



A 'strong trust' must be more than just good grades



P23

DfE's £1bn 'savings' claim slammed



P12

Headteacher mental health crisis must be top priority



P20-22

## Flagship ECF reforms unleash recruitment risks



Investigation, page 5-6

## Heads plan Covid isolation rooms so symptomatic kids can take exams

- 'Ambiguous' guidance leaves leaders playing Covid guessing game as tests return
- Heads develop own plans to stop exams chaos amid no testing and anxious kids
- 'It's the blind leading the blind, but we're trying to find most equitable solutions'

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR\_93

PAGE 4

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### Formative assessment: How you can take part in promising research

Page 29



### House of Commons Education Committee

### Education select committee: meet the new members

Page 16



### White paper: More questions than answers for LA schools

Page 24



### How Ofsted's narrow curriculum harms us all

Page 26

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## NEWS

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# The return of exams: 'Ambiguous' Covid rules leave heads on their own (again)

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

EXCLUSIVE

Headteachers are planning to set up separate isolation rooms so pupils with Covid symptoms can take their exams, as "ambiguous" guidance again forces them to find their own solutions.

Summer exams begin next month for the first time since the Covid pandemic. But leaders warn the end of free testing, unclear guidance and heightened anxiety among pupils leave schools facing a "logistical nightmare". *Schools Week* investigates...

## What the guidance says

The Joint Council for Qualifications published guidance earlier this month on exams. It urged schools to follow UKHSA guidance, which states pupils who test positive for Covid should be encouraged to isolate for three days. Those who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay home and return when well enough.

However, those with mild symptoms should be advised to attend and sit exams.

But crucially, as free testing has now ended, heads fear the rules leave them and pupils playing a guessing game as to whether they may have Covid.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said positive pupils unable to access tests risks "transmission to other students and invigilators".

JCQ had no details on the powers schools have to stop pupils attending. When asked, the government pointed us to UKHSA guidance on schools dealing with infectious diseases. It states if a child has symptoms a school "can take the decision to refuse a child if, in your reasonable judgment, it is necessary to protect others".

UKHSA confirmed to *Schools Week* this applies only to pupils who feel unwell and have a high temperature.

## 'Blind leading the blind'

Vic Goddard, co-principal of Passmores Academy, in Essex, said: "It feels like the blind leading the blind, but all we're trying to do is give the most equitable solution for the young person."



He is considering allowing Covid-positive pupils to attend school to complete their exams in a separate setting.

Many classrooms have full-glass panel sides meaning there are "plenty of rooms where we could put a kid inside and sit outside and still supervise". Decisions would be on a case-by-case basis, and balancing the implications of the pupil coming into school versus missing the test.

Pupils who miss exams are eligible for "special consideration". But they will only be awarded grades if they have "completed one whole component within the specification".

Dr Paul Heery, chief executive at White Hills Park Trust, said he could understand ill pupils insisting on sitting exams as "their futures could well be damaged by missing the exam".

He is looking at letting symptomatic pupils take exams in separate rooms as "there is so little guidance... We're really in the dark."

Gaynor Cheshire, chief executive of The BOA Group academy trust, is considering a similar system, adding "ambiguity" around advice leave schools "just preparing for the unknown".

## Gaming fears

Under the guidance, pupils who miss an exam due to Covid are not required to provide evidence of a positive test.

Tim Marston, headteacher at Wreake Valley and The Roundhill academies in Leicester, said the decision was "an extreme example as to why the lack of free testing is bonkers". It provided an

opportunity for pupils to game the system and risks "invalidating another set of grades".

Goddard said most pupils wouldn't consider this, warning "the only people that would encourage gaming would be schools".

But Barton added the lack of available tests "creates the unhelpful perception that the system is vulnerable to abuse".

ASCL has said it "cannot understand" why free testing has not been brought back. It was the "obvious" solution.

The DfE says where a school "suspects the authenticity" of a pupil's eligibility for special consideration, they should "investigate the matter as suspected candidate malpractice".

## Struggles to secure invigilators

Meanwhile, schools are also struggling to source invigilators. Over four in five of 1,000 exam officers surveyed by the National Association of Examinations Officers (NAEO) had a shortage.

Leaders usually rely on retirees, who are less willing this year because of potential Covid spread.

Pepe Di'Iasio, headteacher at Wales High School in Rotherham, has doubled his school's invigilator workforce to provide "more flexibility". He filled the posts with university students after advertising at nearby University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University.

The number of rooms set aside for pupils with special needs or mental health issues will increase from two to six due to the high numbers of pupils reporting anxiety and feeling uncomfortable in "traditional exam conditions", he added.

The headteacher anticipates up to "half a dozen" pupils also completing their exams at home due to Covid anxieties – a scenario that would normally occur "once every three years".

Under the Equality Act 2010 schools are expected to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils. He added: "We will make sure we accommodate those pupils suffering with mental health issues to ensure we can reassure them we are giving them the best chance to perform."

It leaves him facing "a logistical nightmare" as the school overhauls its normal timetable to keep the areas quiet.



NEWS

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# ECF reforms risk heads snubbing new teachers

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Nearly half of primary heads are considering taking on fewer early career teachers because of issues with flagship reforms, with new mentors working at weekends to complete training.

The early career framework was rolled out nationwide in September, giving new teachers extra training time across two years and a mentor in a bid to improve recruitment and retention.

But polling by Teacher Tapp has uncovered just 14 per cent of early career teachers and nine per cent of mentors think the training is a good use of time.

Most say it has added "a lot" to their workload, with one training provider admitting mentors are completing training in the evenings and on Sundays.

It also found nearly half of mentors were not given additional time to work with teachers, with one in five leaders saying they were not giving extra time for the role.

The mentor time-off timetable is funded by government and is a statutory duty.

More than one-third of school leaders now say they may take in fewer early career teachers in the future, which rises to 46 per cent among primary heads.

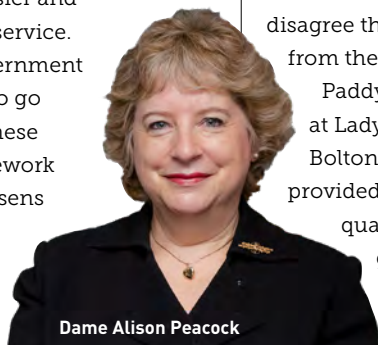
## Warning reforms could 'worsen recruitment and retention'

Dame Alison Peacock, chief executive at the Chartered College of Teaching, said the results were "alarming".

Amid complaints of huge workload pressures and reforms being a "straitjacket", Schools Week revealed ministers promised more flexibility. Changes included making registering teachers easier and simplifying the digital service.

But Peacock said government "needs to be prepared to go further in addressing these issues so that the framework does not falter and worsens a situation it seeks to improve".

More than 25,000



Dame Alison Peacock



teachers and 23,000 mentors are using the ECF, which was rolled out in September.

Schools minister Robin Walker said feedback had been "largely positive". But the Teacher Tapp survey of 1,400 staff – covering new teachers, mentors and school leaders – challenges the claims.

Two-thirds of new teachers disagree that they have "learned a lot" from the ECF. Only 30 per cent say the support makes them a better teacher.

Despite being designed to improve retention, 21 per cent of teachers say reforms would make them less likely to stay in the profession – the same number of teachers who say that it would make them more likely to remain.

Fifty-seven per cent of ECTs say it has added "a lot" to their workload, with 65 per cent of mentors saying the same.

While two-thirds of mentors say it has increased new teachers' knowledge, half say it repeats too much of ITT, is too prescriptive and does not meet individual teacher needs.

Two-thirds of ECTs disagree or strongly disagree that they have learned a lot from the framework.

Paddy Russell, headteacher at Ladybridge High School in Bolton, said while the materials provided to schools were "high quality", there's "just too much to get through... If there isn't the time to engage, it

just adds stress on to workload issues and defeats the purpose of trying to provide high-quality training."

But there were some more positive findings. New teachers like their mentors – with just two per cent saying they'd opt out of this. Nearly a quarter of mentors said it made them better at mentoring, and 14 per cent stated it made them a better teacher.

## Schools not giving mentors enough time

DfE funds schools to give ECTs five per cent off timetable and 20 hours of mentoring in their second year.

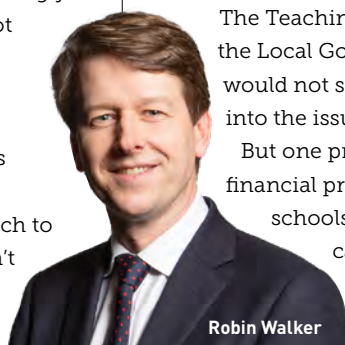
Another 36 hours of mentor time off timetable is funded by government if schools use one of its six training providers.

But 46 per cent of mentors said they had not been given additional time to work with ECTs. Twenty per cent of senior leaders admitted the same.

This is a statutory duty that should be checked by appropriate bodies, councils and teaching school hubs.

The Teaching Schools Council and the Local Government Association would not say if they had looked into the issues.

But one provider, Teach First, said financial pressures were hindering schools, who have to stump the cash upfront before being reimbursed at the end



Robin Walker

NEWS

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of year two.

Faye Craster, Teach First's director of teacher development, writing in a blog added: "Even if they did have the capital to enable them to do this, it is hard to find time and space in a busy school timetable for this."

Teach First analysis found 13 per cent of their mentors completed part of their training on a Sunday, while another 27 per cent completed it on weekday evenings.

The provider is working with schools to "understand and share best practice" for giving mentors sufficient time.

### Early days of major reforms 'always challenging'

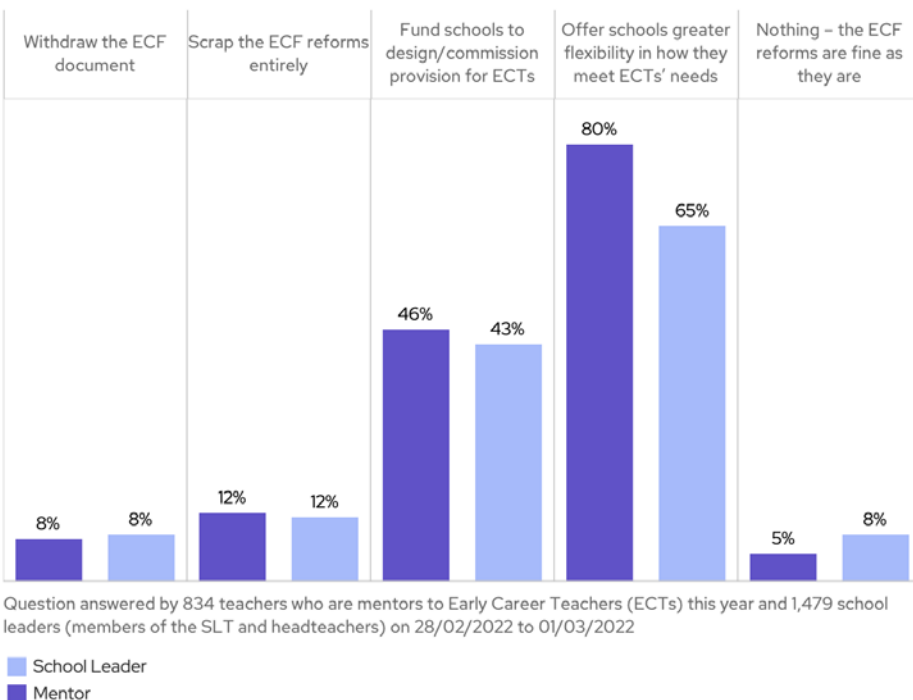
Ambition Institute, another provider, said it has updated its learning platform 136 times after feedback. They will also invest in more subject specificity training from September.

Its own survey, of 1,900 participants, found 80 per cent of ECTs and 75 per cent of mentors were satisfied with the programme.

Tom Rees, Ambition's executive director of programmes, said the first term of any "major implementation is always the most challenging. By listening first-hand from teachers where there are concerns, alongside schools and trusts who are implementing it successfully, we've been able to make adaptations and are continuing to listen to feedback."

But the fall-out is already risking future recruitment. Seventeen per cent of primary school leaders will "definitely" take fewer trainees or ECTs in future, with another 29

### You wake to find yourself transformed into the education minister. Which of these do you do?



## 'The first term of any major implementation is always the most challenging'

per cent saying they "may" take those steps.

This was lower at secondary, with nine per cent definitely planning to take in fewer new teachers, and 19 per cent saying it is a possibility.

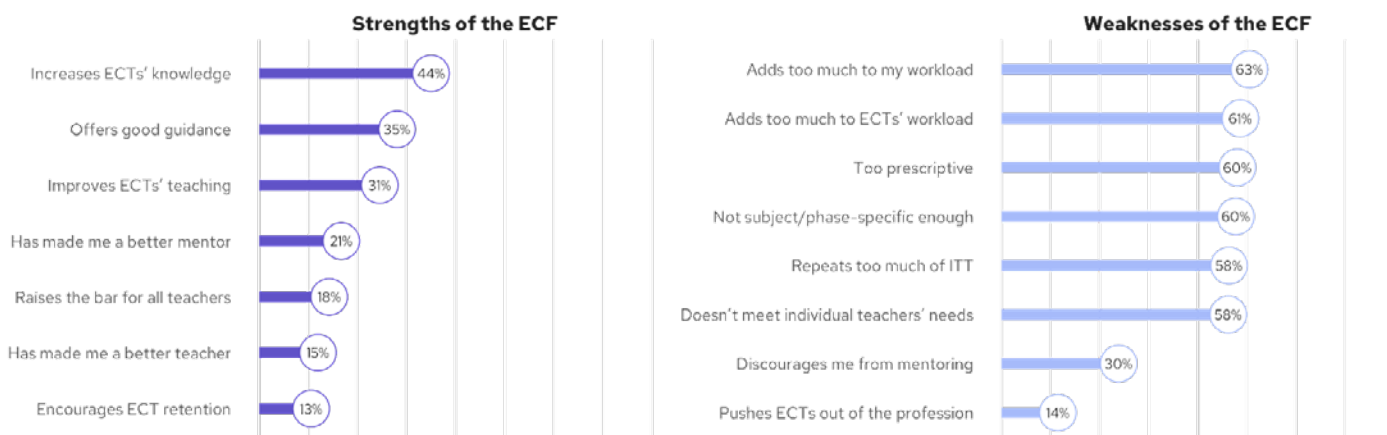
Just 12 per cent of mentors and school leaders thought the ECF should be scrapped entirely. Instead, 80 per cent of

mentors believe schools should be given greater flexibility in how they meet ECT's needs.

A DfE spokesperson said it is "conducting extensive evaluation" and "initial feedback from teachers has been broadly positive about the structured training and support it provides"

### What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Early Career Framework?

Question answered by 1,041 teachers who are mentors to early career teachers (ECTs) this year



## NEWS



## DfE prepares for post-Covid exodus of teachers

**TOM BELGER**  
@TOM\_BELGER

The Department for Education has hiked its recruitment targets for trainee teachers, saying it expects a post-Covid exodus of existing staff.

Ministers will be hoping cuts to initial teacher training (ITT) bursaries and some early-career bonuses – enacted after the shortlived Covid boost in training applications – do not come back to bite them. Post-Brexit reforms will also make it harder to recruit EU staff.

The government estimates 32,600 people will need to start post-graduate ITT courses in the next academic year to meet schools' needs the following year.

The newly published figures mark an increase of 1,570 teachers on last year's targets, including 855 more at primary and 715 at secondary level.

Ministers met their secondary teacher recruitment target for the first time in eight years during the Covid boom in 2020, but missed it again in 2021, when it recruited just a quarter of the physics teachers it needed.

The DfE said the main reason for raising its goals was an "increase in the number of teachers forecast to leave the workforce" in the next two years.

The numbers leaving the profession fell to their lowest level on record in 2020-21, but the DfE expects a "post-pandemic rebound" as some teachers who put off their decision to leave "will actually do so".

Teacher training organisations accused the government of "failing to take a long-term view" when it slashed £130 million from bursaries in late 2020.

Nick Gibb, then schools minister, said at the time that a significant rise in applications in 2020 showed teaching remained "an attractive proposition", but Covid is widely seen to have fuelled the rise.

For next year, target numbers have increased for physics, computing, English, modern

languages, geography, history, and design and technology.

The biggest jump is in modern languages, up 42.2 per cent to 2,140 trainees. The DfE said this was to compensate for two years of below-target recruitment, "the first time we have made such an adjustment".

It comes a day after research showed salary top-ups can boost teacher retention – just as the government prepares to revive early-career bonuses in maths, physics and chemistry, but not languages.

Its main incentive scheme was axed in 2020 alongside the bursary cuts, which included a 62 per cent cut to languages grants.

*Schools Week* also previously reported on Brexit's impact on overseas recruitment, with about a third of secondary language teachers EU nationals. New EU staff now need sponsorship, face costly visa and NHS fees, and no longer qualify for capped tuition fees, loans or bursaries.

Such hurdles threaten to undermine ministers' hopes of 90 per cent of year 10 pupils entering the EBacc by 2025, with the government admitting that low take-up of languages was the "primary barrier" to achieving its aim.

But recruitment targets have been cut for maths, biology, chemistry, classics, art & design, business studies, drama, music, physical education and religious education.

Maths faces the biggest decline with 760 fewer trainees thought needed, despite the DfE not meeting targets last year. But it said this was "more than offset" by increased returners, more staff "new to the state sector being recruited" and more maths trainees immediately entering teaching.

Recruitment has been capped for physical education in 2022-23, but targets can be exceeded for other subjects.

The DfE said targets were based partly on pupil number projections. But it also factors in expected "short-term increases in post-pandemic leaver rates" and economic growth forecasts.

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## Retention bonuses work, study suggests

**TOM BELGER**  
@TOM\_BELGER

Retention bonuses for new maths and physics teachers make them 23 per cent more likely to stay in the profession after two years, suggests a new study.

Researchers say the findings show retention payments can help to solve recruitment shortages, just as the government plans to revive them as part of its "levelling up" agenda.

But the study found more than one in five new teachers eligible for the salary top-up still left the profession, with experts noting the high salaries offered elsewhere to maths and science graduates.

Boris Johnson faced criticism when he announced a rehashed version of retention payments last year after scrapping a previous scheme in 2020. He promised up to £3,000 tax-free for maths, physics, chemistry and computing teachers, although details remain unclear.

The new research, for the Gatsby Foundation and conducted by Sam Sims and Asma Benhenda of University College London, looked at the £2,000 retention payments offered to some maths and physics teachers between 2018 and 2020.

Only 22 per cent of the maths teachers left within two years, compared with 27 per cent of their peers who did not receive a payment.

The government recruited 22 per cent of the required physics teachers last year – the lowest on record. Maths stood at 95 per cent of the target.

Jenni French, the programme director at the Gatsby Foundation, said payments were "cost-effective", with retention of staff almost a third cheaper than replacement.

US research indicates retention slips to normal levels once recipients' payments end.



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## NEWS

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# Director at criticised council wins DfE contract to help others improve

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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A former council official who worked for a local authority criticised by inspectors for "serious weaknesses" in special needs support will advise other councils on how to improve.

The Department for Education has appointed 13 new SEND advisers, on salaries of £90,000, to act as "critical friends" to "support and challenge" councils.

They will focus on areas judged by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission to require a written statement of action for their SEND services.

One of the advisers is Judith Mobbs, who was appointed assistant director for inclusion at Suffolk Council after a damning SEND inspection in 2017.

The council was handed a written statement in January of that year after inspectors found services were "disjointed" and parents felt they had to "fight" for full recognition of their children's needs.

But two years later, inspectors visited again and found leaders had not made "sufficient



progress" to fix the "serious weaknesses".

The watchdogs said the "timeliness" of completed assessments and education, health and care plans had improved, but was "too slow for too many". The quality of education, health and care plans were "too inconsistent" and "too weak".

Steven Wright, a parent campaigner on SEND in Suffolk, said they were "stunned" at the appointment, adding: "It makes you question how DfE selected these advisers."

However, the Ofsted report did point out sufficient progress had been made in governance and leadership by forging "strong" links with services and "radically transforming" services.

Mobbs left the council in April last year. Suffolk has not had another inspection since 2019.

A Department for Education spokesperson said all advisers "have demonstrated the necessary skills, knowledge and experience relevant to the role and will support the department's aim to level up SEND delivery across the country".

The DfE provided a comment on Mobbs' behalf.

Other advisers include Dr Kevin Rowland, a chartered educational psychologist, and Cath Hitchen, a former assistant director at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

Advisers will provide progress reports to government to ensure the "pace of improvement is appropriate".

They will be expected to "align" their support with the SEND review, published last month.

The contracts have an initial term of 12 months, with an option to extend for two more years.

Schools Week has previously revealed how parents in Suffolk spent thousands challenging the council at tribunal over SEND support, with one mother diagnosed with cancer using her life insurance.

We also reported in 2019 how schools faced having to fire staff after the council bungled the introduction of a new "banding" system for high-needs pupils.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

## Government adviser wins £50,000 contract to ease SEND deficits

A government adviser has won a £50,000 government contract to help negotiate bailouts for councils with large high-needs deficits.

Tony McArdle is a director at Priora Consulting Limited that will provide financial advice to local authorities as part of the safety valve intervention programme.

The DfE has already reached deals with 14 councils to secure bailouts totalling about £400 million in exchange for sweeping reforms to authorities' SEND support.

The government cash, which aims to ease high-needs funding deficits estimated at £2.3 billion, comes with strings attached.

McArdle, a former chief executive of the Lincolnshire County Council, was an independent

adviser to the SEND review and sat on the review's steering group. He is also the chair of the SEND system leadership board, set up by Nadhim Zahawi when he was children's minister.

The contract said Priora would be required to provide advice on the "strategy, structure and management of negotiations" through the safety valve scheme.

It would also give the DfE advice on "the leadership of local authorities" in the programme. The DfE would work on 20 new negotiations with councils in 2022-23, the contract added.

Priora was awarded the contract without competition under a process known as "single tender action", as it was below the £138,760

threshold.

In 2020, the *Northamptonshire Telegraph* reported how a company linked to McArdle won a multi-million pound contract with Northampton County Council, where he was lead commissioner at the time.

The council said he always left the room when the company's work was discussed.

He also wrote an "introduction" to DfE guidance published last year on "learning from the 'safety valve' programme". He said the scheme "demonstrated just how quickly good leadership and genuine collaboration across education and finance can identify suitable and innovative solutions".

McArdle was contacted for comment.

## EXPLAINER

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# DfE finalises climate plan: need to know

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@FCDWHITTAKER

The government's climate change strategy for education includes plans for a new natural history GCSE, no single-use plastics in schools and hints at digital testing.

The final version was published yesterday. A draft came out in November, launched at the COP26 conference in Glasgow.

Many of the policies confirmed in the final document are those already outlined in November. But here is what's new ...

## 1. Natural history GCSE

A natural history GCSE by 2025 will give pupils a "further opportunity to engage with and develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the natural world".

"In studying this GCSE, young people will explore organisms and environments in more depth, gain knowledge and practical experience of fieldwork and develop a greater understanding of conservation."

It will not count towards the EBacc, but will in the "open" bucket of subjects for Progress 8.

## 2. 'Sustainability' lead in every school ...

Every education setting will have nominated a "sustainability lead" by 2025.

They will be responsible for putting in place climate action plans, also by 2025.

There is little extra detail.

## 3. ... and carbon literacy training

Carbon literacy training for at least one person in each school will start to be rolled out next year.

The training will build knowledge of climate change, as well as how to access public funds and engage with schemes such as the nature park and climate leader's award.

It will also help trained staff understand emissions reporting and how to develop a climate action plan to share in their school.



## 4. Schools to report emissions by 2024

The final document gives more details on the draft strategy pledge for a smart meter trial in schools.

The government will work with Energy Sparks this year and next to trial the delivery of energy management systems in schools, providing real-time information on energy use on a "user-friendly online portal".

The government will work with energy providers to receive data directly from the school estate (unless schools opt out).

The aim is to have all schools reporting their emissions via a standardised framework by 2024. The installation of smart meters will "improve the accuracy" of the data.

## 5. DfE to develop 'sustainable tests'

Working in partnership with the Standards and Testing Agency (STA), the DfE has said it will develop a "sustainable assessment model".

This work will consider the "environmental impact of digital testing and the trade-offs with existing testing methods".

The STA is responsible for overseeing testing in primary schools, including SATs.

Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, has previously said he was "considering the potential" of online exams.

## 6. Annual climate literacy survey

The government will this year introduce a new annual climate literacy survey to "benchmark progress in improving the climate knowledge of school leavers".

No further details have been published.

## 7. 'Let's Go Zero' targets

The paper commits to new targets for schools between 2025 and 2035 as part of the "Let's Go Zero" campaign. But there is little detail about what these will entail.

The campaign's website says that it will unite "teachers, pupils, parents and their schools as they all work together to be zero carbon by 2030".

It pledges to work with the government to support schools to reach the goal through seven policy actions, including investing in training, adapting and retro-fitting the school estate, improving building specifications and other measures.

## 8. No more single-use plastics

The DfE has said it will eradicate single-use plastics by 2025 and "encourage the use of reusable and recyclable materials in schools".

It has not said how this will be achieved.

## 9. Annual progress reports

Annual progress reports will be published, supported by the annual climate literacy survey and several other measures.

These include...

- a published risk assessment of flood, overheating and water scarcity of the education estate, reviewed annually from 2023
- information on the biodiversity of schools, baselined by 2023 to allow annual progress reporting
- data about on-site emissions, baselined by 2024, and progress against national targets published from 2025 onwards

## What's been dropped

The draft strategy proposed that the DfE and all its arms-length bodies mandate that suppliers bidding for £5 million-plus contracts commit to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, and requiring them to publish a "carbon reduction plan" showing how they will meet the target.

This pledge does not feature in the final strategy.



## NEWS

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## TV producer 'wouldn't let go' of new nature GCSE

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Mary Colwell, a 25-year veteran of the BBC natural history unit, has long been worried that the nation's historic skills in recording natural history have slowly been disappearing among "increasingly disconnected" younger generations.

Her solution? A new GCSE, specifically on nature.

"It's very hard for someone not in education to get into the system," the television producer told Schools Week. But it was an idea she "wouldn't let go of".

She first thought of the new exam 11 years ago and in 2017 launched a petition that received 10,000 signatures. But the Department for Education, then led by education secretary Justine Greening, shot down the idea, saying it "was covered in the current national curriculum".

It's rare for new GCSEs to be approved, in recent years at least. In the previous parliament – until December 2019 – there was a ban on approving new GCSEs following widespread reforms.

But Colwell is not afraid to put in the hard yards (she walked 500 miles across the UK and Ireland to raise awareness of the decline of curlews, a large European wading bird).

The pivotal moment came in 2018 when Green Party MP Caroline Lucas offered her support, before sharing the vision with Tim Oates, the director of assessment research and development at Cambridge Assessment, which owns exam board OCR.

The three-strong team helped to write a model specification for a potential exam, running a consultation during the pandemic.

This week, the government backed OCR's proposals, announcing as part of a new sustainability and climate strategy that it will "aim" to get the GCSE up and running so pupils can take it from 2025.

Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, said it would offer young people "a chance to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding" of the Earth, its environment and "how we can come together to conserve it".



Mary Colwell

Colwell hopes "first and foremost", it will help connect young people back to the natural world.

**Specification overlap 'not a problem'**

The model specification, which suggests what the qualification should look like, outlines how pupils would be able to understand "specific organisms and the setting in which they live". They would also learn about the human impact on the environment and how this has evolved.

Oates said it was "very carefully developed" to ensure that overlap with other subjects such as sciences and geography "wouldn't be a problem".

The specification says natural history has a "unique mix of scientific, geographical and ecological knowledge, skills and approaches", with learning outcomes "very different" to those of biology or geography.

For example, while those two subjects include knowledge of habitats and components, natural history would expect "first-hand experience" of habitats through observation and research.

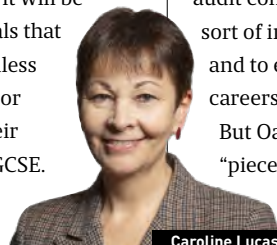
Fieldwork forms a "significant" part of the GCSE, with children learning from their local wildlife and environment, as well as global examples.

But the specification states it will be critical to provide materials that allow any teacher "regardless of geographical location or financial resources of their school" to deliver the GCSE.

Marianne



Tim Oates



Caroline Lucas

Cutler, the curriculum innovation director at the Association for Science Education, said a "significant proportion" of teachers would "lack some confidence" in fieldwork, so must be supported.

But Mark Castle, the chief executive of the Field Studies Council, said it was not just older pupils who should get the chance to explore the natural world.

"We must encourage children to be curious and passionate about the natural world from a young age so that they can make informed choices about how they protect it as they grow and develop. We will continue to campaign for this," he said.

**'Implementation is key'**

The DfE and Ofqual will now have to consult and agree on the subject content before Ofqual accredits exam boards' specifications and assessment materials. Schools will have a year lead-in time.

Cutler said implementation would be key. She also called for "clearly identified pathways" from primary to post-16 on what students could use the qualification for.

Philip Dunne, chair of the environmental audit committee, said it was "exactly the right sort of intervention" to make lasting change and to encourage young people to choose careers in ecology and nature.

But Oates is clear: the qualification is a "piece of a complex jigsaw" on increasing sustainability within education.

## NEWS

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## Academics question DfE's 'shameful' £1 billion savings boast

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

A union boss had branded the government as "shameful" for its declared victory on an "ambition" to cut £1 billion from school spending.

A recent report by the Department for Education says its "ambition to save £1 billion in non-staff spending has been achieved".

A resource management strategy aimed at saving costs was launched in 2018.

It included a teacher vacancy website, supply agency reforms and an expansion of deals, benchmarking tools and regional buying hubs. It also put forward a school resource management adviser scheme and highlighted controversial national funding formula reforms.

The new study said the sector had spent £1.1 billion less on non-staff costs than "if schools had not changed their spending behaviour".

It says non-staff spending fell from £12.7 billion in 2015-16, to £12.1 billion in 2019-20.

It argued that if there had not been changes, per-pupil spending would have stayed at £1,650, the 2015-16 level, and budgets would have spiralled as pupil numbers increased.

"Without a change it would have steadily risen to £13.3 billion," it said.

But Luke Sibieta, a research fellow at the



Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), said the period had been one of budget cuts, making falling spending "entirely unsurprising".

"To say this counts as a 'saving' is a bit cheeky. Schools would have had to make cuts somewhere."

IFS research last year highlighted budget cuts "without precedent in post-war UK history", with per-pupil spending falling 9 per cent in real terms in the decade to 2019.

Sibieta said not all cuts merited the term "saving". "Finding a better deal on your energy or photocopying would definitely be savings, but cutting lunch portions or reduced training for staff would not be."

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said it was "shameful that the DfE is proud of the cuts", highlighting rising class sizes.

A survey published by the NASUWT union last week found three-quarters of member teachers reported larger classes.

Jon Andrews, the head of

analysis at the Education Policy Institute, said it was "unclear" whether the lower figures represented "genuine efficiency savings, or is simply cost-cutting that could end up having an adverse impact".

Sibieta said the department's decision to include 2019-20 figures was "eyebrow-raising".

Academy data used in the study runs up to September 2020 – and therefore includes several months of partial school closures because of Covid.

Sibieta said this helped to cut energy, catering, book and training costs. *Schools Week* previously highlighted multimillion-pound improvements in some large trusts' finances linked to such savings.

Susan Acland-Hood, the DfE's permanent secretary, in January acknowledged "most types of non-staff spend" had fallen in 2019-20, more than offsetting extra Covid costs such as IT and cleaning.

DfE claims about its cost-cutting consultants have also proved contentious, with one telling a school to limit pupils'

lunch sizes. The government said it had saved £35 million in 2018, but later admitted to only £4.9 million.

A DfE spokesperson said the £1.1 billion reduction showed the sector's "achievements" managing resources. It pledged to continue helping secure "best value" for schools.

Luke Sibieta

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## DfE investigated over academy success claims

Government claims about the effectiveness of academy trusts to back up its white paper reforms are under investigation by the statistics watchdog.

The UK Statistics Authority is investigating a complaint by the National Education Union on data in the Department for Education's "case for a fully trust-led system", published alongside the schools white paper. Ministers want all schools to be in "strong" trusts by 2030.

NEU's joint general secretary Kevin Courtney said the report was a "disgraceful, deliberate misuse of statistics and the deliberate suppression of relevant data".

The government claimed moving underperforming schools into academy trusts had been "transformative", with more than seven in ten sponsored academies now rated 'good' or 'outstanding'. This compared to around one in ten local authority-maintained schools they replaced.

But the NEU said Ofsted grades had been "systematically misrepresented", and did not take account of schools that have converted since their last inspection.

Its own analysis found that that 90 per cent of maintained schools previously rated less than good improved to 'good' or 'outstanding', compared to 74 per cent of sponsored

academies.

The union has written to "every councillor, every head teacher, every chair of governors to tell the truth about what the statistics show".

"We defeated Nicky Morgan's white paper six years ago. And we are fighting this white paper's plan for all schools to join MATs now," Courtney added.

Addressing the union's annual conference in Bournemouth last week, joint general secretary Dr Mary Bousted said the "only way that the government can justify its obsession with academies and MATs is for it to deceive".

DfE did not respond to a request for comment.

## NEWS

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# Warning notices issued to growing trusts

FREDDIE WHITTAKER &amp; JAMES CARR

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Ministers must ensure academy trust growth is “secure and sustainable”, leaders have warned, after two recently expanded trusts received school performance warnings.

Katherine Cowell, the regional schools commissioner for the north of England, has issued termination warning notices to Hope Sentamu Learning Trust over Barlby High School, and to Ebor Academy Trust for Ebor Academy Filey.

Both North Yorkshire schools were placed in special measures in November, with the warning notices published last week. The notices can lead to academies moving to new sponsors.

Hope Sentamu trust is made up of 15 schools and was formed through the merger this year of the former Sentamu Academy Learning Trust and the Hope Learning Trust. Of Hope’s original ten schools, six, including Barlby, joined since 2017.

Ebor Academy Trust has 24 schools, 15 joining in the past five years.

The government wants all schools in “strong” trusts by 2030, and “expects” most trusts to work towards having ten schools, or 7,500 pupils.

Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the ASCL leaders’ union, said the expansion envisaged by ministers must be “secure and sustainable”.



She warned the DfE’s target must not lead to “expectations being placed on trusts to expand at a pace and scale which is unrealistic”.

Inspectors criticised safeguarding at Barlby High School. They said governors and trustees “do not know what behaviour is like in the school”.

A spokesperson for Hope Sentamu trust said the new organisation’s academies “are benefiting from increased size and scale”, adding that the trust was “working exceptionally hard” to improve Barlby High. Two new experienced senior leaders and other specialist staff have been appointed.

When Ebor Academy Filey was placed in special measures, inspectors said the trust had “identified that the trust does not have the necessary experience of secondary education to be able to provide the support that the school needs to improve”.

Ebor has already agreed to transfer the school to the Coast and Vale Learning Trust, but Cowell said she had issued the warning because she

was “concerned that there is a need for swift improvements”.

Gail Brown, the chief executive of the Ebor Trust, said Filey joined in 2015 when the trust was hoping to recruit more secondary schools. But none joined, and in 2019 Ebor began discussions with the regional schools commissioner about finding a new trust for the school.

This would be “better for the school and the community”, Brown said, adding that her trust had “expanded by focusing on the primary phase”.

The government has been criticised for allowing some trusts to grow too quickly. In two high-profile cases, ministers had to “pause” the growth of E-ACT and the Academies Enterprise Trust, both prominent chains.

Alice Gregson, the executive director of Forum Strategy, warned that a “race towards bigger numbers of schools joining trusts, without a sufficient focus on capacity building and organisational sustainability, is a huge risk”.

However, she said that medium and smaller trusts had “huge potential”.

“Providing these trusts with the necessary investment and doing more to signpost them to the support that already exists, means they too can grow sustainably, realise their potential and play an even bigger role in serving their communities.”

The DfE was approached for comment.

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## Poor turnout for RSC adviser elections

Just a quarter of academy leaders voted in recent elections for advisers who oversee the sector.

New figures show a turnout of 25.7 per cent in the regional school commissioner (RSC) adviser elections.

Turnout varied across regions, however, from 46.2 per cent in the north to just 20.5 per cent in Lancashire and West Yorkshire.

England’s 9,786 academies at the time of the poll late last year could vote for up to four candidates to fill posts in each of eight regions.

But only 2,517 school or trust leaders

used their vote, selecting an average of 2.3 candidates each. Six candidates received fewer than ten votes.

The turnout is far lower than the 2019 general election (67.3 per cent), European parliament elections (37.6 per cent) and 2021 police commissioner polls (33.2 per cent).

Dame Maura Regan, the chief executive of the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust and a national leader of education, secured the most votes at 140.

Tim Coulson, the chief executive of the Unity Schools Partnership and a former RSC, was second with 90

votes.

Winners’ names were initially released without vote numbers or turnout. Breakdowns were only published recently after a freedom of information request by *Schools Week*.

An unusual mid-election boundary shake-up delayed the results, and resulted in 38 winners declared in nine regions rather than the 32 expected in eight regions. All but eight winners will serve altered areas from September.



Dame Maura Regan



## EXPLAINER

## Eight things Zahawi told the education committee this week

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi appeared in front of the parliamentary education committee on Wednesday. Here's what we learned..

## 1 Academy reforms 'could completely close attainment gap'

The attainment gap between poorer pupils and their better-off peers has started to widen in recent years, exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.

Zahawi said proposed reforms to move all schools in to "high-performing" trusts held the key to narrowing the gap again.

"I think we know what the ingredients are to get it to close," he claimed. "I'm confident if I can deliver this white paper, we will absolutely make a big dent in that gap, if not close it completely."

## 2 Schools should be 'unashamedly' patriotic

Zahawi was asked by Conservative committee member Tom Hunt whether he shared the view that young people should be "proud to be British and that on the whole, we're a force for good".

Hunt said he would like to see patriotism "promoted in our schools unashamedly".

Zahawi said he "absolutely" shared Hunt's view, adding: "In my view this is the greatest country on earth.

"Our values, British values, being taught in schools are incredibly important", he said, adding that it was "heartening" to visit schools and see them making a "big deal" of British values.

## 3 Six-month target for failing schools

The schools white paper proposed new standards for academy trusts, along with new statutory intervention powers. This includes schools with successive less than 'good' Ofsted grades.

Andrew McCully, the DfE's director general for schools, said the new powers and increased capacity in other trusts mean "we can do that [intervene] increasingly quickly. The objective of an underperforming school is to do that within five to six months."

Many schools were left for years without intervention, including one waiting for over a decade (see story on page 14).

## 4 Council MATs could be allowed in areas with strong trusts

The white paper proposes letting councils found academy trusts, but only in areas "where too few strong trusts exist".

However, Zahawi said he was "open-minded" when asked whether councils in areas with high-performing trusts would be prevented from setting up their own.

"I just don't believe that it's fair to exclude a high-performing local authority that is delivering great outcomes for students from this journey," Zahawi added.

## 5 Zahawi to publish reforms timeline

Zahawi wants to publish an "operational chart" of timelines for the delivery of reforms. He held up a document but did not say when this would be released.

"I've done the policy making, but operationally I want to publish so that your committee can see, the world can see, what our targets are and our timelines for delivery against this.

"It's what I did on vaccines because data and transparency is my ally on this journey."

Academy reforms and the "missing children's" register may feature in this year's Queen's Speech, meaning they would be prioritised for legislation in the next parliamentary year.

## 6 Do EIAs spell the end of opportunity areas?

Since announcing 55 new "education investment areas", which include all 12 of the existing social mobility opportunity areas, the DfE has remained tight-lipped on the future of its original policy.

But Zahawi suggested the scheme would be superseded. He told MPs he didn't want "to lose all the great work" from opportunity areas, so pitched "building on" them to levelling-up secretary Michael Gove.

"So what we are doing is we are taking the best evidence of what worked in the opportunity areas and embedding it in the education investment areas."

## 7 DfE working on trans pupil support guidance

The Department for Education is working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission on new guidance on how to approach issues around sex and gender in schools.

Zahawi said new guidance will "allow the frontline to feel that they have the backing and confidence of the department to make those decisions and make them confidently by safeguarding the characteristics of minority students as well as the other children in their care".

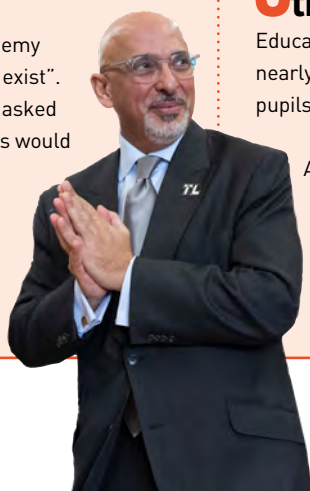
A recent YouGov poll found most teachers wanted more guidance around such issues.

## 8 DfE 'more interested' in Latin than attendance

Education committee chair Robert Halfon chided Zahawi for spending nearly the same amount on Latin in schools as boosting attendance of pupils.

The Latin excellence programme will be run by Future Academies with a £4 million contract, while a trial to mentor persistently absent pupils is to be funded with £5 million.

Zahawi said the white paper sets out "very clearly" how schools and councils should support high attendance.



## NEWS

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# School's 11-year wait for academy sponsor (should) end next month

TOM BELGER

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An "orphan" school left waiting 11 years for a sponsor is due to academise next month, as its deficit balloons to £6.3 million.

A top civil servant this week admitted that intervention in failing schools was too slow, revealing the government has a six-month target for transferring failing academies to stronger trusts.

Yet Hanson School in Bradford (pictured) is one of 44 "inadequate" schools currently waiting longer than six months to become academies, raising fresh questions about maintained schools being left behind.

While conversions for maintained schools typically take longer than transfers of failing academies, 29 'inadequate' maintained schools have been waiting at least three years to be taken over by a trust.

Ministers outlined plans last month for all schools to join "strong" academy trusts by 2030. But Howard Stephenson, a professor of education at Nottingham University, said orphan schools "won't be easy wins to improve".

He said they were an "absolutely predictable" consequence of a competition-based system, with "markets encouraging cherry-picking".

Five education secretaries have moved on since Hanson School was rated "inadequate" in 2010.

Academising such schools is a flagship Conservative policy, but three sponsors who



expressed interest walked away.

Delta Academies Trust is now set to take the school on. A spokesperson said it was "working very hard" towards a May 1 launch – but warned private finance initiative issues made transfers "complex".

PFI building and maintenance deals at Hanson and other schools have bedevilled many conversion plans over the past decade. It also faced legal issues involving on-site leisure providers.

But a Bradford council spokesperson said it has now resolved a "costly contract" by agreeing an exit settlement. This payout is a "large part" of a forecast £1.5 million increase in Hanson's deficit to £6.3 million. Councils have to foot such bills on conversion.

Hanson is one of 44 current conversion projects taking at least six months. DfE data shows 28 do not have planned sponsors, including 18 left in limbo for at least three years.

Sponsored conversion timescales were slowing even before Covid, taking 13.5 months in 2019. Conversion numbers sank to one a month in late 2021, a



record low – with Covid derailing inspections and delaying some ongoing transfers.

Andrew McCully, the Department for Education's schools director general, disclosed the "five to six-month" target to rebroker academies under questioning this week by the education select committee.

He admitted transfer times were "not good enough", but said white paper plans for tougher intervention in trusts would transform failing academies faster.

Yet it is unclear what, if any, such targets apply for "inadequate" maintained school conversions. The proposed reform will not help fix the longstanding issue of "orphan" maintained schools unwanted by sponsors.

Plans to mandate double "requires improvement" school conversions too will also increase demand for sponsors, and experts say takeover funding for trusts is insufficient.

The white paper itself acknowledged the government had not "systematically supported" strong trust growth, or "adequately incentivised" expansion in areas requiring them most.

Stephenson suggested ministers' wariness about mandating full academisation could show they "needed councils to work with schools academies didn't want". Now the government plans to allow some council-run trusts.

A DfE spokesperson said it was pleased Delta had been chosen, even if conversion had taken "longer than we would have liked". The delay is not reflective of the wider conversion process, they added.

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## Falcon takes on its third academy

The government's flagship turnaround trust has taken on its first school outside the north, notching up its third academy 19 months later than planned.

The government unveiled the Falcon Education Trust in 2019 to take on "the most challenging schools in the north", recognising reforms had left some unwanted.

The King Solomon International Business School run by the Excell3 Independent Schools Trust, a standalone free school in Birmingham, joined the trust this month.

It comes almost four years after the school was rated "inadequate", a grade issued just three years after it opened.

Excell3 received a termination warning notice in 2020.

The Christian school previously accused Ofsted of failing to consider its three years spent in temporary accommodation, which included using an "inflatable dome" as a canteen.

The all-through school is only the third school to join Falcon, and marks its first foray into primary education. Falcon has previously blamed cancelled inspections during Covid for a "lack of new pipeline schools".

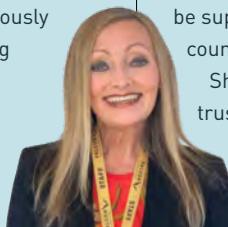
Thornaby Academy in Stockton-on-Tees joined in 2020, and Royds Academy in Leeds in 2021. It had

planned before Covid to reach three schools by September 2020.

But *Schools Week* reported in January on Falcon's widened remit to go national. It aims to quickly transform challenging schools' fortunes so other trusts will be willing to take them on.

Anne-Marie Holdsworth, Falcon's chief executive (pictured), said it will be "increasingly be supporting schools from across the country".

She highlighted its partnerships with other trusts and specialists, and said it would draw up a "bespoke plan" for King Solomon to improve outcomes "as swiftly as possible".



## POLITICS

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# How the education select committee looks now

## FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The parliamentary education committee has welcomed five new members in the past year after several MPs stood down or took front-bench jobs.

The current committee looks very different to the one formed in early 2020 following the last general election.

The political make-up of select committees is determined by representation in the Commons, with parties putting forward MPs. Membership can change frequently.

For example, Christian Wakeford recently left the committee after defecting from the Conservative to the Labour party. Tory MP and former teacher Jonathan Gullis stood down after becoming a parliamentary private secretary (PPS),

as did David Johnson, who is PPS to education secretary Nadhim Zahawi.

The Conservatives have seven MPs on the committee, while Labour has four. Chairman Robert Halfon, with original Conservative members Dr Caroline Johnson and Tom Hunt, remains, as do Labour MPs Apsana Begum, Kim Johnson and Ian Mearns.

Meet the new members...

### Anna Firth, Conservative, joined March 2022

A former councillor in Sevenoaks, Kent, Firth was elected as the MP for Southend West in a by-election in February this year following the murder of Sir David Amess.

She was the co-founder of the Invicta Academy, an online learning platform set up to provide lessons during Covid lockdowns. Invicta last year was forced to stop listing MPs, including the former education secretary Gavin Williamson and committee chair Halfon, as "sponsors".

Companies House records show Firth resigned as a director of Invicta in February.



### Miriam Cates, Conservative, joined October 2021

Elected in 2019 for the South Yorkshire seat of Penistone and Stocksbridge, Cates was once a science teacher in Sheffield.

She went on to own a technology business with her husband, and has talked about the importance of "digital skills".



### Caroline Ansell, Conservative, joined March 2022

First elected as the MP for Eastbourne, East Sussex, in 2015, Ansell lost her seat in 2017 and then regained it at the 2019 general election.

She is a former French teacher, and referred in her maiden speech to her "passion" for education.

She also served as a councillor on Eastbourne Borough Council.



### Kate Osborne, Labour, joined July 2021

Osborne has been the MP for Jarrow in Tyne and Wear since 2019.

She worked for Royal Mail for 25 years, and was a trade union representative.

She was also a councillor in Preston until her election to Parliament.



### Angela Richardson, Conservative, joined March 2022

Richardson was elected as the MP for Guildford in Surrey in 2019, replacing the former education minister Anne Milton who ran as an independent after resigning the Tory whip in protest over Brexit.

Before becoming an MP, Richardson worked in investment banking and in the City. She has been a school governor and chair of a parent-teacher association.





## NEWS

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# 50,000 tutors to be trained

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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Nearly 50,000 new tutors will be trained – including school staff – under the new £18 million National Tutoring Programme contract.

As *Schools Week* revealed, ministers are overhauling the flagship scheme so all catch-up cash goes straight to schools next year. Randstad, the HR company, will be axed from its current contract, which was worth £32 million.

The provider has overseen a sluggish take-up in tutoring this year, with many schools organising their own provision.

From September, £349 million will go directly to schools, who will decide how to spend it.

Three smaller tenders have been published for quality assurance and training from September until August 2024.

These reveal how the DfE wants to ensure training is available to at least 25,000 would-

be tutors in 2022-23 and 20,000 in 2023-24.

This will cover schools-led tutors and academic mentors. The training will be mandatory for new staff, except for qualified teachers.

The chosen provider will also deploy a maximum of 3,600 academic mentors each year, with a minimum recruitment figure of 1,500.

The quality assurance of the tuition organisations tender is worth £2.4 million while the training contract is worth £7.4 million.

The final contract for recruiting and deploying academic mentors is worth £7.9 million.

Bidding closes on May 23, with the contract expected to start on July 22.

The new contract comes as polling for the Sutton Trust found nearly seven in ten primary heads say they did not receive enough catch-up cash this year.

But as of March, two in five had not engaged with the NTP.

## Trust reserves nudge £4bn

Academy trust coffers swelled by more than a quarter last year, with the sector's total financial reserves surging to nearly £4 billion.

*Schools Week* has previously revealed how partial school closures, exam cancellations and other scrapped activities saved trusts significant sums as Covid spread.

New grants also helped offset the pandemic's extra costs and better-off trusts tapped donors.

However, some of the rise could be attributed to delayed construction projects, as well as increased academisation and trust growth.

Department for Education data published this week shows 97.4 per cent of trusts reported surplus cash or breaking even in their most recent accounts.

The average trust had £1.48 million in reserves, up by more than a quarter from £1.15 million in 2019-20.

The latest document shows the average trust's reserves amounted to 12.9 per cent of their income in the year to August 31, 2021, up from 11.4 per cent the previous year.

The net combined reserves across all trusts rose from £3.13 billion in 2019-20 to £3.94 billion last year.

Just 70 trusts reported deficits (2.6 per cent), with a combined black hole of £22.4 million – down from £42.1 million a year earlier.

Data for maintained schools published in December showed a similar picture, with Covid fuelling an unlikely turnaround in their finances.

Kevin Courtney, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said savings were a "one-off" and budgets remained "challenging".



JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR\_93

## Ofsted stops endorsing failing schools' action plans

Ofsted will no longer "reject or endorse" action plans from trusts and local authorities (LAs) with failing schools because it provides "false assurance to parents and schools".

Those responsible for 'inadequate' schools must prepare a statement of action outlining how they will improve, including a timescale and parental engagement plans.

This must be sent to Ofsted within ten working days of receiving the final graded report.

But from this week, the watchdog will no longer provide feedback or judge whether the statement is "fit for purpose".

Ofsted will instead use the plan to form part of the "evidence base for the first monitoring visit" of schools found to have serious weaknesses.

Ofsted made the change because its "ability to judge a school's improvement trajectory based on this very initial plan is limited, and can provide false assurance to parents and

schools where we say it is fit for purpose".

Maintained schools judged to be 'inadequate' are subject to an academy order which forces them to join a trust, while academies may be rebrokered to another trust.

An Ofsted spokesperson said: "Our monitoring inspections provide a more transparent and secure assessment of how a school is improving."

# EDITORIAL

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## Headteachers should not face Covid guessing game

The return of exams is welcome. But it threatens to be overshadowed by ambiguous guidance that, once again, shunts the issues on to headteachers.

With just weeks before exams start, school leaders are scrambling to get plans in place. This includes coming up with solutions for pupils who are displaying Covid symptoms but who insist on coming in to sit their exams.

On the flipside, leaders are also looking at solutions for pupils and also invigilators, who may be concerned about being in exam halls with lots of other people (who may or may not have Covid).

Because free tests have ended, schools will also be in the horrible position of playing a Covid guessing game to decide whether pupils have the virus, and whether coming in to sit their exams may spread it to others.

Why the government has not reintroduced free testing to rid leaders of this invidious task, as well as ensuring exams do not cause more outbreaks, is bonkers.

As always during this pandemic, it's school leaders who have to deal with the fallout.

## ECF is too important not to get right

Today's Teacher Tapp findings on the rollout of the early career framework are worrying. The issue of the training for new teachers worsening workload was already well known.

But the general discontent with training, the fact leaders are not giving mentors enough time to support teachers and the potential risk of schools deciding not to take on new teachers should be looked at by ministers.

The early career framework was one of the rare education policies that was broadly supported across most sections of the sector. Everyone knows its potential.

The survey shows some things are going well. New teachers really value mentors, for instance. But the sheer volume of negative findings overshadows it.

Ministers have already shown they are listening to feedback to offer more flexibility on the reforms. They should now consider what more they can do.

Providers are also aware of the problems and are finding their own solutions, which is great.

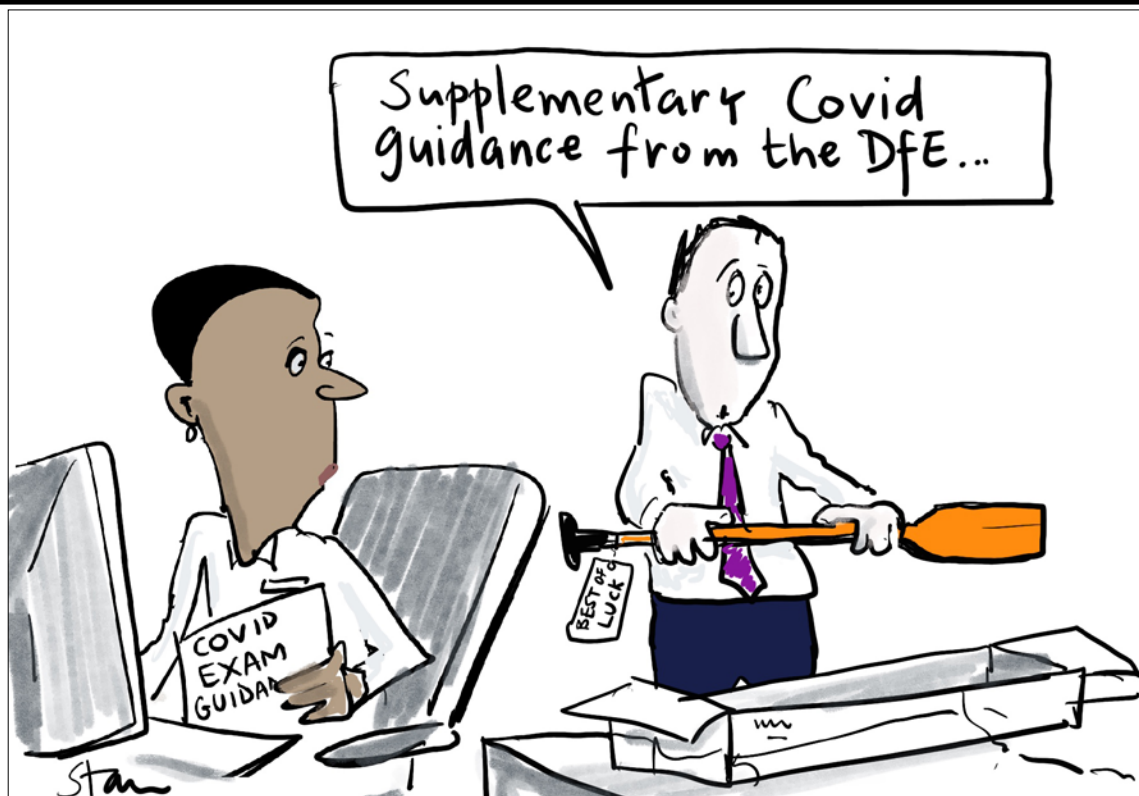
The rollout of any major reforms will encounter problems. Let's hope swift action will mean these are just teething issues before the programme fulfils its huge potential.

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Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



‘Let’s look at where the bodies are going in, and why’

Paul Gosling, new president of school leaders’ union NAHT, tells Jess Staufenberg the government must prioritise getting exhausted headteachers back on side

<p>Primary school headteacher Paul Gosling, the incoming president of school leaders’ union NAHT, says the title of his debut conference speech next week is “Humanity, Compassion and Solidarity”.</p> <p>Noble ideals, by any standards. But during our interview, there is one word he says again and again, and it’s none of the former. Instead, he keeps talking about “agency”.</p>	<p>His predecessor, fellow primary school head Tim Bowen, made the focus of his one-year presidency “wellbeing”. No wonder. The Covid pandemic has put leaders and staff through unprecedented stress and even trauma (a Teacher Tapp survey in October found almost three-quarters of heads had witnessed a colleague cry last year).</p> <p>But the vice president, who officially</p>	<p>takes up post on Friday April 29, wants to trace the crisis of poor wellbeing right back to its source. “Tim has been focusing on wellbeing, which is great. But the focus on wellbeing was dealing with the symptoms, and I want to deal with the cause.</p> <p>“Rather than pulling bodies out of the river, let’s look at where the bodies are going in and why.”</p> <p>The statistics on school leadership are</p>
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## Profile: Paul Gosling



Singing with the reception class in summer 2021

stark. In March last year, an NAHT report stated 75 per cent of assistants and deputies said that concerns about work-life balance were currently preventing them from seeking a headteacher position.

A union survey also found 53 per cent of deputy and assistant heads and middle leaders did not aspire to headship – significantly up from 40 per cent five years ago.

Headteacher vacancies rose by 18 per cent in the first three months of this year, compared to the same period in 2020, up from 957 to 1,125, according to teacher vacancies website TeachVac.

It's the first noticeable rise in headteacher vacancies since Covid hit – suggesting the relentless toll of leading a school through the crisis is starting to bite.

The government's insistence that things are back to normal again doesn't match with the experience of leaders on the ground, who are still battling huge staff and pupil absences. But post-Covid norms such as free testing have been ditched, with pre-Covid norms such as league tables back.

This month, the NAHT's head of advice Kate Atkinson, warned "there is a real sense now it has all got too much".

Gosling is clear who's to blame. "I do think some of the low wellbeing is being driven by the way we're treated by government. Poor mental health often comes from a loss of choice.

"Schools are humane and compassionate places, but we're often not treated like that."

A failure to protect the agency and autonomy of school leaders has been on the downward spiral for some time, he says,



On a year 6 visit to Downing Street in March 2022

## "Poor mental health comes from a loss of choice"

pointing to "intervention at the classroom level", such as the numeracy and literacy hour brought in under New Labour.

But the arrival of Michael Gove as education secretary in 2010 heralded a "work harder, jump faster" approach which has "burnt people out". It's worse when leaders have to implement changes they don't themselves agree with, says Gosling.

He was forced into drastic action at his own school – exactly the kind he didn't want to implement – to meet funding challenges.

He has been headteacher at Exeter Road Community Primary School in Exmouth for 13 years now, taking it from the old 'satisfactory' to a 'good' in 2012, a grade he kept at a short inspection in 2017.

But he had been running at budget deficit for seven years.

"The local authority was very supportive. But then they said at one stage, 'This is going to get picked up'."

Nearly nine per cent of pupils at Gosling's

school are on an education, health and care plan, and 45 per cent receive free school meals – both well above the national averages. As a result, he was "running a very hot budget".

"We used to have a policy that every teacher had a teaching assistant. But the high-needs money wasn't coming in to cover the costs." The school had to lose ten of its 24 teaching assistants. "That's ripped the support out."

Gosling adds: "We lost a specialist reading recovery teacher, and a maths support teacher, who did one-to-one work with children who were falling behind. Having those people would have been so useful during the pandemic." He almost throws his hands up in despair. "And now the government is talking about one-to-one tuition!"

The school now has a balanced budget, but is "not the same school as it was in 2017. Is it as good? You lose that many people..."

Gosling's frankness is all the more



# Profile: Paul Gosling



powerful because he comes across as a fundamentally optimistic and energetic person. None of it comes across as a whinge – he’s too good humoured. But his concerns all feed into the wider retention problems.

“You are receiving guidance and laws from the Department for Education which sometimes you don’t support totally, and you’ve got to do it even though you don’t believe in it sometimes, and that puts people off the job.

“We tend to suffer in education from neoliberal ideas of running businesses dating from the 1970s and 80s,” he shakes his head. “Look at Google today – it’s all about working with the ingenuity which comes from releasing people’s potential properly in the organisation. If you take away people’s agency, you take away the joy of the job and why they’re doing it.”

Compounding the problem is that a headteacher or principal can usually only turn to their deputy or assistant for support on a day-to-day basis.

“They see those frustrations, and they may think, I don’t want that responsibility myself,” he adds.

It’s what makes supportive colleagues so important for encouraging staff up the ladder – and why it is so frustrating for Gosling that he’s had to cut staff.

Despite attending a pretty “horrible” secondary school himself as a child, he was

## “Deputies are very close to the pressures of the job”

inspired to train as a teacher in Devon after doing work experience at the school where his mum was a secretary.

Meanwhile his father had left school at 15 to sell carpets on Rathbone Street Market, in Canning Town. The family was religious (although Gosling is not), and a bishop in church spotted his dad’s leadership potential. Gosling explains with admiration that his dad eventually became a probation officer, working with young offenders caught up in the criminal gangs of east London in the 1970s and 80s.

Gosling returned to his own school, Ravenscroft Primary, in east London, for his first job, before later moving back to the west country. He became head at Exeter Road in 2009.

During his tenure, Gosling says he has experienced the government failing again and again to properly consult, or consider, the profession it oversees. He says this includes everything from guidance arriving at 7pm on a Friday, or Ofsted



Gosling is a headteacher at Exeter Road community primary school in Exmouth

claiming it would run inspections even if a headteacher had died (the statement was quickly retracted).

He says the new academisation target (for all schools to be in a strong trust by 2030) won’t happen without “proper partnership”. Will the DfE listen?

“I was involved in a roundtable with [former schools minister] Nick Gibb a few years ago, and I mentioned agency. He wrote it down in a little book. But it runs into the sand if they don’t fully understand the message.”

His advice?

“Come and talk to NAHT. We will help you understand how people are thinking and feeling. We’ll help you finesse your message. We want the best for the country, and you do too, so let’s do it.”

If the government wants to avoid an exodus of exhausted headteachers, the new secretary of state should take note.



# Opinion

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## BARONESS BARRAN

Minister for the school system

### White paper: the profession's insights are key to our success

**Strong trusts are at the heart of our ambitions, writes Baroness Barran, and the review stage will ensure everyone has a say in shaping how we deliver them**

We have lofty ambitions for our children, and I know schools up and down the country do too. By 2030, we want 90 per cent of children to leave primary school having achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. By the same time, average GCSE attainment in both English language and maths should have increased to grade 5.

Strong trusts are at the very heart of these ambitions, outlined in our schools white paper. A trust-led system is the right thing to aim for, but we need school leaders and teachers to help make sure every trust is a strong one.

The empirical evidence to date shows that these strong trusts are highly effective at improving schools. But it is not just about school improvement: we believe that families of schools are more likely to be successful as they create better opportunities for staff, have support in managing finance and free up time for teachers to focus

on teaching.

Yet as minister for the school system, with academies key to my remit, I know there are schools that remain nervous about what a fully trust-led system might mean, for them and for the wider system.

These concerns are not without merit: not all trusts are delivering in line with the strongest – but all

should be doing so. And even if they were, the trust system we have today was never designed for all schools to be in trusts.

These are problems that need to be addressed if our trust-led system is to succeed.

Our plans – created after listening to parents, students, teachers, trust leaders – have been designed to share best practice in delivering educational excellence, a well-supported workforce and sound use of funding. I want to expand strong trusts and increase the number of trusts that are strong.

We are going to be clear on what we mean by strong – and what we don't mean – by putting a new definition of trust strength



at the heart of our review. This definition will include more than outcomes, but also inclusion and staff development, which are vital to schools' and students' success.

These are changes this government is committed to making, and we need experts working in schools to think about

require trusts to work constructively with each other, their local authorities and the wider public and third sectors, to supporting schools with consecutive Ofsted judgments below 'good' to join strong trusts, or changing the rules to allow local authorities to set up trusts.

I firmly believe they are the right actions to strengthen the school system and support our shared journey towards excellent teaching for every child by 2030 – ultimately the most important outcome of this work.

We must work together if we are going to achieve this, and my door remains open to the sector, schools and families. I always want to talk to those who feel they have new evidence, a new piece of the puzzle to fill in, or something to add to the conversation.

I know those working in schools share our unwavering commitment to children and young people and delivering the education they deserve. I also know that success can only be found if school leaders and teachers are part of the solution.

If you can get behind our changes and look at how we can help you make the biggest possible impact, children today will thank us in years to come.

“ Success can only be found if teachers are part of the solution

how their school can make the biggest possible impact in the system of the future.

We want to understand and address the problems teachers have already identified.

We want to deliver on the aspirations of parents for their children, wherever they live.

Our upcoming trust regulatory framework review, which we expect to last until the end of this year, is our chance to come together to make sure we find the best solutions.

What we find in this process will complement our wider changes to the school landscape, all aimed at making trusts as strong as possible – from the introduction of a new collaborative standard that will

# Opinion

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**CAROLINE BARLOW**  
Headteacher, Heathfield  
Community College

## White paper: a roadmap with opportunity and risk for all

**Having an end point to our fractured system is welcome, writes Caroline Barlow, but charting a course to that destination is fraught with risks**

Now that the dust has settled on the release of the schools white paper, there has been time to reflect and consider it in the round. White papers set out legislative intent, and *Opportunity For All* is clear that it is “the start of a journey” whose exact details have yet to be charted; but in many ways, that is both its opportunity and its conundrum.

The paper is unashamedly aimed at parents and linked to the levelling-up agenda. While it states intent to share evidence and enable collaboration, it remains to be seen how much the process will be done with, or to, the profession; that is perhaps the initiative to be grasped.

Within its many pledges and promises, there is much that schools can already point to as current practice: the length of the school week, rich and rounded provision, extra support for those who need it, focus on research-informed practice. Many of these have been developed for years, so some may see that as a seal of

approval, but others will wonder why such established good practice needed legislation. We can only hope that doing so doesn't represent an inclination to legislate for how, rather than whether, these things are done.

Similarly, nobody in the profession would deny the importance of high levels of

attendance and strong behaviour, especially post-pandemic. But it is unclear how collection and manipulation of data will lead to ‘game-changing’ improvements if resources and capacity don't swiftly follow.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity is in the regulatory review and the clarification of roles in a trust-led system. The systemic structuring is no surprise; it is the culmination of a decision taken a number of governments ago and at least gives an end date to our current fragmented system. Here, it will be the how, rather than the what, that matters.

As a strong and ambitious maintained LA school, we are left



with more questions than answers. Sited in a potential education improvement area, will we be subject to direction suggested by the expansion of existing trusts into the area? Will we be encouraged to start our own trust, but in doing so have to meet the designated optimum number of ten? Or will remaining an LA school present only two choices: be assimilated

### “LA schools are left with more questions than answers

into an existing larger trust, or join an LA trust?

The latter are an interesting ideological departure, but not without complications. How will LAs' new MAT stakeholder role be balanced against their existing responsibilities to provide challenge and support for vulnerable students, or co-ordinate admissions? LAs often wrestle to hold MATs to account, and this reform could make that even harder.

Furthermore, while there is a willingness to support trusts of church schools, in rural areas these are often spread geographically in ways that belie community; for genuine community leadership,

blended trusts must surely be a consideration. The paper states that “the priority in making these decisions will always be what is right for the children, parents and communities they serve”, but to what extent will stakeholders be able to exercise their voice?

Our system has been overly and punitively measured and fragmented by competition, often at the expense of our most vulnerable young people. One of the paper's most powerful and positive levers is an expectation that all trusts and LAs will model civic leadership and collaborate on school improvement and systemic aspects, such as admissions and attendance. This has the potential, if aligned intelligently with other regulatory levers, to be a significant force for good. But it is a big ‘if’.

There is a promise to engage with the sector to shape the detail, but all parties' feet must be held to the fire on this: there must be genuine engagement with and from the sector. The paper celebrates a funding boost, but we all know the unprecedented scale of financial pressures means it is unlikely to stretch as far as it needs to. We are going to have to work together if the system that emerges is really going to be sustainable, let alone “fairer and stronger”.

Opinion

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**The DfE’s climate strategy is welcome, write Dawn Haywood and Lucas Ewen, but students are in many ways a better guide to sustainability than ministers**

As the Department for Education releases its sustainability and climate change strategy this week, we can expect a flurry of interest in how schools should build sustainability into their curriculum, prepare young people for green skills and careers and make use of their estates.

Like many, though, for us sustainability has already been front of mind. When it comes to climate change, our leaders, staff and students all agree that what is needed is direct action. So the DfE strategy is a welcome first step from them, but in reality it’s late and is likely to represent little more than a starting point for a slow, systemic approach.

That political vision and ambition is needed – as well as the funding to make it a reality – but it’s unlikely to satisfy children and young people, who are increasingly impassioned and driven to want to make a positive change now. We see delivering this change as a facet of our mission of unlocking our students’ academic and personal potential and empowering them to take responsibility for themselves and others as active citizens.

That’s why sustainability is one of our strategic “big moves”, and it is led across our trust by staff and students working together. As the children’s commissioner’s recent Big Ask survey found, children care deeply about the environment. So, to ensure our students have a meaningful voice in sustainability decision making, we work in partnership with our student senate.

The senate is made up of 100 student leaders from year three onwards across

DAWN  
HAYWOOD

CEO, Windsor  
Academy Trust



LUCAS  
EWEN

Year 11  
student, Great  
Wyrley Academy



Climate strategy? Let your students lead the way

our family of schools, and a critical part of their work is developing and enacting our sustainability “big move” to reach net zero by 2030.

Being part of the planning helps students be part of the solution. They started with a summit on sustainability,

They offered their insights into their experiences with different green initiatives and shared what they believed worked. And as a result, our strategy evolved. It now includes embedding sustainable development across the curriculum, an increased

“ We see delivering change as a facet of our mission

where trust leaders presented their ideas built upon the One Planet Living principles and the United Nations’ sustainable development goals. Students were encouraged to share their views, helping them play an active role in our decisions.

focus on helping to prepare students for a future that includes green careers, and more investment in sustainable school estates.

As an example, at Great Wyrley Academy, several key changes have already been made to make the school



more sustainable. We have installed solar panels to provide a renewable energy source, fitted new windows and energy-efficient lighting and reduced the school’s use of fossil fuels. Not only has that made the school more eco-friendly, but it has put us in a stronger position to face increased energy costs.

More than that, students are also able to take part in an eco-club that brainstorms ways to improve sustainability and takes direct action. Students have already implemented recycling initiatives, planted trees and started participating in a woodland management project.

Our sustainability strategy will drive further change as we seek to embed sustainable practice across everything we do. This includes embedding education for sustainable development across our curriculum, instilling a zero-waste culture of ‘reduce, reuse and recycle’, using technology to drive sustainable change and building social value within procurement policy.

So while the DfE strategy is a welcome nudge to the sector, the real success of our journey so far is thanks to the input and endorsement from our students. Rather than just teach them about responsibility, aspiration and leadership, we have given them the opportunity to develop and embody these values, and we will never look back.

In the senate, we have created a place for them to realise the power of their voice, take action and positively impact our trust, our communities and ultimately the planet. Giving our students the opportunity to turn their passion and drive into real change has only motivated them further, and that’s an impact that will long outlast the responses to this strategy, if not the strategy itself.



# Opinion

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## ADRIAN LYONS

Former HMI and survey lead,  
Getting Ready for Work

### We can't afford our chaotic approach to work-readiness

**Simple steps could transform young people's work-readiness, writes Adrian Lyons, if only political leaders were willing to put the work in**

It's more than five years since Ofsted's *Getting Ready for Work* report looked at how secondary schools were preparing young people for employment. In our post-Brexit, post-Covid and post-Ukraine world of economic risk and opportunity, its topic has never been more relevant.

Yet the report's publication was followed quickly by a change of regime at Ofsted, and a narrower, ideologically driven view of curriculum means the inspectorate has not bothered to check whether things have improved since.

Given the challenges of the past two years, it seems unlikely they have. And that's worrying, because its main findings were sobering. The extent to which schools engaged in work-readiness was largely dependent on whether school leaders considered it to be a priority. And where schools were delivering enterprise education, it was often unclear whether it was having any impact.

Meanwhile, business involvement relied too heavily on

teachers' and parents' personal networks, potentially resulting in disadvantaged pupils missing out. And a lack of local coordination meant business leaders described the environment as 'chaotic'.

In reality, that chaos has been just as true of the politics of work-related learning as of its implementation in schools. Until

2010, the Department for Children, Schools and Families had strongly supported enterprise education. Post-2010, the DfE had no interest in it and removed funding. Then, the Department for Business under Liberal Democrat leadership during the coalition tried to promote enterprise education in schools, and I remember the lead civil servant's surprise when I told her about the DfE's huge intellectual capital in that area. It turned out the DfE was unwilling to share it with the business department.

By 2014, David Cameron appointed Lord Young as his 'enterprise advisor'. He established a number of advisory groups, one of which looked at enterprise in

schools. Its key message was that enterprise education is not about turning young people into little entrepreneurs but something much broader and relevant to the nation's economic future.

It has passed into folklore that Margaret Thatcher once said that "other people come to me with their problems. David Young comes with his achievements." But despite this reputation, even he was unable to make any real difference beyond setting up a network of enterprise advisers.

*Getting Ready for Work* gave Ofsted one job (and bear in mind, this is a job Ofsted gave itself): "To ensure that inspection judgments take greater account of the coherence and rigour with which schools prepare pupils for employment and self-employment."

“These recommendations would be transformational

Instead, its new inspection framework from 2019 took a minimalist approach. Just one of nine bullet points for the 'good' criteria under the personal development judgment is in any way relevant. It took the chief inspector's grilling by the education select committee to add words to the effect that schools must meet "the requirements of the Baker Clause".

There were recommendations for secondary schools, too. Were they followed, they would be transformational. But to this day, the negative consequences of failing to meet even the basic statutory requirements are unclear.

It seems that because the



evidence from the survey upon which the report was based was that the quality of enterprise education was poor, the decision was made to simply stop looking. Imagine if the same was true of any other subject.

At the time of the Ofsted survey, another by the British Chambers of Commerce found that more than three-quarters of firms believed a lack of work experience was the reason young people were unprepared for work, while just over half (52 per cent) said they didn't offer such placements, citing cost, time, administrative burden and lack of information.

*Getting Ready for Work* was well-received by the numerous organisations involved in enterprise education, work-related learning and financial education. But like Lord Young's 2014 report for the business department and the PM's office, Enterprise for All, its legacy is a testament to the harms of short-term government thinking.

In the meantime, the "high-wage, high-skill, high-productivity" economy Boris Johnson has promised seems more distant than ever without the skilled young people it needs to fuel it.

# Reviews

## BOOK REVIEW



### The Complete Guide to Pastoral Leadership

**Author:** Amy-May Forrester

**Publisher:** John Catt Educational

**Reviewer:** Dr Stephen Lane, Year 7 pastoral lead and teacher of English, Lichfield Cathedral School

In a field dominated by cognitive science, curriculum planning, classroom pedagogy and bloody dual coding, but woefully lacking substantial work in the area of pastoral leadership, Amy-May Forrester has taken on the challenge of offering the world of education publishing a 'complete guide' to this important topic. Inevitably, I'm not sure any book could live up to this grand objective — unless it ran to several volumes — but Forrester has done a damn fine job here.

With chapters covering a wide range of issues, Forrester deftly balances references to research in a variety of fields with practical examples grounded in daily issues faced by pastoral leaders. Each chapter includes case studies that invite the reader to reflect on how they might tackle the issues, along with key tips and specific suggested reading.

Forrester presents a compelling case for the importance of strong pastoral care, describing it as the "beating heart of any school" and stresses the value of a clear sense of vision for pastoral leaders and the need for establishing high expectations. Forrester also gives a sharp outline of the link between pastoral care and behaviour, dipping into some of the key debates, such as sanctions, restorative practice and permanent exclusions. The section on behaviour also includes some useful strategies for how to have difficult conversations with parents that are then explored more fully in a later chapter specifically dedicated to working with families.

Forrester also makes a convincing argument for the link between pastoral

care and cognitive science, illustrating how pastoral leaders can make effective use of research findings in this area. There is an important element to this with regard to understanding that as pastoral leaders, we need to have "amassed a whole range of knowledge about learning so that we can best know how to support our young people" while also emphasising how working collaboratively with academic middle leaders can have the "most leverage".

I was particularly interested in the section on attendance, in which Forrester summarises the research on the negative impacts of attendance rewards which, in some studies, actually had the consequence of reducing subsequent rates of attendance. In the same chapter on attendance, Forrester also outlines some key ideas from nudge theory and points in particular to the work of Durrington Research School, who used positive text messages to encourage attendance.

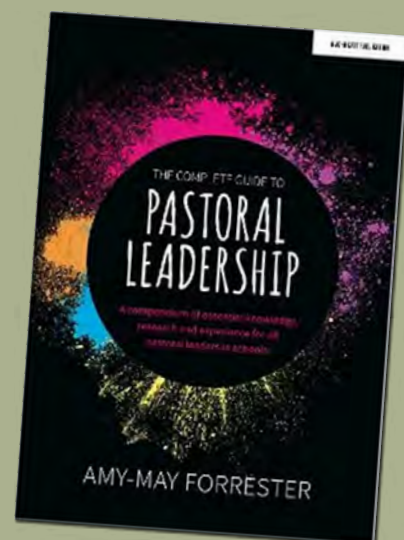
Forrester's own anecdote of organising a football match to reverse the trend of low attendance during the last week of half-term is a neat example of how the references to research are followed up by on-the-ground illustrations of practice that exemplify how readers might incorporate strategies into their own settings.

Another strong section of the book is Chapter 7, 'Pastoral Leadership and Management'. Forrester makes the case that pastoral leaders play the most important role in school, and that without them "nothing else can happen". She then explores research on models of leadership and considers how this affects approaches to pastoral leadership in schools with some useful ideas for how to work with

colleagues.

In a chapter on 'Surviving and Thriving as a Pastoral Leader', Forrester highlights the need for pastoral leaders to engage in self-care, noting that we can "become so consumed with helping others that we inevitably feel guilty about helping ourselves". It may seem trivial, but an important part of this is the way that teachers generally - and pastoral leaders in particular - often sacrifice their own nourishment needs in order to meet what they see as their professional obligations. But eating and drinking properly is crucial and, as Forrester observes, "There's nothing worse than a hangry pastoral leader."

Overall, *The Complete Guide to Pastoral Leadership* is a strong book which will make an invaluable resource for any new or experienced pastoral leader. Forrester presents a wide range of research and balances this with practical steps readers can take. Running throughout is a clear sense of Forrester's own voice which makes the text engaging and compelling.



# Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is Ruby Bhatti, national leader of governance, Yorkshire and the Humber

@Ruby\_Bhatti\_OBE

**What do we want? Character! When do we want it? Soon!**

@GuyClaxton

Guy Claxton's latest blog focuses on empowering young people with the values and attributes they need to live well in this world. True to his career-long ideals, he argues that a curriculum should offer them opportunities to explore different avenues within and beyond school and to pursue occupations that give them purpose and happiness. Pedagogically, they should be given a diet of escalating challenges that fill them with excitement and interest so that they develop "positive learning dispositions".

Claxton then outlines the "12 pillars of fulfilment" as a common core of character development, and it's interesting to note, too, that he views the coaching aspect of teaching and leadership as a protective factor for their ideals.

There are as many supporters as detractors of Claxton's vision, but as a chair it has made me think about the importance of ensuring our own vision strives, not only to empower students' success, but their happiness too.

## TOP BLOGS of the week

**One size does not fit all: Autism Spectrum Disorders**

Christina Whalen via @ed\_rethink

This blog is a great read for autism awareness month. Though Christina Whalen notes the common traits of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and the common challenges faced by people with ASD, she also makes a compelling appeal to the fact that no two people on the spectrum are the same.

Whalen's blog is full of interesting data: one in 44 students are estimated to be on the spectrum, and ASD is four times more common in boys than in girls yet impacts demographics and socioeconomic groups equally. However, Whalen explains, diagnosis alone doesn't really tell us anything about what to expect, as the range of disabilities is incredibly diverse.

As a chair of governors, I regularly raise questions to ensure the school is supporting students with ASD by following appropriate education plans and interventions. Reading this has strengthened my resolve to ensure those plans are appropriately tailored to each one.

**As food poverty is set to soar, how many free school meals reach under-fives?**

@EduPolicyInst

This is a very insightful blog from the Education Policy Institute, tackling a growing item on many school agendas.

Many of the families on low incomes in our communities are already struggling to afford essentials, and stark data shows that an additional 1.3 million families will be pulled into poverty next year – including 500,000 children.

Here, the EPI's Kerris Cooper highlights the importance of free school meals and the impact that food poverty has upon children's education. Recognising that there are children in poverty who are still missing out, the post nonetheless strongly welcomes the decision to permanently extend FSM to children in families with no recourse to public funds, provided they meet the eligibility criteria.

While the blog ostensibly addresses the policy's application to nursery-aged children, it gives insights into data trends that should be of interest to any primary school leader. And its theme is universal to the sector. It has certainly made me reflect deeply on our duty to identify children and families who are experiencing food poverty so that we can support them as much as we can.

**The ever-evolving leadership lens**

@E\_Sheninger

This post offers some great insights on leadership. Rather than to offer a full and final set of attributes, Eric Sheninger instead starts by accepting that his own lens for understanding the role has changed and continues to change. The aim, he argues, is to be able to adapt in different ways to show improvement as contexts change.

He goes on to list examples of disruptive events that challenged his own status quo and led him to develop his own "pillars of digital leadership" and embrace a more nuanced leadership perspective.

As a chair and trustee, I have seen leadership teams use research and evidence to improve outcomes. From that experience, I can only agree with Sheninger that relationship building never ceases to be vital to implementation.

A thought-provoking reminder to embrace change and create spaces for practices to evolve.



# Research



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

## How can formative assessment best lead to progress?

**Jake Anders, deputy director, UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities**

No one reading this article will be in any doubt as to the importance of high-quality formative assessment in teaching and learning. The term, often used interchangeably with "assessment for learning" and in contrast to "summative assessment", refers to assessment activities undertaken by teachers – or students themselves – to obtain evidence which is then used to adapt teaching and learning methods to meet student needs and improve learning outcomes.

However, just because formative assessment doesn't involve the high stakes with which its summative counterpart is often associated doesn't mean it's easy to do well. Indeed, previous research has highlighted not just that attempts to support teachers in developing their formative assessment skills at significant scale are difficult, but that they can backfire if done poorly.

As part of research funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, a team at the National Institute of Social and Economics Research and I worked with SSAT – the Schools, Students and Teachers Network – to carry out a randomised controlled trial of the Embedding Formative Assessment (EFA) programme. Embedding Formative Assessment is a professional development programme for schools, developed with educationalists Dylan Wiliam and Siobhan Leahy, that aims to support teachers to embed formative assessment strategies in their practice to improve pupil learning outcomes.

The programme itself consists of light-touch training

and support, mostly focused on training and supporting school leaders and teachers who then go on to lead teaching and learning communities (TLCs) within schools. Most schools arrange these TLCs during time already dedicated to professional development, and each of their meetings involves teachers reporting on their use of techniques since the last meeting, sharing new formative assessment ideas

to try, and personal action planning for the coming month. Teachers are also asked to pair themselves for monthly peer lesson observations between TLC meetings.

To look at the impact of schools implementing EFA, 140 secondary schools across England were recruited into the project, with 70 allocated to receive EFA, while 70 were allocated to receive a substitute payment, which they could put to any purpose (except EFA). This allocation was carried out at random so that the only systematic difference between the two groups was whether or not they were implementing EFA. After two years of implementation, we compared pupils' GCSE test scores between the two groups of schools, providing us with a highly relevant outcome measure.

We were extremely pleased to find that schools that implemented EFA saw higher pupil attainment than those in the control group. This was particularly true for the group of schools where monitoring work suggested the biggest changes in practice had taken place.

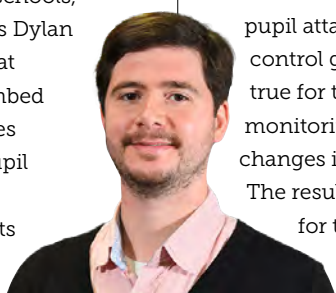
The results are really encouraging for this approach to improving teachers' implementation



of formative assessment in the classroom and, hence, pupils' academic attainment. The size of the difference between the EFA and control groups is equivalent to almost two months of pupil learning: especially worthwhile given the post-Covid catch-up context and the fact that this is a low-cost, scalable programme. The size of the effect was also slightly larger among pupils with lower levels of prior attainment, suggesting the potential for this work to narrow the distribution of test scores.

The Education Endowment Foundation are now supporting further work to scale up the delivery of Embedding Formative Assessment as part of their accelerator fund. This new project is focusing particularly on schools in the regional schools commissioner regions of the North, the East Midlands and Humber, and the West Midlands.

While we're not directly involved, we'd nevertheless encourage schools to take part in this important research. It stands to add powerfully to our understanding of how we can scale up programmes and practice like this across schools throughout the country – not to mention offering immediate benefits for teachers and pupils.



Week in

# Westminster

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

## SATURDAY

It's not unusual for education secretaries to snub their annual invitation to the NASUWT conference. The last to front up was Nicky Morgan in 2016, and many readers will remember how well that went.

However, even though he couldn't make it to Birmingham, Nadhim Zahawi did send a video message to delegates.

It mostly consisted of his usual "thank you" to the schools community, and then a roll call of existing government policies.

But it's likely a lot of delegates would still have been none the wiser, as the clip was broadcast during a tea break!

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Talking of frosty receptions, perhaps Zahawi got cold feet after seeing his opposite number, Labour's Bridget Phillipson, booed and heckled at the National Education Union conference earlier that week when she gave her views on Ofsted.

## SUNDAY

Rising class sizes have been a concern for secondary schools for some time (although average classes are getting smaller at primary level as a baby bulge makes it through the system).

However, delegates at the NASUWT conference warned that the issue isn't just increasing numbers of pupils, but their size.

Studies show children are larger than in the 1970s, when many school buildings were designed and opened. But the increases are marginal, so it's hard to see that this alone is causing a class size crisis.

## TUESDAY

Teachers already, rightly, feel they've had a raw deal from politicians during Covid (last-minute, late-night guidance, new rules announced in newspapers first, an education secretary urging parents to report schools to Ofsted over remote learning, etc).

But Conservative MP Michael Fabricant took things to a new level in his bid to help disgraced prime minister Boris Johnson, accusing teachers of breaking lockdown laws by having after-work drinks in the staffroom.

Universally condemned by education unions, the comments - made during an interview in which Fabricant attempted to defend the indefensible - were even brought up in the Commons by Labour's Sir Keir Starmer.

The opposition leader said Conservative members "can associate themselves with that if they want, but those of us who take pride in our NHS workers, our teachers, and every other key worker who got us through those dark days will never forget their contempt".

Zahawi, who has pitched himself as a champion of the profession, has remained silent.

## WEDNESDAY

Clearly undaunted by the UK stats watchdog investigating his department's dodgy claims about academy success, Nadhim Zahawi was quite happy to reel off some of the questionable claims in front of MPs this week.

The DfE was criticised a few weeks ago after claims a document published

alongside the schools white paper had misreported Ofsted grades and cherry-picked trusts to make its case for full academisation.

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The schools white paper wants all schools to be in "strong" multi-academy trusts - signalling the end not just for local authority-maintained schools, but also standalone academy trusts.

So it's fitting that one of the schools Zahawi heaped praise on for its approach to improving attendance, was Hammersmith Academy - a single-academy trust!

The ed sec was also caught out when talking up the government's "levelling-up" plans when he mentioned the Merseyside borough of Knowsley.

But committee member Kim Johnson was quick to point out that Knowsley is not receiving any levelling-up funding from the government. Oops!

## THURSDAY

Exams regulator Ofqual is seeking a senior freedom of information officer to work at its Coventry offices as part of a "small central team who lead on providing effective responses to Freedom of Information requests and liaises with the Information Commissioner's Office, ensuring statutory deadlines are met".

It's possible the watchdog is just replacing someone who left, but it wouldn't be a surprise if demand has increased after 2020's exams fiasco - where Ofqual was accused of hiding "in its attic" while the furore raged.





## Deputy CEO

**Salary:** Highly competitive  
**Hours:** 37 hours per week (permanent) | Probationary period: 6 months  
**Pension:** Local Government Pension Scheme  
**Location:** BDMAT Central Office, Daleview Road, Birmingham B14 4HN  
 (some of the time is spent visiting schools)  
**Start:** 1st September 2022 or as soon as possible after that date

Do you want to be our Deputy CEO?  
 We are looking for a Deputy Chief Executive Officer who is able to combine humility with determination. You will be a nurturing leader who does not seek credit but wants success to be sustained over a longer period of time, long after you are gone. We are looking for an excellent communicator who sees their role as serving others.

We are looking to appoint someone who shares our vision and values and can contribute to the direction of the Trust, as well as having the skills and knowledge needed to meet our objectives. We need our Deputy CEO to ensure our finances are optimised to deliver high standards for our pupils and achieve our vision and ensure we meet our regulatory duties in a number of key areas, such as health and safety and data protection.

We recognise that you may come from a different faith background or have no faith yourself. Our priority is to employ leaders that share the same values regarding education provision, as set out above. Whatever your personal belief, we would be seeking to appoint a Deputy CEO who is able

to hold the ethos and values of the Trust and speak passionately and with conviction about them.

**Interviews are scheduled for Tuesday 17th May and Wednesday 18th May 2022**

For informal enquiries, please contact BDMAT's Chief Executive Officer, Christopher Mansell through his PA, Sheila Benbow who can be contacted at [s.benbow@bdiat.org.uk](mailto:s.benbow@bdiat.org.uk) or telephone 07990 949410.

### How to Apply

Please follow this link to apply  
<http://www.mynewterm.com/jobs/884314257/EDV-2022-BDMT-71413>

**Closing date for applications: 12 noon on 6th May.**

### References and eligibility:

All appointments are subject to satisfactory references and eligibility to work in the UK. The Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment. An enhanced DBS will be required.





## Vacancies

### Head of Design and Innovation

Ensure Voice 21's model of teacher development and school improvement is sector-leading, strengthening and innovating our approach to drive long-term change in our schools and transform outcomes for students in our target population.

**Salary: £40,000-£46,000, depending on experience**

Where you'll work: Remote, with regular travel to our London Office and elsewhere. Occasional overnight stays required.

Contract: Permanent, subject to successful probation review at 3 months.

Terms: We welcome applications on a full-time or 4-day per week basis.

**Closing date: 12pm, Monday 9th May**

### Research and Policy Lead

Work with our large and growing network of Voice 21 Oracy Schools to support both practitioner-led and co-constructed research in order to develop our understanding of high-quality oracy education and support Voice 21 to set a research-informed policy agenda.

**Salary: £32,000-£36,000, depending on experience**

Where you'll work: Remote, with regular travel to our London Office and elsewhere and occasional overnight stays required.

Contract: Permanent, subject to successful probation review at 3 months.

Terms: We would welcome applications on a full-time or 4-day per week basis.

**Closing date: 12pm, Monday 9th May**

### Impact Officer

Generate and communicate insights into how our programme of professional learning, 'Voice 21 Oracy Schools', transforms outcomes for students in our target population, including gathering, synthesising and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data to support evidence-informed decision-making throughout the organisation.

**Salary: £27,000-£31,000, depending on experience**

Where you'll work: Remote, with regular travel to our London Office and elsewhere and occasional overnight stays required.

Contract: Permanent, subject to successful probation review at 3 months.

Terms: We would welcome applications on a full-time or 4-day per week basis.

**Closing date: 12pm, Monday 9th May**



**Worsbrough Bank End Primary School**  
The best in everyone™  
Part of United Learning

## Principal, Worsbrough Bank End Primary School

Closing date: **12 noon, 6th May 2022**

Start date: **September 2022**

Worsbrough Bank End is a one form entry primary for children aged three to eleven years and is full of potential. Its recent Ofsted inspection confirmed it as a securely good school with a great sense of community that places families at the heart of all it does.

As Principal you will have the opportunity to lead the school on its continued journey of improvement, providing children with an inspirational

learning environment and the very best opportunities.

United Learning is deeply committed to the progress, success and safeguarding of all children and young people. As a Group, we aim to offer more by working together than any single school could on its own: we aim to support and develop leaders, provide professional development and offer broader experiences for children and young people.

Apply here:

<https://unitedlearning.our-careers.co.uk/>



## Head of School Secondary

Full-time and permanent

Spot Salary: £70,000 per annum

This is an exciting opportunity to join our Academy, where putting students first is part of our fundamental culture.

The Head of School selected for this role will work with the Headteacher and the Primary Deputy Headteacher to provide excellent leadership in improving behaviour, attendance, raising achievement and the nurturing of our thriving and unique school community.

**Full details and an application pack can be found in the 'Key Information' section, under 'Vacancies' at: [www.bridgewatercollegeacademy.org](http://www.bridgewatercollegeacademy.org)**

**Closing Date for applications:**  
**Friday 29th April 2022 at 12pm**

Bridgewater College Academy is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share its commitment. Our mission is that all children achieve. A criminal disclosure check will be requested for any applicant who is offered a position



## Principal Dukesgate Academy

**Location:** Dukesgate Academy

**Closing date:** 12 noon, Monday 9th May

**Start date:** September 2022

Dukesgate Academy is a one form entry primary school for children aged three to eleven years and is a school full of potential. Its most recent Ofsted inspection confirmed that it is a securely good school with a great sense of community that places families at the heart of all it does.

As Principal you will have the opportunity to lead the school on its continued journey of improvement, providing children with an inspirational learning environment and the very best opportunities.

United Learning is deeply committed to the progress, success and safeguarding of all children and young people. As a Group, we aim to offer more by working together than any single school could on its own: we aim to support and develop leaders, provide excellent professional development for all staff and offer broader experiences for children and young people.

Apply here <https://unitedlearning.our-careers.co.uk/>



## Music Teacher

**Salary:** Main Pay Scale

**Contract:** One Year Fixed Term



We are looking for a Music Teacher to join the New Wave Federation who;

- ◆ Is an excellent practitioner with a creative and innovative approach
- ◆ Is committed to the delivery of high quality teaching and learning in music
- ◆ Inspirational and dedicated to making a difference
- ◆ Possess excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- ◆ Is a good team player

We can offer you schools which are;

- ◆ Well-resourced and have high quality music provisions and resources
- ◆ Have friendly, dedicated staff with high expectations
- ◆ Have good opportunities for professional development
- ◆ Are outstanding and hold Apple Distinguished Schools Status
- ◆ Selected as an English Hub by the DFE

In all our schools we have a passion for high standards and want all our children to achieve their potential and be inspired to go beyond that. If you think you can help us on our quest for excellence then please come and join our happy and vibrant teams. The right person will be someone who is up to date with 21st century education through music, who can use new technologies and who is creative and resourceful. Previous applicants need not apply.

**HOW TO APPLY:** Application packs are available from the Federation Business Manager, Ms Alia Choudhry: [achoudhry@newwavefederation.co.uk](mailto:achoudhry@newwavefederation.co.uk) or 020 7254 1415.

**Closing date:** Friday 13th May 2022 at 12pm  
**Interview date:** w/c Monday 23rd May 2022



## Teacher of Maths

Permanent, Full Time

Salary: MPS/UPS - plus relocation package

Starting September 2022

Jane Austen College

Be part of the Jane Austen College story! We are seeking to appoint an excellent Teacher of Maths at our thriving academic and inclusive school situated in the heart of Norwich. This role comes with a recruitment and retention package to support the relocation of excellent candidates to Norwich and Norfolk.

To apply for this role, please visit the Inspiration Trust Website

Closing date for applications:  
**12pm on Thursday 5th May 2022**

*Inspiration Trust is committed to safeguarding and all staff appointments are subject to satisfactory references and enhanced DBS checks. You will be required to provide references and undertake an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Check.*

*This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. We are an equal opportunities employer.*

## Would you like to join our amazing Alps Education Team?

We are currently looking for a Full Time or Significant Part-Time Education Consultant to join our growing team, someone who is passionate and committed to Alps and our philosophy and who believes that every student should be valued and inspired to reach their full potential.

This senior-level role is varied, exciting and fulfilling, with fantastic opportunities in our work supporting schools, colleges, MATs and LAs, both in the UK and Internationally.

As an Alps Education Consultant, you will be expected to deliver exceptional training, assist with the product development and educational direction of the company, attend and contribute to Key Educational meetings, including with the DfE, Ofsted and Estyn, as well as working with our key partners, including PiXL, HMC and ASCL.

Application Closing Date: Friday 6th May 2022

To find out more, please email  
[jevon.hirst@alps.education](mailto:jevon.hirst@alps.education)



# Principal at Hill Top Academy

**Grade:** L18-L24 (£64,143 – £74,295) School Teachers Pay and Conditions  
**Location:** Hill Top Academy  
**Reporting to:** Local Governing Board and Chief Executive Officer  
**Responsible for:** All Academy Employees and Pupils



The Directors of Exceed Learning Partnership are looking to appoint an outstanding strategic leader who will inspire our pupils and empower our staff to continue to strive for the very best education.

This is a great opportunity for an exceptional individual to join a highly successful and outstanding team. Taking accountability and responsibility for academy performance and with a commitment to creating optimum educational opportunities for all pupils across the organisation.

## The ideal candidate will have:

- A record of outstanding and inspirational strategic leadership
- A strong background in Teaching and Learning
- The drive and commitment to improving the life chances of all pupils at Hill Top Academy
- A proven track record of accelerated pupil progress and raised standards
- Strong literacy and numeracy skills
- Excellent organisational skills
- Experience of working with children with a range of needs
- Good understanding of the importance of transition into all phases.
- A good communicator with excellent interpersonal skills
- A team player who contributes to whole academy and trust improvement.

## The Trust will offer:

- Excellent career development working alongside a CEO and Director of Primary Education who are passionate about education, teaching & learning
- Talented and hard-working professional colleagues who are committed to children's success across the curriculum
- The most up to date research and opportunities to influence national policy.
- Wonderful pupils and parents who support the school in all its' aspirations.
- Lots of fun and inspiration to achieve your very best!

Further information including Recruitment Pack and Application Form please visit the Trust Website <https://www.exceedlearningpartnership.co.uk/vacancies/> or by contacting the Trust office

Email: [admin@exceedlearningpartnership.com](mailto:admin@exceedlearningpartnership.com)  
Telephone Number 01709 805175

**Closing Date for Applications:**  
**25th April 2022, 12 noon**





**ST JOSEPH'S**  
Catholic Primary School

## HEADTEACHER

The governors of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School are seeking to appoint a highly-motivated, inspirational and dedicated Headteacher with the energy and enthusiasm to lead the school, whilst striving to maintain its exceptional levels of education and community spirit. This is an exciting and rare opportunity to lead a successful and heavily oversubscribed Catholic Primary School with a fantastic reputation.

Our school has a well-developed curriculum and continually achieves high outcomes for its pupils. Our pupils are caring, enthusiastic, hardworking and eager to learn. Our staff are committed professionals with a passion for continued improvement, a love of teaching and supporting our pupils to achieve their best.

St Joseph's is situated in the centre of Upminster, a vibrant commuter town and a short walk from Upminster station with excellent transport links to London, Essex and the South East and a short drive from the M25.

[www.st-josephs-upminster.net](http://www.st-josephs-upminster.net)



## HEAD OF SOCIOLOGY

**Required for September 2022**  
**MPS – UPR & TLR 2b, £4,781**

An exciting opportunity has arisen to appoint a well-qualified, committed and motivated teacher to lead this highly successful department.

This post is a really exciting leadership opportunity for a successful Teacher of Sociology who is looking for the next step in their career and wants to be part of a world class school with a continuous leadership development and support programme as a new curriculum leader, or it is the next step for an already successful Head of Department to develop your leadership skills even further at an outstanding school.

For further information about the school and this opportunity, including details of our pre-application session, please visit our website <https://weatherheadhigh.co.uk/join-us/work-with-us/> where you will also find details of safer recruitment procedures and the relevant checks applicable for this role.

**Closing date 25th April 2022.**



## TEACHER OF ENGLISH

(with additional responsibilities)

**Required for September 2022**  
**MPS – UPR & TLR 2b or 2c**

We are seeking to recruit a well-qualified and highly motivated practitioner to enhance our outstanding and high performing curriculum area to teach across Key Stages 3, 4 & 5.

This is an exciting opportunity to join our department and begin, or further develop, your leadership skills with a TLR 2b or 2c responsibility at an 'Outstanding' and 'World Class School'. The specific area of responsibility will be decided by the skills and experience you have to offer but may include, a Key Stage responsibility with the department, Whole School Literacy or Phonics.

For further information about the school and this opportunity, please visit our website <https://weatherheadhigh.co.uk/join-us/work-with-us/> including details of safer recruitment procedures and the relevant checks applicable for this role.

**Closing date 6th May 2022.**



## YEAR LEADER

**Required for September 2022**  
**MPS – UPR & TLR 2a, £7,017**

We are seeking to appoint a well-qualified and committed Year Leader to join our outstanding Student Services team.

Working under the guidance of an Assistant Headteacher, the successful candidate will be able to create a positive ethos with their Year Group and ensure all students make outstanding progress academically and in their personal and social development. You will also be an effective leader, managing the work of the year group tutors and pastoral support staff.

We have an excellent range of resources available to support and enrich Teaching and Learning and exceptional pastoral provision to enable our students overcome barriers to learning and achieve their full potential.

For further information, please visit our website <https://weatherheadhigh.co.uk/join-us/work-with-us/> including details of safer recruitment and the relevant checks applicable for this role.

**Closing date 6th May 2022.**