupil numbers have risen at several academies, "which have helped to secure the financial sustainability of the trust".

Meanwhile the Kemnal Academies Trust's reserves increased from £9.5 million to £12.4 million. It said "usable reserves", excluding ring-fenced cash, rose £2.9 million.

But it stated that only the "majority" of the £2 million it incurred in extra Covid costs were compensated by government grants.

Astrea Academy Trust even replaced a £0.9 million operating deficit in 2020 with a £6.4 million surplus in 2021. Reserves also rose, but the trust's financial overview did not spell out Covid's net impact.

**Using reserves for Covid pressures 'unreasonable'**

The figures come amid increased scrutiny of growing reserves. Pressed by Labour to fund

more air purifiers this week, schools minister Robin Walker noted most schools are "operating with a cumulative surplus".

But Julia Harnden, funding specialist at school leaders' union ASCL, warned that expecting schools to use reserves for unbudgeted Covid pressures is "neither realistic nor reasonable".



Leora Cruddas

## NEWS

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## £40m cuts to council budgets are 'levelling down', heads claim

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

Headteachers have accused the government of "levelling down" school improvement funding by slashing more than £40 million a year from council budgets.

The Department for Education confirmed this week that the £41 million school improvement monitoring and brokering grant given to councils will be halved in 2022-23, and then scrapped the following year.

It says the measures will put maintained schools "on a more even footing" with academies, which can fund school improvements via top-slicing rather than receiving extra DfE funding.

Local authorities will also be given the power to raid maintained school coffers to make up the shortfall.

Charlotte Ramsden, president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ACDS), said the move will affect "millions of children", with top-slicing heaping "more pressure on school budgets".

The DfE is pressing ahead despite admitting that there is "significant concern" among councils in newly published consultation documents.

The alarm was raised over local schools' forums blocking attempts by councils to top-slice more cash. But the government said it could step in to overcome local resistance, stating that ministers "reserve the right to permit de-delegation against the wishes of a schools forum".

Ramsden also said it was "misguided" for the DfE to suggest low levels of formal intervention by councils to justify scrapping the grants.

Many councils provide early support "to avoid the need for formal intervention", she said, with such resources particularly valuable to smaller, rural schools.

The ACDS fears cuts "will limit the ability of local authorities to fulfil some of their statutory responsibilities around



education".

Local authorities were entitled to at least £50,000 each in the last funding round, but most received far more. Lancashire council, which oversees 544 schools, was paid the most, receiving £1.96 million for the year to April.

The changes will also "enable councils to better adjust over time to the government's long-term ambition for all schools to become academies within a strong trust".

One headteacher called the consultation a "farce". Thomas Moore, head of Bury CofE Primary School, said the department was "levelling down rather than up. This is surely the pivotal point to further support something they agree is working by providing additional funds to MATs, not pulling it from LAs."

Ramsden disputed the idea that the reforms will align maintained and academy schools, given the "many inconsistencies" in funding between them.

The cuts also appear "inconsistent with plans to create an 'eco-system of schools'", she added, referring to comments by education secretary Nadhim Zahawi last year.

Zahawi is widely seen to have struck a more hands-off tone

about academisation than his predecessor, praising maintained schools and ruling out "arbitrary timelines" for conversions.

Nick Brook, deputy general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said reforms would be seen as a "thinly veiled attempt" to push academisation, "making it financially less appealing to stay under LA control".

The DfE's plan to proceed with cuts opposed by most respondents in the consultation is "deeply disappointing", he added.

Some schools explicitly objected on the grounds that reforms may incentivise academy conversions. But the DfE said officials "don't consider this a reason" why councils won't be able to fund themselves sufficiently.

Other respondents noted that councils still have some responsibilities over academies and provided local intelligence to regional schools commissioners.

The DfE said funding was only intended for maintained schools, and top-slicing would enable such intelligence-sharing to continue.

The department highlighted the extra £1.6 billion in core schools funding announced in the recent spending review.

"While we recognise schools' budgets face other pressures as well, the scale of this increase significantly offsets the pressure that may be felt through the loss of this grant," the document stated.



Credit: ADCS

Charlotte Ramsden



## NEWS

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## Ombudsman wants to intervene over academy admission disputes

**SAMANTHA BOOTH**  
@SAMANTHAJBOTH

The local government ombudsman wants the power to investigate academy admissions and exclusion complaints, claiming that it could boost public trust.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is an independent investigatory body which acts as the final stage for complaints about council services, including admission and exclusion concerns in maintained schools.

It publishes reports that make recommendations, but it cannot enforce action.

Its powers do not cover academies however, whose trusts are their admission authorities. Any complaints relating to academies are investigated by the Education, Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA).

On Monday, the LGSCO Michael King renewed calls for extended powers. He told MPs at the levelling up committee that independent scrutiny of academies could promote public trust in them.

The LGSCO has been calling for such reforms for over a decade. Two parliamentary committees have asked central government to consider the body's reach.

Ministers are now working on the schools' white paper, which aims to provide clarity of roles for the different bodies involved in overseeing areas such as admissions, including local authorities.

*Schools Week* understands that the LGSCO has met twice with the Department for Education since 2019, but no further progress has been made.

King said: "One of the main things I'm committed to in our learning is that you can learn from complaints to improve services. Academies are missing out on that by not being part of that kind of culture."

An LGSCO report from March upheld a complaint against St Olave's and St Saviour's Grammar, a voluntary-aided school in Bromley, south-east London, which found "fault causing injustice" when rejecting a child's admission to its sixth form.

The ombudsman recommended that the governing body apologise and pay the child £400 to

recognise the "avoidable frustration and distress".

However, Geoff Barton, general secretary of school leaders' union ASCL, said it seemed "problematic" to have a local government ombudsman "overriding complaints about schools which sit outside of local authorities".

This was "particularly as there are already a number of bodies that have oversight", such as the ESFA, Ofsted and regional school commissioners.

But King claimed that investigations linked with government bodies could be perceived to have "skin in the game".

He said there was a "misunderstanding" that people believe they will look at complaints through "the lens of local government".

He added: "[The] process should be available to parents in the same way that it is for almost every other public service in this country."

Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said there needed to be conversations about "strong and intelligent regulation" of the school and trust system.

But she added: "It is not really possible to respond on specific points of regulation outside of a regulatory strategy."

The LGSCO also wants to give parents and pupils the right to an independent investigation of complaints on any topic not resolved by the school. A 2009 pilot of this run in 14 local authorities found that some schools welcomed the ombudsman's help to solve "vexatious" complaints by parents.

The body also wants to be able to consider the actions of a school fulfilling an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and complaints about SEND provision within a school if a child does not have a plan.

In its 2019 SEND report, the education select committee said the DfE should "at the earliest opportunity" bring forward legislation to allow the ombudsman to "consider what takes place within a school".

The DfE said it was considering the proposals and would respond. The spokesperson added that the SEND review, due in the first quarter of this year, was "further looking at improving children's outcomes".

## Elite universities shun T-levels

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
@BILLYCAMDEN

EXCLUSIVE

Less than half of universities have confirmed they will accept T-levels for entry this year, with many Russell Group institutions turning their backs on the new technical qualifications.

An investigation by *Schools Week's* sister paper *FE Week* found many universities are still yet to decide whether to accept the qualifications, less than two weeks before the UCAS deadline for 2022 admissions.

T-levels are equivalent to three A-levels and have UCAS tariff points allocated to them.

The first students began their two-year courses in digital, construction or education and childcare in September 2020, and will now be deciding their next steps.

T-levels were designed so students can enter work straightaway, but ministers insist the qualifications are a viable entry route to university.

At the end of last term, the Department for Education published a list of institutions that had confirmed T-levels were suitable for at least one of their courses.

Eighty were listed, of which 66 were traditional universities. There are 140 universities in the UK, meaning just 47 per cent currently accept T-level students.

Ten of the 24 universities in the elite Russell Group are so far not accepting T-levels.

The University of Oxford said T-levels alone were "unlikely to satisfy the requirements for entry, as they are technical qualifications, while all degree courses at Oxford are highly academic".

Cambridge University said the three initial T-level subjects "would not be a natural fit" with any of their degrees.

The DfE urged universities to provide "transparent information about their entry requirements" as soon as possible.

The government's own list does not include details of courses for which T-levels are accepted. Instead, students are encouraged to "look at UCAS and at their preferred higher education provider's website".

Around 1,300 students studied the first three T-levels in 2020 and a further 5,450 signed up in 2021. Ten subjects are now on offer at over 100 institutions, though this includes less than 10 schools.

The DfE said it expected the number of universities accepting T-levels "to grow in the coming weeks".

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## RECOVERY

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# 'Scandalously poor': Government falls behind on tutor promises

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

The government's flagship catch-up scheme would have to almost treble its current rate of progress to deliver the amount of tutoring promised by the government for this year.

Official figures show just 302,000 National Tutoring Programme (NTP) courses were started by pupils last term, or about 24,000 courses per week. It means that, after one term, the government is still 85 per cent short of its target to provide two million courses of 15 hours of tutoring this academic year.

The majority of the courses started so far (230,000) were also through the new school-led tutoring route – where schools are handed cash directly to bring in their own tutors.

## 'Scandalously poor'

Under the tuition partners and academic mentor routes – the two directly overseen by outsourcing firm Randstad – just 72,000 courses have been started, 9 per cent of the 776,000 target.

The programme would have to almost treble its rate of courses started each week to hit its overall target. Schools Week analysis shows that, if it continues at its current pace, the two million tutoring sessions would not be delivered until the start of the 2023 academic year.

Nick Brook, deputy general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said the figures were "without question, disappointingly low". The government's "tutoring revolution risks stalling unless more is done", he added.

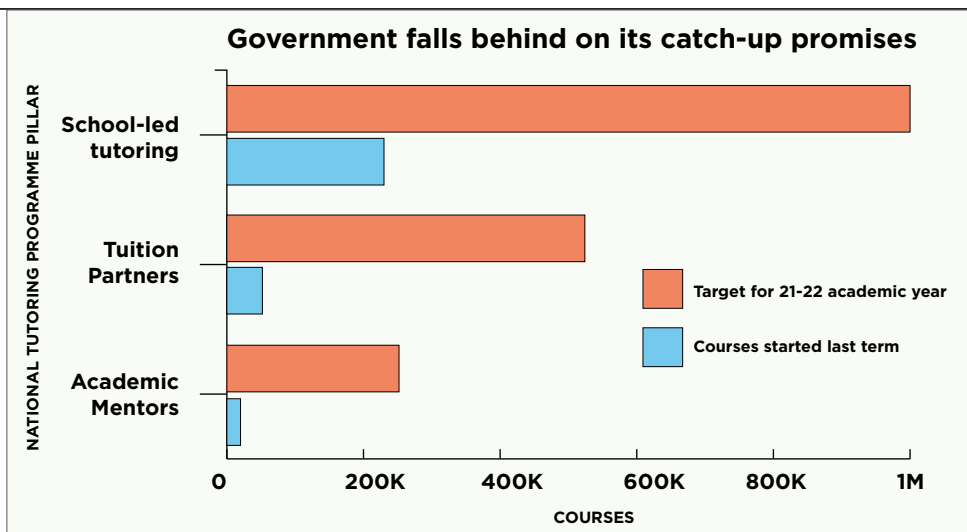
One tutoring provider, who wished to remain anonymous, said the figures were "scandalously poor".

Schools minister Robin Walker, appearing before MPs this week, admitted that there was "further to go" and that Randstad must go "faster on this".

## 'Schools have a lot on their plate'

But the Dutch firm, making its first public appearance since winning the contract to run year two of the NTP at the education select committee on Wednesday, defended its record.

Karen Guthrie, NTP programme director, said they were on track, but added that it was a "collaborative approach" and schools have "a lot on their plate" now.



Randstad, which has a £32 million contract to run the NTP, has almost doubled the number of approved tuition partners from 33 to nearly 60 this year. However, the tuition target is more than double last year's.

Guthrie's comments were backed up by Graham Archer, the Department for Education's recovery director, who said, "in broad terms", they were where they expected to be at this stage.

Walker added that tutoring also tends to pick up towards exam season.

But Brook said that "too many schools report that there are simply no tutors available that meet their needs" and accessing support through the NTP was "confusing and difficult".

As of December 12, 52,000 courses had been started by pupils through the tuition partners pillar, where approved tutor organisations provide catch-up coordinated by Randstad. This is just 10 per cent of the firm's 524,000 target for this year.

It also appears to be slower than the take-up this time last year, the programme's first year, when 95,000 children were enrolled by early January, despite only launching in November.

Meanwhile, only 20,000 courses were started by pupils through the academic mentors route. This equates to just 8 per cent of the 252,000 target for this year.

Providers are due to meet Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, next week to thrash out issues.

Some are discussing forming an "alternative" provider to challenge Randstad over its running of the NTP and have urged the government to use a break clause to enact the change of ownership.

The DfE is also yet to publish details on how



Schools minister Robin Walker and DfE's education recovery director Graham Archer before MPs this week

many pupil premium children the NTP is reaching – against this year's 65 per cent target.

Archer said it is "tricky to monitor", but Guthrie said she expected some data to be published in the coming weeks.

## 'Use tutors to plug staff shortfalls'

Meanwhile, Archer said the DfE was also "actively encouraging" schools to use in-house tutors and academic mentors in "support of teaching where that is necessary and makes most sense, where there are staff absences that require that".

A report by Teach First, which ran the first year of the academic mentor scheme, found about one in five schools used mentors with qualified teacher status to provide teaching cover.

Walker was asked by MPs whether the drive for more supply staff to fill Covid absences meant the government was "fishing in the same pool" under the tutoring programme.

He said it was not as "straightforward as a direct competition, but I accept that there are probably some pressures from the fact that we're recruiting on both".

## RECOVERY

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# Music and PE cut as schools met Covid challenge

A government-commissioned research report has offered a glimpse of how schools responded to the impact of Covid in the last academic year.

The research into school recovery strategies, carried out by Ipsos MORI in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and the Centre for Education and Youth, is based on a survey of 1,018 school leaders and more detailed interviews with 40 people.

Here's what they found.

## 1. Schools cut back on music and PE

Just over half of primary and 37 per cent of secondary schools said they had reduced hours for certain subjects, "particularly music and PE".

Primary schools also reported reducing hours for languages and singing, while secondaries mentioned design and technology.

However, some schools reported boosting teaching hours for PE and other outdoor activities.

One issue was restricted access to such things as science labs and music equipment, with one school reporting that equipment needed 72 hours of disinfecting before re-use.

Around half of primary leaders reported increasing the number of hours a week spent on English and maths, while most secondary schools kept the hours for those subjects the same as before Covid.

## 2. Trips called off and assemblies scaled back

Unsurprisingly, around nine in ten schools reported that they didn't run any trips or concerts, while two-thirds said they did not welcome external speakers. Sixty-five per cent of primary schools and 51 per cent of secondaries did not run any non-catch-up-related clubs.

Assemblies were also affected, with 29 per cent of primary schools and 40 per cent of secondary schools not offering any at all.

## 3. Schools 'centralised' curriculum and streamed children

As schools adapted to new ways of working in the spring and summer of 2021, some leaders interviewed reported adopting a more "centralised" approach to curriculum planning, as well as "streamlining" by dropping non-statutory aspects to free up time for catch-up and wellbeing activities.

Some schools even brought in streaming to support low-attaining pupils, with one reporting streaming in all of its year groups, "which is not something I believe in, but I think that in this instance it was the right thing to do".

Among the academic interventions deployed by schools, phonics was the most common cited by primary schools, while providing digital access to pupils was the top response among secondary leaders.



## 4. 'Difficulties' with summer school funding

Although three in five secondary leaders reported in the summer term that they were planning a summer school, several schools interviewed reported "difficulties" with the funding provided by the government.

The funding was retrospective and based on the numbers attending, so "concerns were raised about recruitment and attendance". One school even offered pupils a laptop as an incentive for attending.

There was also "a sense of reluctance" to run holiday clubs or interventions from some school leaders because "both pupils and staff were exhausted and needed a break".

Schools also reported difficulties making "concrete recovery plans" at the time, as longer-term funding and guidance was "viewed as uncertain".



## 5. Mental health a big concern

In the autumn term, pupils' emotional and mental health and wellbeing was the most common challenge cited by secondary leaders (46 per cent) and the second most common among primary leaders (42 per cent).

The most common challenge for primary schools was large differences in progress between pupils (46 per cent).

As the academic year progressed, leaders in both phases reported that disparities in pupils' social, emotional and academic progress increased, with pupils "having increasingly complex and variable needs".



## 6. Pastoral interventions placed 'substantial demands' on staff

With mental health a big issue, schools enacted a number of pastoral interventions. These included ensuring a broad curriculum offer, providing information on accessing mental health support, as well as prioritising the teaching of PSHE or RSHE.

However, the research noted that pastoral interventions "often placed substantial demands on staff resources, as these were delivered in addition to their existing responsibilities".

## COVID

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## State schools in deprived areas hit hardest by staff absence

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

State schools are almost twice as likely as private settings to have a large number of staff absent, with those in the most deprived areas the worst affected.

Polling by Teacher Tapp for the Sutton Trust found that one in five state schools reported absence rates of 10 per cent or more last Friday, compared with one in eight independent schools. Of the most deprived schools, three in 10 reported these absence levels.

Sir Peter Lampl, the Sutton Trust's chair, said we "must do all we can to ensure that poorer pupils are not further disadvantaged as a result of this disruption".

Department for Education attendance data showed the number of staff absent for Covid-related reasons rose from around 32,000 in the last week of last term to almost 60,000 last week, the highest level since September.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT school leaders' union, said the disruption was significant. "The concern is that the situation could worsen over the coming weeks," he added.

Pupil absence also reached its highest level this academic year, with 315,000 pupils, or around 3.9 per cent, off because of Covid.

The Sutton Trust found that a quarter of state schools did not have enough cover teachers, while 28 per cent had used non-teaching staff. Eight per cent said they were combining classes, a method recently suggested by the DfE.

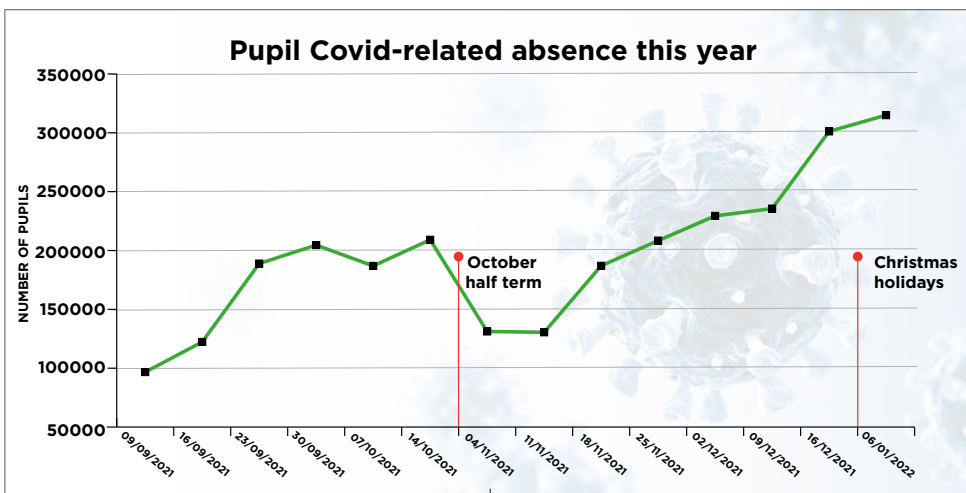
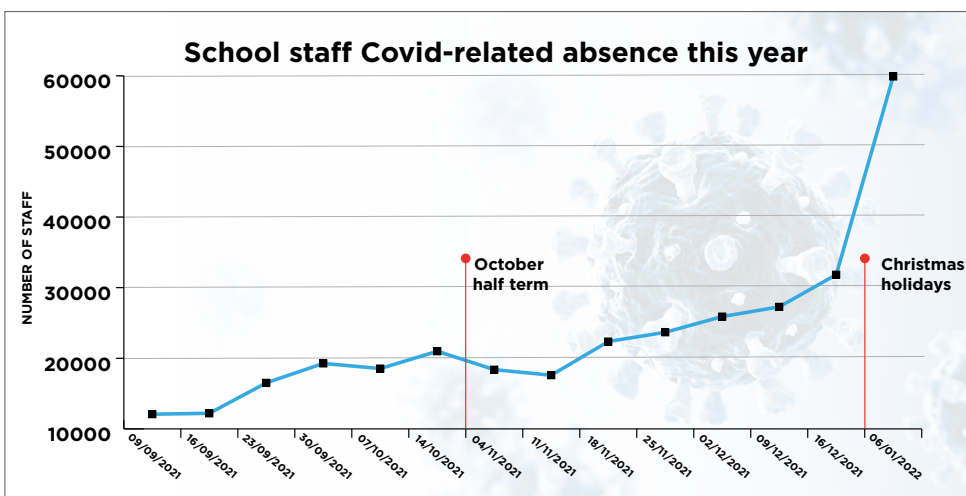
Around a quarter of teachers said they had prepared material for online learning this week. But a fifth of all schools reported that one in 10 pupils did not have access to an electronic device. Around 7 per cent said more than a third of pupils did not have adequate access.

The online resource Oak National Academy had 340,000 users last week, its highest number since March last year when schools were closed.

## Large spike in staff off with Covid

DfE attendance data shows that most staff off for Covid reasons have tested positive. Around 20,000 teachers and school leaders and 27,000 teaching assistants and other staff were at home with a confirmed case on January 6.

The proportion of support staff off for this reason rose by 160 per cent between December and last week, while the proportion of teachers and leaders absent increased by 81 per cent.



Meanwhile the Office for National Statistics said the education sector had seen the biggest month-on-month increase in the proportion of people reporting that they were suffering the effects of long Covid.

The number of pupils at home with a positive case has also grown. Of those absent for Covid-related reasons last week, 159,000 were off with a confirmed case, up 43 per cent on the 111,000 absences for this reason on December 16.

While absence due to suspected Covid or because of attendance restrictions fell, there was a large rise in the number of pupils required to stay at home and isolate – from 8,000 in mid-December to 21,000 on January 6.

Geoff Barton, leader of the ASCL leadership union, said any hope that the Christmas holidays would act as a firebreak for schools had evaporated, with schools now under "severe pressure".

The DfE has published a regional breakdown of attendance at the

end of last term. It shows that Covid-related absence among pupils was highest in London at 5.1 per cent, more than double the rate of 2.4 per cent the previous week.

The North-East and Yorkshire and the Humber had the lowest Covid absence rates of 2.6 per cent.

On December 16, 1.4 per cent of primary pupils were absent due to Covid in Sunderland, compared with 11.8 per cent in Harrow, north London.

At secondary level, absence rates ranged from 0.9 per cent in Kirklees, West Yorkshire, to 13.4 per cent in Hillingdon, north-west London.

Children's commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza told MPs she was pressing the government to provide "live" attendance data. This week's data release was the first in almost a month.



Sir Peter Lampl



## COVID

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# Schools face closure over testing kit shortages

JAMES CARR

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More than a third of rapid Covid test deliveries to schools this term have been late, incomplete or have failed to arrive at all despite promises of a "priority supply route".

Schools fear a lack of lateral flow tests (LFTs) could lead to closures and spiralling supply costs as guidance changes mean they become more reliant on the tests than before.

Julie McCulloch, director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said testing was now the government's "key means of controlling the spread of coronavirus".

A shortage of testing kits "causes problems" and the union was raising the issue with the government, she added.

## Staffing fears as school stocks run low

A Teacher Tapp survey of around 1,800 senior leaders found that just over a third of LFT deliveries had arrived on time this term.

In contrast, 17 per cent of schools reported that none had arrived and they were still waiting, 13 per cent said only some kits had arrived and 5 per cent said they were delivered late. The remaining third either did not know or could not answer.

DfE guidance "strongly encourages" staff and secondary school pupils to conduct twice-weekly LFT tests at home. But Karen Dhanecha, headteacher of Park Way Primary School in Maidstone, Kent, is still awaiting delivery of tests



ordered in November.

An emergency order was also placed after the tests failed to arrive before Christmas and scheduled for drop-off last week, but neither has arrived.

Dhanecha said staff had struggled to secure testing kits from other sources. The school was down to its last seven tests for 42 staff members. "Our risk assessment says that all staff and any visitors to the schools must have a negative test. Unless I change my risk assessment and say it doesn't matter, I won't be able to staff the school," she added.

Separate Teacher Tapp polling last week for the Sutton Trust found that 8 per cent of schools had staff unable to attend due to a lack of Covid tests.

Since December 14, vaccinated adults and children aged between 5 and 18 who are close contacts of a positive case can attend school but are "strongly advised" to conduct LFTs each day for seven days.

Simon Smith, headteacher at East Whitby Primary Academy in Yorkshire, warned this was creating the biggest problem. His school is waiting for 393 test boxes scheduled for delivery on January 4.

He said the school could have lost eight staff members this week who were close contacts, at a

cost of around £800 per day, were staff not able to use limited spare testing kits.

"There are so many challenges we are facing – this shouldn't be one of them," he added.

A DfE blog post stated last week that test shortages were "not a problem for schools as they use a different priority supply route".

A spokesperson said this week there were "no widespread issues" and that schools should have "sufficient supplies".

Around 31 million test kits were delivered to schools and colleges during the last two weeks of last term, with millions delivered each week this year too.

Other headteachers praised the speed at which emergency replenishment kits were delivered within days.

## Guidance increased demand for tests

The Sutton Trust study also found 5 per cent of schools reported not having enough LFTs to distribute to pupils.

Catharine Darnton, headteacher at Gillotts School in Oxfordshire, explained that "parents are more reliant on schools at the moment" due to shortages elsewhere.

A delivery of 1000 test boxes scheduled to arrive last week has been rescheduled for Friday, meaning only select year groups will get supplies this week. This, however, was the school's first problem with deliveries since March.

Meanwhile, Nottinghamshire County Council stepped in and provided around 600 kits for pupils to take home at Alderman White School in Bramcote after a mix-up with its delivery.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## Ex-teachers helping with shortages are 'drop in ocean'

At least 585 former teachers have answered the government's call to arms and returned to the classroom to help with Covid staffing issues.

More than 45,000 school staff were off with Covid last week. Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT school leaders' union, said the number of ex-teachers coming forward was a "drop in the ocean compared to the scale of the challenge faced".

According to the Department for Education, 485 teachers have signed up with supply

agencies following the drive. A further 100 Teach First alumni have also "expressed an interest in supporting the workforce".

The department said the data was from just 10 per cent of agencies, and that the total number signed up was "likely to be much larger".

According to government data, there are 93 supply agencies that are part of the Crown Commercial Service's framework used by the DfE for its call to arms, meaning the government figure for the scheme is

based on data provided by around nine organisations.

But the vast majority of these will not be in schools yet – and the DfE would not provide figures on this.

*Schools Week* revealed last week how some supply agencies had seen limited impact from the scheme, with delays to DBS checks and other hurdles in the way for those who do come forward.

Of 76 ex-teachers who approached the TLTP Education agency, just four were compliant.

## NEWS

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## Diocese academy conversions get go ahead without governor approval

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

A diocese has secured academy orders, set conversion dates and begun talks over staff and land transfers for its schools – without their governors' consent.

A union warned of "utter disbelief" among some governors and heads, and condemned the regional schools commissioner for backing the plans and incorrectly stating that governors approved them.

The Catholic Diocese of Hallam has been trying to consolidate its 47 schools in South Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire in two new multi-academy trusts (MATs) since last January. It is one of several dioceses receiving extra funding as part of a government pilot to accelerate the academisation of Christian schools.

Leaders say MATs will enable more collaboration, career development, economies of scale and resources to help struggling schools.

Philip Patterson, the Hallam diocese director of primaries, said it reflected "the need to develop and secure Catholic education for the long term", including operating joint Catholic-Anglican schools.

Carol Gray and Kate Copley, co-regional schools commissioners (RSCs) for the East Midlands and the Humber, signed off the new St Francis and St Clare Catholic MATs at an advisory board meeting last month.

The converter applications and transfer of 19 voluntary-aided schools, as well as 23 single-academy trusts and five schools in a small Catholic MAT, were also approved. Academy orders have since been sent to schools and councils concerned.

But the National Association of Headteachers claims the orders came as a shock to some governors and heads involved – with a "large number" attending a union meeting to raise concerns last week.

"They feel they've been duped and misled by the diocese," Rob Kelsall, an



NAHT national officer, said. One head spoke of their "utter disbelief", he added.

This week the diocese began formally consulting unions on behalf of governing bodies over the transfer of staff to the trusts. A letter states its solicitors have also written to council officials over "land issues and the commercial transfer agreements".

The correspondence states that schools "will be converting to academy status on the dates set out", with some as soon as April.

The RSCs' office also sent a letter to council chiefs alongside the academy order stating that governors themselves had applied to convert. The diocese did not dispute that it had sought the orders rather than governors, but said the letter had simply used "standard wording".

The RSCs similarly told the NAHT that it had been a "model" letter schools had known to expect, and acknowledged that governors had not approved conversion, according to the union.

"The idea RSCs issue academy orders on the pretext governors might approve it is ludicrous," said Kelsall. He called for an investigation, questioning why ministers had not done the same for every maintained school a decade ago.

A source at a law firm which works on conversions said: "Assuming the schools in

question are not eligible for intervention, and the governing bodies of the school have not applied for the orders, it's not clear on what legal basis the orders have been issued."

The diocese is not the first to use controversial tactics on academisation. The archdiocese of Birmingham was accused of "ruling by diktat" last year after it told schools to convert by September 2022.

Both government and Hallam officials acknowledged that governor approval was needed but defended their approach.

Patterson said an academy order "does not take effect and cannot be enacted until the governing body has passed a resolution to convert", and existing academies would also need to approve transfers. Schools were "fully informed of the need to take these next steps".

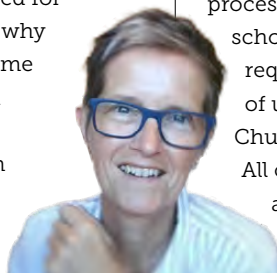
A DfE spokesperson said it remained committed to all schools joining MATs, and the Catholic Church was a "longstanding partner".

"We are working with the Diocese of Hallam as they continue through the process of doing the same for their schools, in accordance with all legal requirements and our memorandum of understanding with the Catholic Church."

All of the voluntary-aided schools were approached for comment.



Carol Gray



Kate Copley

NCFE

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## NEWS

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# Maths teacher made OBE hits out at 'pointless' 10-year fraud battle

HANNAH SOMERVILLE

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EXCLUSIVE

A maths teacher made an OBE in the new year honours has denounced a "pointless, traumatic" 10-year legal battle that left a deprived west London borough £5 million out of pocket.

Dr Richard Evans received the award for services to charitable fundraising during Covid. He had been made an MBE in 2003 for services to education.

Evans, who teaches at Mill Hill County High School in Barnet, ran the 2020 London Marathon for charity having survived a heart attack the previous May. He was treated at the Royal Free Hospital, to which he had delivered food parcels for frontline staff just days before.

Evans told *Schools Week* that he laid the blame for that heart attack squarely at the door of his ex-employer, the London Borough of Brent, and the Metropolitan Police.

A former deputy head of Copland Community School in Wembley, Evans was suspended and sacked in 2009. In a sensational case, four ex-staffers including headteacher Alan Davies and two governors were accused of defrauding the school to the tune of £2.7 million in bonuses.

Five of the so-called "Copland Six" were acquitted of conspiracy to defraud in 2013. Davies pleaded guilty to six counts of false accounting. In 2018, the High Court ruled that four, including Evans, had taken unlawful overpayments, ordering them to pay back £1.4 million to Brent.

The council never recovered most of the cash. The decade-long tussle left the defendants' careers in tatters while Copland's fate was sealed ahead of a planned academy conversion.

Evans, a former education adviser to David Cameron, maintains he had no idea he was being overpaid as he believed the payments, described as bonuses, had been



approved by the local authority.

"The whole experience, quite bluntly, was terrifying," he said. "When you go through something like this, you question every sinew, every bit of what you held to be important. There's no sense of apology."

Brent council said it stood by its decision to pursue the money based on the High Court ruling.

"The unlawful overpayments should have been used to improve the education of pupils at Copland school," it said.

"Taking no action would have been unjust and would have sent the wrong message to public servants in Brent and elsewhere."

Before the scandal, Copland was a 1,400-place secondary in a diverse area that counted footballer Raheem Sterling among its former pupils and was rated "satisfactory" by Ofsted.

"It was a challenging environment," Evans said, "but a challenge I looked forward to. We tried to give young people the sense that they could achieve anything."

At 6.50am on March 1, 2011, Evans and his wife were arrested in a raid on their home. In addition to fraud, he was retrospectively accused by a whistleblower of stealing three paintings valued at £120,000.

The paintings had never left Copland's grounds and had been located by Brent as early as 2009. They were donated to Copland by the late, influential British artist Mary Fedden, one of several public figures whom pupils had met on Evans's initiative.

Brent lodged its claim at the High Court on the eve of Evans's employment tribunal. In 2009 he had been given an 800-page investigation report to read 19 days before the disciplinary hearing. His unfair dismissal claim was ultimately upheld in August 2020.

The council spent £1.7 million of public money on the High Court case and was ordered to pay more than £260,000 in costs. Evans's tribunal alone cost Brent more than £100,000; he had been told to pay back just £46,000, with the remainder statute-barred.

Separately, legal aid bills in the High Court case ran to half a million pounds.

To date, Brent has recovered just £450,000 of the overpaid cash – plus a Rolex watch that used to belong to Alan Davies.

Evans said his standing in the community had been devastated. "Immediately," he said, "my name was in the papers. People Google it. Walking down my street, the abuse I got was phenomenal."

"Councils have to learn from this. It was pointless and destructive."

Copland went into special measures in 2013. It was taken over by Ark academy trust that September. The paintings were returned to Fedden's estate, at its request, in 2014.

Brent council said the conversion plans had not been a factor in the case.



Dr Richard Evans

## NEWS

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## Edenred out as DfE sets up school meal voucher Plan B

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers have drawn up a back-up plan to provide free school meal vouchers in case schools are forced to close again over the coming year.

Wonde, an edtech firm, won the year-long contract in December to provide a "contingency scheme" for the Department for Education in the event of Covid-19 attendance restrictions or national school closures.

It means multinational company Edenred, which won contracts totalling £425 million to run the scheme during earlier lockdowns, is no longer involved.

Edenred stopped providing vouchers on behalf of DfE in July, and a new competitive procurement round began in October. It is not clear if Edenred bid.

Last year's scheme was heavily criticised for initial distribution delays, the appointment of Edenred without an open tender and value-for-money concerns.

Under the new plan, Wonde will be given five days' notice to launch their voucher



scheme for up to 1.7 million pupils. The company will only be paid if the services are used.

The firm had already built up its own voucher system before the Edenred scheme was launched in the first lockdown. It has provided vouchers to 11,500 schools since the start of the pandemic.

Peter Dabrowa, Wonde's chief executive, said the company was "proud" to be the new vouchers platform. "It's great that DfE is being proactive and having a solid contingency plan in place which we hope won't be needed, and it doesn't look like

that's the case moving forward."

If vouchers are needed again, parents will see changes to the way they are distributed, compared to the previous programme.

Under the old scheme, parents were sent a code from their school or local authority before redeeming it through a website, all over email.

But Wonde has developed a phone application for parents, who can also choose to receive a text. Vouchers would be assigned by schools and links sent directly to parents, who could then select a supermarket.

An Edenred spokesperson said the company had supported 20,350 schools, delivering £483 million vouchers, with satisfaction rates of 94 per cent from parents and 90 per cent from schools.

"We are proud to have achieved this while ensuring every penny of taxpayers' money was translated into the equivalent value in vouchers."

A DfE spokesperson said it "routinely considers contingency arrangements in line with government coronavirus planning".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## Government extends full breakfast clubs funding to end of school year

The government is to fund its breakfast clubs programme in full for another four months, with plans for schools to contribute delayed following a partial U-turn.

The Department for Education has also announced that it will widen the eligibility criteria so that more schools can access the scheme.

Last year, ministers said that they would spend £24 million extending the national school breakfast club programme for another two years, taking the scheme up to July 2023.

However, the department also said last summer that schools would only receive a 100 per cent subsidy for the clubs until the end of March 2022. The subsidy would then be reduced to 75 per cent, "allowing schools to contribute 25 per cent from other funding streams".

The DfE has now updated its guidance "in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges that schools have faced".

Participating schools will receive a 100 per cent subsidy for until the end of July this year, with a reduction to 75 per cent from August. It means the government will fund the scheme in full for the rest of this school year.

The government had also said that schools would be eligible for the scheme if they had 50 per cent or more pupils in the A-F bands of the income deprivation affecting children index. The DfE announced this week that the threshold had been reduced to 40 per cent.

The government's 12 social mobility opportunity areas will also be prioritised. All eligible schools will be contacted this month.

The partial U-turn follows criticism of the breakfast clubs programme, which was

launched in 2018 with £26 million in funding before being extended into 2020 with a further £11.8 million.

*Schools Week* revealed in early 2020 that, despite claiming to have "created or improved" around 1,800 breakfast clubs in schools across England, only 286 were actually new.

The programme hit a further snag last year when Magic Breakfast, one of two providers of the scheme, did not bid for the extension funding. The charity said it "did not believe the terms of the contract would allow us to meet our charitable mission – to ensure no child is too hungry to learn".

Family Action, which had run the programme with Magic Breakfast since 2018, was awarded the contract for the 2021-23 extension alone. The charity is responsible for sourcing and delivering breakfast food products to schools.

## NEWS

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# Check social media and improve training under proposed new safeguarding rules

FREDDIE WHITTAKER  
@FCDWHITTAKER

The government plans to encourage schools to inspect the social media accounts of potential employees and beef up training requirements for governors under proposed changes to safeguarding rules.

The Department for Education also wants child-on-child abuse guidance, which has been published separately since 2017, withdrawn and "incorporated throughout" its main statutory document for schools.

A consultation on changes to the statutory keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) guidance was launched this week. If approved, the changes would come into effect in September.

The consultation also seeks views on some changes enacted in 2021 and whether they have worked.

Many of the proposals are technical and involve moving guidance around the document itself. But several substantive changes are proposed that will affect the way schools operate. Here's what you need to know.

## 1 Consider 'online search' on shortlisted candidates

The new draft guidance says that schools "should consider carrying out an online search (including social media) as part of their due diligence on the shortlisted candidates" as part of the recruitment process for new staff.

This "may help identify any incidents or issues that have happened, and are publicly available online, which the school or college might want to explore with the applicant at interview".

## 2 Ensure governors are given safeguarding training

Although evidence suggests the "majority of governors and trustees" already undertake "some form" of safeguarding



training, the DfE said it intends to make the need for it more explicit.

Governing bodies and school proprietors "should ensure that all governors and trustees receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training at induction," the draft guidance states.

This training "should be regularly updated".

The consultation document states that training is "essential to ensure new governors/trustees understand their roles and responsibilities", particularly given their need to take a strategic rather than operational approach.

## 3 Child-on-child abuse guidance to become statutory

The DfE plans to withdraw its separate, non-statutory guidance on sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in school and colleges, which was introduced in 2017 and last updated in 2021.

An Ofsted review into high-profile school sex abuse revelations last year on the

Everyone's Invited website referred several times to the DfE's standalone guidance.

Incorporating it "throughout KCSIE" would "give the issue the prominence it deserves in statutory guidance", the DfE said.

This will also "remove duplication", as "much of the content in the standalone advice was already in part five of KCSIE".

The guidance will also be updated to use the phrase "child-on-child abuse", rather than "peer-on-peer abuse", and to use the terms "victims" and "perpetrators". The DfE said this was done for consistency.

## 4 Children 'may not feel ready' to speak about abuse

In a section on "what school and college staff need to know", the DfE has added a paragraph that states: "All staff should be aware that children may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited, or neglected, and/or they may not recognise their experiences as harmful."



# EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Schools on the brink, and the PM can't even apologise properly

In May 2020, leaders and their staff were awaiting final confirmation of the plan to welcome some pupils back at the beginning of June.

Secondary schools were being told to plan work for, and check progress of, homebound pupils. Ofqual had launched its consultation on plans for autumn exams.

Without knowing the full severity, or risks, of Covid – without a vaccine being available – many staff went into school, to ensure vulnerable children were not left behind.

Staff rooms were shut off. Tables, chairs, pens – anything kids could get their hands on – were meticulously wiped down.

School staff worked incredibly hard, and – no matter how trying – they stuck to the rules.

Boris Johnson's brazen and pitiful attempts to apologise this week for the "bring your own booze" gathering in his own back garden is an affront to the tireless efforts of everyone in the sector.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi has made great strides in getting the sector back onside after the Gavin Williamson debacle.

But the quick defence of his boss, saying Downing Street was a "big department" and referring to the PM's excuse that he thought he was "going to motivate his workforce", could endanger that.

As schools also struggle with kickback from some parents and pupils over harsher Covid restrictions – such as wearing face masks in class – this will not help. It sets a terrible example.

The government needs its crucial public servants. It is time and time again asking more and more of them – to get the country through Covid, as we lurch from one crisis to the next.

The latest – Omicron – is hitting schools hard right now. Staff absences are soaring, schools can't source supply, and Zahawi is asking retirees to invoke the 'blitz spirit' to return and help keep pupils learning in the classroom.

It is disgraceful for the education secretary to ask such a thing while his government has shown disregard for the rules. It's time those responsible – starting with the prime minister – took responsibility for letting the country down.

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# Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



## ‘Never underestimate the power of the working-class mum’

**Anne-Marie Canning knows what it’s like to have all the odds stacked against you, get good grades, and still not get a place at a highly selective university. Working with parents can change that, she tells Jess Staufenberg**

“I still get phone calls from people in my village, saying, ‘My mum met your mum in the supermarket, and she says you might be able to help my son go to university.’”

I’m talking to Anne-Marie Canning, chief executive of The Brilliant Club, a charity that trains and pays PhD researchers to tutor disadvantaged pupils to help get them

into top universities. It’s one of the many spin-off social enterprises founded by former Teach First graduates, in this case in 2011 by Jonny Sobczyk and Simon Coyle.

The pair stepped down in 2017 and handed over the reins to Chris Wilson, a Cambridge University graduate who had been with the charity for five years.

Now it’s the turn of Canning, who despite

getting a place at summer school for Oxford University while a teenager was painfully rejected for an undergraduate course. Her experiences growing up in a working-class community – the northern ex-mining village of Carcroft – perhaps explain one of her key targets for engagement: mums.

If the first five years was to establish The Brilliant Club’s Researchers In Schools



# Profile: Anne-Marie Canning



South London Parent Power goes to Parliament in 2019

programme, and the next five years to prove impact, Canning says the following five years under her stewardship will be about “throwing open its doors”. The Brilliant Club may be based in schools (it sends PhD researchers into about 900 schools) but it is the community around schools Canning has her eye on.

Like the phone calls she keeps getting, the story starts in a Yorkshire village. “I used to tell a very sanitised version of where I’m from, saying that I was from Doncaster. But that’s a really big town with good train connections, whereas I’m from a pit village, where it was pretty rural, and the pit got closed.”

Canning’s father had been a miner before becoming a lorry driver, and her mum worked for the National Coal Board and was disabled. Canning looked after her mother, and also attended North Doncaster Technology College (“the worst school in Donny”) which, according to Canning, at the time had 2,500 pupils, only 17 per cent of whom were getting A\* to C grades at GCSE (nowadays it’s Outwood Academy Adwick, and results have improved).

Despite this, Canning applied to Oxford University’s summer school aged 17 – and was accepted. When she worked at the university some years later, a colleague revealed they had received her form: “They said it was the only application they ever accepted late.”

But despite the exciting box of books that arrived beforehand as reading material, the actual experience also made her angry. “I realised the nature of inequality in education.” She leans in to explain the



A year 9 pupil exploring literary theory with The Brilliant Club

## “The National Tutoring Programme could be as loved as the NHS”

“crystallising moment”.

“A fellow student said, ‘When we apply, I don’t mind which of us gets into Oxford, because we’ve all worked equally hard’. And I thought, ‘Well, I mind. I don’t have a teacher in all of my A-levels, so my grade A in my A-level is a bit different to yours.’ Canning took five A-levels, but her school had a staff shortage and couldn’t appoint teachers for two subjects.

Another tough lesson arrived next when she was rejected from a place to read English literature at Oxford. “That is hard, because I was the first to apply from my community and you’re held up as a totem. It’s like, ‘If she can’t do it, who can?’”

Instead, she broke barriers by becoming “the first student union president at York University with an actual Yorkshire accent”.

After graduation, Canning went to work at Oxford University as an access officer “to try and crack this thing”. She says she was its first ‘outreach professional’ and even

won a prestigious Oxford teaching award for her work with schools.

Wanting to be somewhere “more radical”, Canning then joined King’s College London, becoming director of social mobility and student success. She moved the university to a “fully contextualised admissions system”, which she says was “about making the starting point for admissions, ‘how do we offer a place to the student?’, rather than ‘how do we reject them?’”. Too many admissions systems are about prize giving.”

Statistics suggest the problem is way off being solved. Deprived pupils have only a one in 50 chance of accessing the most competitive universities, compared with one in four for the most advantaged pupils. Meanwhile, the “access gap” for top universities between pupils on free school meals compared with their peers has widened since 2010.

Moreover, since Covid hit (Canning

# Profile: Anne-Marie Canning



Canning with her mum in Doncaster around 1988

started at The Brilliant Club on the first day of lockdown), policy shifts have made the charity's work even more relevant.

First, the pandemic ushered in a big public focus on tutoring with the arrival of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). According to Canning, The Brilliant Club is its largest non-profit provider, winning a contract with the Department for Education to tutor 8,000 pupils last year, and aiming to tutor 7,000 students in 2021-22 and again in 2022-23.

"We thought it was the moral and ethical imperative," she says, adding families are now increasingly anxious to access tutors. "Parents know all the parents are doing it, and that they can't afford it, and that's devastating. They know the game and they're distressed for their kids about it."

Many are working second jobs to afford a tutor, she says, and some parents have even asked Canning which child to pay tutoring for, because they can only afford one. This all means "the National Tutoring Programme could be as loved as the NHS," says Canning – a message she took to the Conservative Party conference last year.

But she is frustrated that administration of the NTP moved from the Education Endowment Foundation to the for-profit HR firm Randstad, which is accused of presiding over a low take-up of tutoring this year. Some of the best-known tutoring providers were late to re-join the NTP this year amid a contract stand-off with Randstad. "My big worry is that parents who have never had access to a tutor before are now losing faith in tutoring,"



Canning as a councillor in Oxford in 2014

Canning warns.

This is where her focus on parents comes in. As chair of the DfE's Bradford opportunity area – a government scheme to boost social mobility in 12 targeted areas – Canning recently helped introduce funding for mums on a housing estate to take learning materials from school direct to other parents. And families from her old village regularly ring her to ask for help getting into university.

"These are mums who are meeting my mum in the veg aisle. They sniff out my mum in Asda, and she doles out my number! It shows the power of the maternal working-class mum."

Now Canning has partnered The Brilliant Club with Citizens UK, a charity that supports community action, to set up 'parent power' chapters where parents can ask and get support about university access. There are five groups, each with a university partner: Cambridge, Cardiff, Liverpool, London (with King's College) and Oldham (with Manchester University). "The idea is to have parent power chapters all across the UK – a sort of Mumsnet in person for working-class folk," says Canning. "If you invest in a parent in that way, it spreads to other parents."

This is The Brilliant Club under Canning: bringing the community in from the cold, and getting universities to help her do it. She's had to make some tough decisions

## "I worked at Oxford to try and crack this thing"

along the way: whereas the charity provided a teacher training route for PhD students from 2014, Canning axed it. It's all part of her strategy – to focus completely on both student access into university and student success once at university. For the latter, she hopes to better mobilise the charity's network of PhD tutors to prevent more students dropping out of their courses.

And where Canning leads, the government follows. In November, universities minister Michelle Donelan told universities to rewrite their access and participation plans to focus on improving outcomes for poorer students and working with schools. "This is a big regulatory change, and we've got a lot of universities coming to us," notes Canning.

So with universities keen to sign up, Canning's focus on hard-to-reach parents as a priority sounds wise. "A common thing across my career is a belief in parents," she says. "If there's one thing we should be encouraging parents to do, it's telling their kids what they dream of for them."



# Opinion

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



NATASHA PORTER

Chief executive officer,  
Unlocked Graduates

## Why we need to see the children of prisoners

**Among the experiences that make children vulnerable, parental imprisonment remains dangerously stigmatised and invisible, writes Natasha Porter**

I had been a teacher for six years when one of the most cheerful children in my year came to school and fell apart in my office. That morning she had woken up as the police broke down her front door. Her parents had been arrested and were very likely to be serving long prison sentences. That evening she would not be returning to her family home.

I thought she was the first child I had taught who had ended up in this situation, but what I know now is that this was almost certainly not the case. Teachers are used to looking out for children who may be unhappy or suffering at home. Bereavement, illness and divorce can all affect the behaviour of the young people in our care. We are drilled to be constantly vigilant for the worst cases.

There is one childhood experience, however, that is almost never spoken about: having a parent in prison. The shame and stigma around this adverse

childhood experience means schools are rarely informed. Even as a teacher of almost ten years' standing, it was an issue that I only became aware of when I started working in the criminal justice sector.

“It is no one's job in government to know where these children are

The numbers are startling: an estimated 312,000 children have a parent in prison each year. That compares to just 100,000 children whose parents get a divorce each year. Statistically, there is more than one child with a parent in prison in every year group in every school in the country. But it is almost certainly true that big secondaries serving communities with entrenched social challenges have larger numbers of these children.

It is also a particularly urgent challenge, because 65 per cent of boys with a parent in prison end up in the criminal justice system themselves.

The problem is that schools might not know who is affected. There's a lot of shame attached to



imprisonment, and it is no one's job in government to know where these children are. Yet knowing this is crucial to supporting them. That might be about urgent action, such as ensuring there is someone to collect them from school if their caregiver has gone to prison since dropping them off in the morning,

made the heartbreaking decision to stop her daughter visiting until physical contact was allowed again.

The good news is that we do know some of what can make a difference. Central to this is strong family ties which help both the child and the imprisoned family member. Of course, there are exceptions to this if the crimes have safeguarding elements, but overall, children keeping a strong relationship with mum or dad in prison is crucial, and schools should be helping with this however they can.

But they can't exercise the required flexibility if they don't know where these children are and how they are being supported. Schools need to create non-judgmental and supportive spaces for families and children to talk about parental imprisonment, and a statutory framework that identifies prisoners' children would allow that support to be put in place.

In the meantime, small changes can have a big impact. This includes being thoughtful about the language we use when discussing prisons and prisoners in classrooms, playgrounds and assemblies. Because it is more likely than you may realise that who you are actually describing is one of your own pupil's mum and dad.



# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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**Improving indoor air quality shouldn't be considered a quick fix for Covid recovery but a long-term investment in healthier and more productive schools, writes David Glover**

The spotlight on air filtration has heightened in recent months with lacklustre Covid guidance advising educational institutions to keep windows open as a way of generating a fresh air supply into shared spaces. With face masks reintroduced into schools, illnesses and infection will continue to be on many parents' and employees' minds. But while the continued presence of Covid means infection control is demanding more of our attention now, the fact is that this attention is always deserved – not just as a recovery solution from the pandemic, but to support better teaching and learning in the long term.

Some 3.4 million children are currently at risk of long-term health conditions and infectious diseases due to poorly ventilated schools in every corner of the UK. Young people spend around 7,800 hours across their educational life in school, and the impact of poor indoor air quality can stay with them long after they leave. Without an effective indoor air quality programme in place, infection can easily spread. And by the government's own rationale, each day of learning is essential and every absence impacts on potential grades and life chances.

And of course it's not just the children. Teachers spend at least 30 hours each week in the school environment and are also put at risk of exposure to harmful airborne viruses. In fact, even before the pandemic, the average teacher had 4.1 sick days each year. For schools, this means additional costs and resources have to be put into sourcing substitute teachers at the last



DR DAVID GLOVER

Co-founder and technical director,  
Plasma Clean

## Improving air quality is for life, not just for Covid

minute, causing more disruption to learning – costs that could be prevented by investing in a robust indoor air quality solution.

But it's not just infection that impacts the health and wellbeing of pupils and teachers. Productivity

Indoor air quality is a challenge for many of the 32,000 schools across the UK, especially those in older buildings without good mechanical ventilation. However, even many newer school buildings are not sufficiently equipped to

“ Productivity and concentration also take a hit from poor air quality

and concentration also take a hit from high CO2 concentrations in classrooms. Combined with increased temperatures and humidity, this can significantly reduce the air quality within the environment. Too much CO2 can cause drowsiness, tiredness and a lack of concentration.

prevent risks from poor air quality. Official guidance dictates that opening a window is a free and sufficient way of generating a fresh air supply, but it isn't a practical, or effective, long-term solution. During the winter months, open windows cause discomfort to pupils, as well as resulting in significant increases



in heating bills. And for schools in urban areas, there's also the danger of external pollution, such as vehicle emissions making its way into the building.

Schools must take the opportunity to act now to prevent the continued disruption to teaching and learning in the long term. And for that to happen, the Department of Education must make more funding available to protect pupils' and staff's health and wellbeing. CO2 sensors are a key way to continuously monitor indoor air quality, but many schools have yet to receive them, and the reality is that they are insufficient – especially for the many classrooms where there is no window to open.

When balanced against the cost of teacher and pupil absence to schools and to the economy, there are many affordable solutions for improving indoor air quality and reducing the risk of airborne infections. These air quality technologies are proven to help limit the potential for Covid outbreaks, but they offer much more than that.

Improved air quality is shown to increase performance and grades due to better cognitive function and decreased incidence of headaches and respiratory issues. Clean air is the invisible piece of the clean learning environment puzzle, and is arguably a matter of safeguarding.

Covid has brought that to our attention. But long after the pandemic recedes, parents, pupils and teachers should continue to expect that health, wellbeing, learning and school budgets aren't continually put at risk by poor air quality.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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**ANDREW MOORHOUSE**  
CEO, The Primary First Trust

## How to take control of your finances in 2022

**Budgets are stretched in unprecedented fashion, but putting value at the heart of our financial operation has been transformative, writes Andrew Moorhouse**

Funding for state schools has fallen in real terms over the past decade, causing significant challenges for schools as they try valiantly to provide ever-improving provision against the reality of less cash. At The Primary First Trust, we have innovated our approach to finances to find a way to make budgets workable.

Schools are accountable for the efficient use of public funds. To really take control of finances, achieve value for money and maximise every public pound, we looked at issues from an economics basis, with the hope of changing the very culture of how 'the money' works.

To understand the structural problem of financial management in the public sector, we looked to Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman. His insights lay out the four ways of spending money and their corresponding effects on quality and value. Friedman broke down the types of expenditure into two categories

– spending our own money, and spending someone else's. Each had two sub-categories, based on who the money was being spent on – ourselves or some else.

In the public sector, we find ourselves spending someone else's money on someone else. It is the most removed we can be from

**“The key for us has been to alter our financial mindset**

properly valuing our expenditures and their impact, meaning the quality and value for money aspects have less weight. The key for us in maximising our funding has been to change that culture – to alter our financial mindset so that everyone is invested in getting value for money.

### Create a feasible surplus

We aim for budgets to deliver a three per cent in-year surplus as it is both achievable and provides sufficient 'wiggle room' to weather unforeseen circumstances. We return the majority back to schools the following year to reinvest in education, and the Trust retains the remainder to bolster reserves and emergency funding.



Our schools benefit from this approach and have so far purchased iPads and Apple TVs to accelerate digital learning; new outside play equipment to support cognitive and physical development; and a new reception area to enhance our parental facilities, all of which

would be difficult to achieve otherwise.

Now, there is tangible incentive for schools to save money and look for best value. The traditional year-end drive to spend unused funds to avoid clawback no longer applies and schools have become accustomed to conserving funds to use strategically, resulting in a virtuous circle of year-on-year improvements.

### Shift the culture

We emphasise the importance of value for money over cost, prioritising what we get for the money, rather than the amount itself. We aim to deliver better provision for the same money, or at least the same provision for less.

We will never reduce the standard of provision by paying less and seek to always improve our value proposition so schools can see how their investment in us continues to generate ever-greater returns.

### Make the most of being in a trust

We cannot ignore costs entirely, so we contracted procurement specialists to sweat big-ticket items, including catering and cleaning. However, the game-changer was supplier management and outsourcing. By reducing approved suppliers across our schools, we saw material cost benefits, using our size as a trust to negotiate improved rates for high-quality services.

Outsourcing basic finance and HR functions to India also ensured higher standards of expertise to provide high-quality support for schools, while dramatically reducing costs, enabling them to invest elsewhere.

### Work with the sector

We work with and advise other trusts, sharing our experiences, the lessons we've learned and the best practices we've encountered and developed. Our transformative cost savings in finance and HR have generated lots of interest and opened up the possibility of trusts working together in new ways to generate efficiencies.

As state schools, we cannot control our funding. What we can do is change our relationship with money, negotiate hard, innovate our service provision and create new revenue streams.

And the winners of our spending others' money on others in this way are not just our students and communities. They are our teachers too.

# Opinion

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

**National Leaders of Governance reforms have left a gaping hole in the vital support available to chairs of governors, writes Neil Yates**

**O**n the back of the Department for Education's restructure of the National Leaders of Governance programme, some former NLGs were worried that a number of the most crucial aspects of the role would no longer be available to those who needed it. In particular, we were concerned about the loss of one-to-one coaching and advisory support for chairs of governors and trustees, which we know to be essential.

The DfE announced the changes to the NLG programme in summer 2021, with the role now focused on providing external reviews of governance at a cost – without the long-valued local support for chairs and boards. The programme is also under new management, no longer overseen by the DfE but by the National Governance Association (NGA).

As part of these changes, all existing NLG designations were revoked and a new application round was opened for a much smaller pool of experts. The founding members of Independent Governor Support (IGovS) all chose not to apply for the new NLG designation because we preferred to continue in the well-established spirit of pro bono volunteering, providing the coaching and mentoring support countless chairs have benefitted from for free.

Thankfully, that charitable spirit is evidently alive and well. IGovS has rapidly grown from our 12 founding members last summer to 29 governance experts across the country today. All are previous NLGs, who well understand the value and impact of



NEIL  
YATES

Founding member, Independent Governor Support

## NLG reforms leave chairs of governors unsupported

the support they are offering because they have not only provided it before, but benefitted from it themselves in their own roles as chairs of governors and trustees.

And their expertise is sorely needed. In the past few months

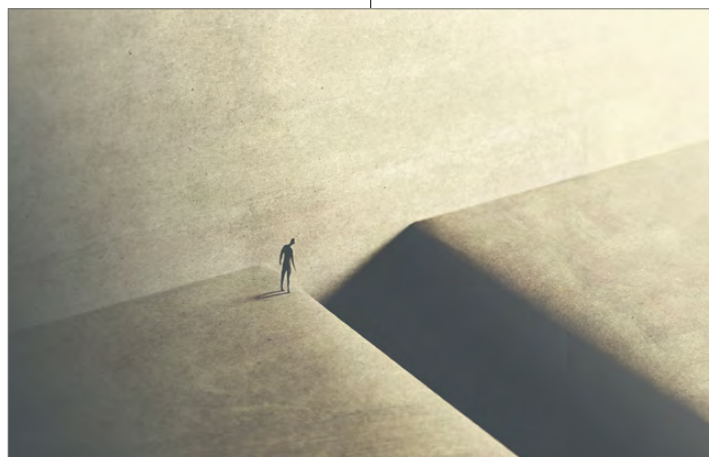
amid the pandemic). We demystified the world of education governance for some new to it, and stepped in as members of panels for boards who were short of experts. We have conducted external reviews of governance and advised

“ The new model has created a gap where informal support once was

alone, IGovS has supported with a host of challenges. We've helped build more effective relationships between chairs and headteachers/CEOs. We coached and mentored new chairs daunted by the level of responsibility involved (especially

on strategic leadership, supporting trust boards through significant change and supporting chairs to move forward from challenging Ofsted inspection results.

Clearly, the new NLG model has already created a gap where



informal support once was, and IGovS exists to help fill that gap. As one of our founding members, Infinity Academies Trust chair of trustees Sean Westaway, asks, "Staff rely on the executive leader for support, who in turn is supported by the chair. But who provides support for the chair?"

It can be a lonely role, so our aim is to be the organisation chairs can turn to for confidential, understanding and empathetic advice.

Sean is based in Lincolnshire, and the geographical spread of IGovS members means that in most cases, chairs can already secure support from an expert who understands their local context and challenges. As we continue to grow, we aim to make that available to all regions, and in depth.

In the meantime, our service allows chairs to quickly secure the help of an expert based not just on that important local knowledge, but the specific skills needed for the job.

At this time of unprecedented national challenge and strained budgets, I'm proud to be one of the founders of this organisation. Free, independent support has seldom been more needed across the sector, and we are here for any type of school or trust.

We understand what it is like to be a chair in need of support, and we hope the government will come to realise their decision to deprioritise this aspect of the NLG role is a mistake.

But chairs can't wait for more reforms to access expert help. And the good news is: they don't have to.



# Reviews

## BOOK REVIEW



### Twenty Things to Do with a Computer (Forward 50)

**Authors:** Gary S. Stager and Cynthia Solomon

**Publisher:** Constructing Modern Knowledge Press

**Reviewer:** Terry Freedman, freelance edtech writer and publisher

Back in 1971, when computers in schools were barely conceivable, Seymour Papert and Cynthia Solomon produced a revolutionary paper. Reproduced in this book, their *Twenty Things to Do with a Computer* introduced teachers to the idea that programming could be used to engage children, release their creativity and still learn stuff.

Reading that paper now, it's astonishing to realise just how visionary it was. It argued that children should be taught to programme computers, rather than employing computers to programme children.

Stager and Solomon's work of the same title for this *Forward Fifty* edition takes up the ideas originally presented in *Twenty Things* and seeks to renew or re-imagine them for a new age. They bring in a range of specialists to achieve this, and the result is uplifting and depressing in equal parts.

The uplifting part emanates from its being a cornucopia of interesting, exciting and novel suggestions and challenges. The depressing part is the evidence that after 50 years, many teachers and policymakers still view computers' place in education rather naively.

Education technology has grown into a veritable industry in that time. But despite the efforts of those Papert referred to as 'yearners' – whom we might (sometimes dismissively) today call mavericks – much of it is concerned with training children to use existing software to attain pre-defined skills and outcomes. As explored also by Audrey Watters in *Teaching Machines*, we are using computers to programme young people, rather than teaching them to

programme computers.

As Stager explains, "Using computers to teach children things we've always wanted them to know, perhaps with greater efficiency or comprehension" inherently hampers technology's transformative potential. And it is interesting to reflect that for all their '21st-century skills' rhetoric, the tech industry has by and large bought into facilitating just that.

However, this book is not about 'guide on the side' vs 'sage on the stage' pedagogy. Many of the ideas are predictably based in 'constructionism' (where learners take the lead and are encouraged to experiment, collaborate and discuss). But far from confining teachers to the role of 'facilitators', *Twenty Things* promotes a commonsense approach in which both constructionism and 'instructionism' cohabit successfully. In fact, thanks to contributions from a large number of writers, it displays with honesty the positive and negative aspects of all such efforts.

The result is a book replete with lovely ideas, such as giving kids programming challenges in the form of haiku, using programming to learn about music (not just simple tunes but harmonics and other advanced concepts) and even civics. For example, what better way to teach young people about fake news than to get them to make videos, say, in which they deliberately set out to mislead people?

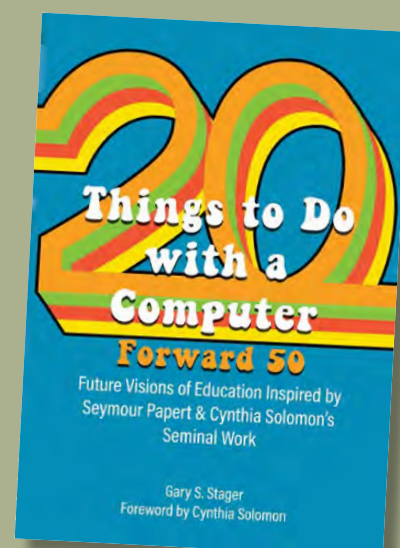
Making videos does not, of course, constitute programming, but rather than a dissonance, this is one of the book's great strengths. It takes the productive potential of children and computers, and places constructive practices at the heart of the curriculum, with careful consideration for where they do and don't belong.

The range of suggestions, perspectives

and personal experience contained in *Twenty Things* is staggering. The variation in chapter length and writing styles keeps it vibrant throughout. And despite a few chapters that weren't as interesting or as useful as others, it made me want to abandon my reading and try out the ideas for myself more than once.

It's bang up to date, too. Several contributors talk about the pandemic, and Stephen Heppell mentions TikTok videos. In fact, Heppell's chapter gives cause for hope. "Phones are banned, TikTok has nothing to do with learning, and so on. An innovation's potential contribution is simply denied," he writes, "and the door for subversive innovation and radical progress opens!"

At heart a potpourri of ideas for the maverick 'yearners' – the teachers who, in Heppell's words, are "recklessly ambitious" – there's plenty here to make any educator think and rethink how our schools have engaged with technology over 50 years, and how they will continue to do so for the next 50.



# Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is  
Gerry Robinson, executive headteacher,  
Haringey Learning Partnership

@gerryrobin5on

**Creating the safe, happy space where  
children are inspired to talk**  
[@EmmaDee77](#)

For those who haven't been paying attention, the clue to the fundamental importance of the Early Years Foundation Stage is in its name. Nursery headteacher Julian Grenier's excellent blog *Inside the Secret Garden* blog discusses all things EYFS, and this guest post by Emma Davis drew my attention.

Following the revised EYFS statutory guidance that came into effect in September, Davis offers advice on communication and language development. Having spent the vast majority of my career in secondary education, this blog was an important reminder that while the practical strategies may vary depending according to the developmental age of the children we work with, the underlying principles are exactly the same.

The rest of the sector could stand to learn from our EYFS colleagues, and this post is a great place to start.

## TOP BLOGS of the week

**Responsive teaching in turbulent times**  
[@chris\\_runeckles](#)

Chris Runeckles starts this post by rightly reminding us that we "cannot wave the learning wand and solve the problem" of ongoing Covid disruption. He then sets about giving detailed advice as to how we might mitigate the worst of its impact.

Responsive teaching is his preferred approach, and he provides a clear, succinct definition of what it entails, supported by wider reading for those who are curious. And the practical strategies he goes on to recommend are just as research-informed, as well as classroom tried and tested.

None is new, but at a time when staff are overwhelmed grappling with the latest phase of the pandemic, this helpful post reminds us that we don't need bells, whistles and a raft of new techniques to make up for the dreaded 'lost learning'. Instead, what we need is to respond to what's in front of us with approaches that we know have always worked and will continue to do so.

**A defence of the profession**  
[@secretHT1](#)

The alarming media trend towards using school staff as cannon fodder is the last thing we need at a time when so many of us are on our knees from grappling with Covid's consequences. This blog provides a reassuring counterbalance.

However, this is no 'woe is me' piece either. Secret Headteacher acknowledges that much of the flak we have faced over the past two years has been for things entirely out of our control and situates this as part of an age-old stereotype of teachers who have an easy life and of short days and long holidays.

But the author also accepts the perks of the jobs and downplays the idea that we are anything like heroes. "We are not better than other jobs," the post states. "Not nobler, not harder working. But, we aren't the opposite of that either."

A valuable read for those inside and outside the profession.

**Being an 'out' LGBTQ+ educator**  
[Vickie Merrick via @DiverseEd2020](#)

It is disheartening that the legacy of Section 28 continues to haunt the careers of those who "began working in schools a long time after its 2003 repeal". But it is crucial that we are aware of this harsh reality if we are to become truly LGBTQ+ inclusive environments.

Being 'out' at work is down to individual choice, and coming out is still far from without its challenges. Here, PE teacher Vickie Merrick looks at these openly and honestly, and the result is a much-needed confidence boost for those who are in a quandary as to whether it's the right thing for them.

The contrasts between Merrick's experiences across different schools is fascinating in itself, and provides helpful hints for school leaders looking to be more inclusive. And Merrick does all this while fostering a sense of camaraderie among those of us who are LGBTQ+ educators ourselves.

Merrick now works in Italy, but there are many parallels with UK schools. And while we may have taken some steps backwards of late, this post is a hopeful reminder that there are still pockets all over the world that are leaps and bound ahead, and where staff are willing to lead the way.

# Research



Manchester Institute of Education will regularly review a research development throughout the year. Contact them @EducationUoM you have a topic you'd like them to explore

## Is extending the school day a viable solution to lost learning?

**Claire Forbes, Research and engagement champion, Manchester Institute of Education**

**W**ith its carousel of lockdowns, self-isolation and partial school closures, there can be no doubt that Covid-19 has constrained the educational experiences of all young people over the past two years. More concerning perhaps is the extent to which the pandemic has intensified the already entrenched learning gaps between more and less affluent young people, bringing into sharp relief the multiple inequities at the heart of our society, and hence at the heart of our communities and schools.

Questions of how to support the recovery of lost learning remain crucial, and particularly so for our most marginalised learners. One possible solution that has fuelled much debate in educational circles is that of extending the school day. While increasing the time that young people spend learning seems an obvious remedy to make up for the learning time they have lost, this solution is not as novel as it might seem. In fact, it already exists in many schools and communities across the world, often referred to as extended school provision, or Out-of-School Time (OST) provision.

OST provision in the UK is commonly led by adults, located in school premises or other local professionally led spaces such as youth centres, and provides academic support or enrichment through a range of cultural, sports and leisure activities. However, despite the range of opportunities typically on offer, evidence suggests that the young people who would most benefit from OST provision (likely the same young people who would most benefit from an extended school day) are the least likely to participate actively and engage meaningfully.

With my co-author Kirstin Kerr, we carried out an 18-month qualitative case study



of the neighbourhood assets that young people use to support their educational outcomes, which revealed one crucial obstacle. Our participants, all aged between 11 and 15, report that as OST provision tends to be designed by professional adults with a professional remit, it fails to sufficiently take account of young people's day-to-day lives, interests, identities and aspirations.

In this regard, OST has a tendency to replicate the disconnect some young people experience in relation to school. There is therefore every reason to surmise that simply lengthening the school day would provoke a similar sense of alienation, fatigue and disinterest in young people already disengaged from formal schooling.

There is some broader evidence to suggest that OST provision can reduce inequalities in access to learning opportunities between more and less affluent young people. OST provision that has managed to reduce

disengagement might offer an interesting blueprint to those wedded to the idea of extending the school day as a means of catching up on lost learning (and preventing the further educational damage the Omicron variant presents).



But reflecting upon young people's perspectives on OST provision as captured in our case study, we would call on educational leaders to think about the challenge differently. What if, rather than simply extending an already overloaded school day, educational leaders took the opportunity to consider new school designs that might distribute time, space and resource differently – in ways that are fully inclusive of young people's needs, identities and interests, and how these have evolved as a result of the pandemic?

To do this, our research suggests that young people must be involved in these discussions as active agents of change and co-producers of knowledge. This would mean them having a central role in critically interrogating what is understood by the notions of high-quality learning and valuable learning outcomes, and indeed how these are facilitated.

However, the first step is for educators, academics and policymakers alike to tone down the rhetoric of lost learning, and to model a more optimistic vision for our young people's future.

Simply adding hours to the school day is unlikely to motivate anyone, and could fail to capitalise on the lessons of the pandemic about what learning looks like when taken to include what happens within and beyond the classroom.



Week in

# Westminster

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

## TUESDAY

Hard-pressed school staff will be reassured to know the government has finally found a publisher to create its planned commemorative book to mark the Queen's platinum jubilee.

Some leaders were unimpressed last year when the government announced it was to spend £12 million on the initiative – which will see a copy of the book celebrating the Queen's jubilee this year sent out to every primary school pupil.

This week a contract award notice confirmed the job has gone to publishers Dorling Kindersley.

We can now all rest easy in our beds.

\*\*\*

The DfE has been roundly mocked this week for its updated advice on ventilation, telling schools to open windows between lessons or only by a "small amount" to stop kids getting too cold.

Interestingly, the department's blog post noted a twitter thread by Professor Cath Noakes, which explains it is only necessary to open a window by a small amount in the winter as you can get both the "wind and stack flow" required to drive ventilation.

However, it caveats that "there may be cold draughts" using such a method.

In its screenshots of the twitter thread, the DfE somehow managed to cut out the caveat that the advice "won't work for everyone" and is not a "magic bullet". Oops!

## WEDNESDAY

Schools minister Robin Walker cut a far more enthusiastic figure than his predecessor Nick Gibb when he appeared in front of the education committee this week.

While Gibb's appearances were often awkward and sometimes confrontational, Walker was the model of deference when he took MPs' questions about catch-up and other policy matters. (Ahh, what it's like to be enthusiastic and fresh-faced, we give him until the end of the year.)

Anyway, Gibb's influence was still clear during various exchanges, when Walker couldn't help but eulogise about his esteemed colleague.

"Without turning this into a hagiography of Nick Gibb I do think he did some exceptional work on systematic synthetic phonics and how they can help in building literacy," he beamed

"Particularly for some of the most disadvantaged pupils and some of those who have had the least support outside of school. There has been real progress as a result of that."

This was minutes after admitting "one of the many things I admire about my predecessor" was his work on the Mandarin programme.

Long live the Gibb legacy!

\*\*\*

Walker may have seemed chipper at the education committee, but he is bound to have other things on his mind,

as Labour's poll lead over the Conservatives expands following partygate.

According to the New Statesman's poll aggregator, if an election were held tomorrow, the schools minister would lose his seat, which he has held since 2010, as would children's minister Will Quince.

## THURSDAY

Education committee chair Robert Halfon is well-known for his catchphrases, but he favours none higher than the "ladder of opportunity", which dates back to his days as skills minister and still gets the occasional outing.

It seems the government is finally starting to speak their colleague's language, with education secretary Nadhim Zahawi shamelessly sucking up to the Tory MP in a recent letter.

"To appropriate your own language, I believe that the work we are doing in this department will also help extend a ladder of opportunity across the education system, from adapting summer exams to providing devices," he wrote.

"I look forward to working with you and the members of the education committee to help take this agenda forward."

Halfon is known for giving his fellow Conservative MPs a rough ride at times. Maybe not for much longer!





# HEADTEACHER

Required for September 2022

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

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

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

We go above and beyond for our staff, and are proud to work alongside Mind, having achieved their workplace Gold Award in 2020-2021 for 'successfully embedding mental health into our policies

and practices, demonstrating a long-term and in-depth commitment to staff mental health'. Informal visits in advance of application are welcomed.

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

**Closing date for applications: 9am on Monday 28 February 2022**

**Interviews will be held: Thursday 3 & Friday 4 March 2022**

**(We reserve the right to close the vacancy if we have sufficient applications)**

Wycombe High School and WHSAT are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. The successful applicant will be subject to a disclosure of criminal records at an enhanced level and must provide proof of the right to work in the UK.

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**Launceston College  
Multi Academy Trust**

## Chief Executive Officer

Launceston College Multi Academy Trust is made up of six distinct and unique schools located in beautiful, coastal and moorland settings in Cornwall and North Devon. We are immensely proud of the educational settings within our Trust.

Our vision is to develop adventurous and ambitious students, who have the character, resilience and self-awareness required to be successful, whatever their background or circumstances. We seek to teach and support them to be responsible as well as happy and successful young people by learning the knowledge, skills and values that are essential for society.

We are looking for an exceptional leader, who has a passion for education and who will work to achieve excellent progress for all the young people in our care and who will foster our culture of achievement, improvement and wellbeing.

### The main purpose of the job:

- Reporting directly to the Trust Board, the CEO will lead the delivery of the Trustees' strategic and operational vision, putting pupil and student outcomes at the heart of everything they do.



- The CEO will be responsible for overseeing and working with our strong and dedicated team of Principals to ensure the continued improvement of educational standards, equality of access and achievement for all, and effective use of resources across the Trust.

**This role is full time, 37 hours on a permanent basis.**

**Salary: L33-L43 (£92,624 - £117,197)**

**Closing date is Sunday, 23rd January 2022.**

If you would like to learn more about this position, or would like to apply, please visit our website: [www.launceston-college.cornwall.sch.uk/vacancies/](http://www.launceston-college.cornwall.sch.uk/vacancies/) to access the CEO applicant pack.

### Safeguarding Statement:

Our Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. All posts are subject to DBS clearance and appropriate pre-employment checks.



## Principal The John Roan School, Greenwich



**Closing date: 6th February 2022**

**Interview dates: 2nd and 3rd March 2022**

**Start date: September 2022**

**Salary: Competitive salary and benefits package**

The John Roan School has a long and distinguished history of educating the young people of Greenwich since its founding in 1677. Today the school remains at the heart of the community, and is part of United Learning, a successful national group of academies and independent schools.

The John Roan School is brimming with potential, and we are looking for a principal with a clear vision, the focus to drive improvement at pace and shares the Trust's determination to do their best for young people.

The position is a great match for someone with the highest expectations, determination, resilience, audacity and compassion in equal measure. We are seeking substantial and sustainable improvements under the leadership of a principal committed to the long-term success of The John Roan School's pupils and community.

The school is also part of a cluster with two other Southeast London United Learning schools, Bacon's College, in Southwark and Sedgemoor Academy, in Lewisham.

Find out more and apply <https://unitedlearning.our-careers.co.uk/>



## Assistant Headteacher

- **Salary:** Competitive
- **Closing date:** Tuesday 18th January 2022 at 12pm
- **Interview date:** w/c Monday 24th January 2022

What is precipitation?

Precipitation is any liquid or frozen water that falls from the atmosphere and falls back to the Earth. It comes in many forms like rain, snow, sleet, and hail.



The New Wave Federation consists of 3 high performing and innovative primary schools in Hackney, London. We aim to provide the best possible primary education in a stimulating and creative environment. The Federation has been awarded Apple Distinguished School Status, which recognises our commitment to innovation through technology.

We are seeking to appoint a Federation Assistant Headteacher to work in our schools and join the Senior Leadership Team. All three schools are in close proximity to one another. Grazebrook is in the Stoke Newington area, Shacklewell is in the Dalston Kingsland area and Woodberry Down Primary School is at Manor House.

In our Federation we have a passion for high standards and we want all our children to achieve their potential and be inspired to go beyond that. This role involves overseeing the curriculum in all our schools. You will have a principle base school however as an employee of the New Wave Federation we may request you work across the schools depending on the needs of the Federation.

**HOW TO APPLY:** Application packs are available from the Federation Business Manager, Ms Alia Choudhry on [achoudhry@newwavefederation.co.uk](mailto:achoudhry@newwavefederation.co.uk)





## Online Leadership Performance Coaches and Mentors

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

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

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

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

### Roles

**Online Leadership Mentor – NPQ Specialist Route**

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

**Location:** Remote

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

**Salary/fee:** Competitive

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

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

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



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**£4000**

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