

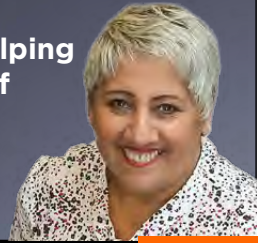
SCHOOLS WEEK

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

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SCHOOLS
WEEK

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NEWS

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New academy standards could dictate school day length and pay

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

New national academy standards could dictate the make-up of trust boards, the length of the school day and even staff pay, new draft legislation which seeks sweeping new powers over the schools system suggests.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi will have greater powers to close down failing academy trusts – rather than just schools – and private schools. He will even dictate what warrants a pupil absence fine if the bill passes into law.

The draft schools bill, published this week, proposes a new statutory set of national standards that will replace a complex system of individual funding agreements, legislation and guidance as the basis of intervention in academies.

Although the Department for Education has not set out a final list of standards, the bill does list “examples of matters about which standards may be set”. These include the curriculum, pupil welfare, careers guidance and the length of the school day, year and holidays.

Other examples include assessments and exam entries, how complaints and whistleblowing are handled and the quality of leadership and management.

Controversially, the DfE also said it may set standards relating to governance structures and procedures “including the composition of boards of directors, and the responsibilities of directors and members” of academies.

The government claimed the standards would “mostly” replicate existing rules.

But Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said she was “very concerned that the state would potentially seek to intervene in the governance of independent legal entities”.

Other examples of potential standards relate to staff pay, admissions criteria, spending and collaboration with partners.

Education policy consultant John Fowler warned the DfE had “yet



The Prince of Wales

to make the case for a level of central control of the school system that the bill represents”.

“The post-war Labour government did make the central control case to establish the NHS, admittedly using existing local democratic structures. So, what’s holding the government back?”

From next September, intervention will focus on academy trusts themselves, rather than individual academies.

New notices to improve will be issued to trusts that have “significant weaknesses in management or governance”, while new compliance directions will be aimed at those who fail to discharge their legal duties.

The government will be able to replace individual trustees or entire boards with interim appointments if weaknesses are not addressed, and in the worst-case scenarios terminate agreements with entire trusts, forcing them to close down.

Andrea Squires, partner and head of education at law firm Winckworth Sherwood, said the reforms represented a “far cry from the days when academies were introduced with the prospect of less regulation and more freedom to innovate”.

A controversial move would also grant councils the power to convert any or all of its schools into academies. While they will have to consult affected schools’ governors, councils only need consent if they are trying to move a foundation or voluntary school.

Paul Whiteman, leader of the NAHT heads’ union, said the decision on whether or not to become an academy or to join a multi-academy trust “is one that must continue to sit with the governing body of each school”.

“The government still has work to do to convince many school leaders and governors of the merits of their vision.”

Also in the bill, Ofsted will be handed more powers to identify and investigate illegal schools, to allow inspectors to “act in a more intrusive fashion”. The inspectorate will be allowed to request a warrant if denied entry, including for an officer to attend where “reasonable force is needed”.

ASCL’s Geoff Barton said: “Action to tighten the law is long overdue and much needed. We are pleased that the schools bill includes measures to address this situation.”

But the bill is silent on the issue of local authority-run academy trusts. It is government policy, not the law, that currently prevents councils from setting up MATs, so ministers are waiting to set out their stall.

The government wants all schools either in or in the process of moving into academy trusts by 2030, effectively meaning all state schools will answer to Whitehall within a decade.



Leora Cruddas



Paul Whiteman

EXPLAINER

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At a glance: The schools bill policies

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A new set of “academy trust standards”, replacing the current complex mishmash of different funding agreements, legislation, and guidance 2. More powers for government to intervene at academy trust level, including notices to improve, directions and powers to replace trustees 3. Councils can apply academy orders for any of their schools, with a duty on governing boards to facilitate 4. When church schools academise, the local council must hand their sites over freehold, not on long-term leases 5. Removal of a “disincentive” to Christian school academisation by giving them the same protections over religious education and collective worship 6. Extension of the statutory protection for maintained schools’ religious character to academies to provide “reassurance” for faith groups 7. Removal of the ability of trusts or governing bodies to make a grammar school non-selective, with a public ballot of parents the only mechanism available 8. New requirements for councils to promote regular attendance and reduce absence, and for schools to publish attendance policies 9. The education secretary will decide what will warrant an absence fine 10. Current laws on granting absence will be extended to academies 11. Legislation for “direct” school funding, rather than councils distributing it based on their own plans, with another consultation on the plans before the summer 12. A duty for councils to keep a register of children not in school, and parents will have a duty to provide information to local authorities for the register 13. Councils will also have to provide support to registered home- | <p>educating families where it’s required</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Legislation to speed up the issuing of school attendance orders, which are issued by councils on behalf of heads to parents or carers of absent pupils 15. The government will make it a crime for parents who are subject to a school attendance order to withdraw their child from school, which is not currently an offence 16. The maximum penalty for breaching an attendance order will increase to a £2,500 fine or up to 3 months’ imprisonment 17. Powers to ban teachers widened to cover misconduct by teachers in online, post-16 and FE settings or not currently teaching, and allow DfE staff to refer teachers 18. More powers for Ofsted to investigate illegal schools and allow inspectors to ‘act in a more intrusive fashion’ and search for and seize evidence 19. Making it a criminal offence to obstruct or not provide information and assistance to inspectors during visits over suspected lawbreaking 20. A right for Ofsted to request a warrant where inspectors are denied entry, including for a police constable to attend where “reasonable force is needed” 21. Legislation allowing the suspension of private schools’ registration where there is a risk of harm or breaches to the independent school standards 22. Making it an offence for an independent school to continue to operate during a suspension, punishable by up to six months in prison and/or an unlimited fine. 23. Requirement for settings to be registered if they provide full-time education to five or more children, or one or more child who is looked after or has an EHCP 24. A requirement for independent schools to apply for government approval if they change things like their proprietor, age range of |
|---|---|

So what happens now?

The schools bill was introduced in Parliament this week after being announced in the Queen’s Speech on Tuesday.

The draft law will first make its way through the House of Lords, where the government could face more serious opposition because it does not have a majority.

After passing the Lords, the bill will move into the House of Commons, where it will be scrutinised again.

If amendments are made to the bill in the Commons, the Lords will then consider these, and if they disagree or make changes, the legislation will begin to “ping pong” between the two houses.

Once this process is complete, the bill will be ready to be signed into law.

It’s worth pointing out that it’s not unusual for government bills to be amended during their passage. Opposition politicians

may succeed in amending the bill, or the government may agree to make its own amendments to get it past.

This means that what gets passed into law will not necessarily be the same as what has been issued this week in draft form. The aim will be to pass the bill in the next 12 months.

Remember to follow *Schools Week* and our journalists on twitter as we follow the bill’s progress!

NEWS

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Parents must pay if pupils miss exams, school warns

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

A school has written to parents warning that they will have to pay for their child's exam fees if they do not turn up without a good reason.

Education leaders said the direct approach was "unusual" and showed "complete disregard for the mental health" of pupils sitting exams.

However, others have said there is "nothing new" in schools reserving the right to charge parents, but it can act as a way of "incentivising candidates to turn up".

Seaford Head School, in East Sussex, wrote to GCSE pupils, parents and carers last week to provide extra information ahead of next week's exams.

It included advice on the timings of exams and other tips. However, the letter also warned that "if a student is entered for an examination and fails to attend any component of the examination, the school will expect to recover the entry fee from that student and/or his/her parents/carers".

The latter part of the sentence was in bold type.

Exceptions would only be made in unforeseen circumstances or medical grounds, the letter added.

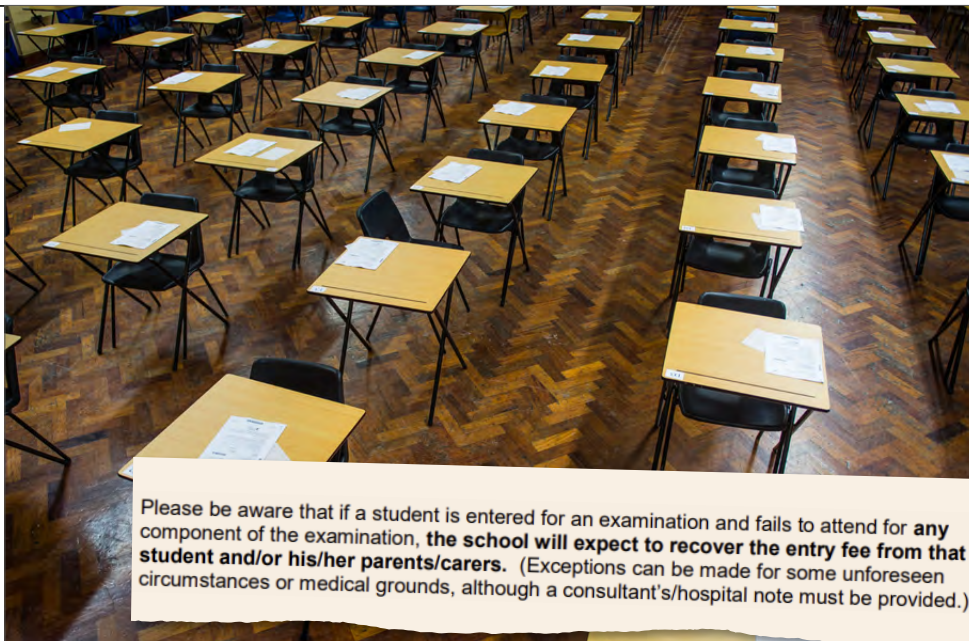
There are strict rules banning state schools from charging parents for things associated with their child's education. They are not allowed to charge parents for exam fees if the pupil has been prepared for it at the school.

However, under the education act of 1996, fees can actually be charged if a child does not turn up to an exam "without good reason".

Hilary Goldsmith, a school business leader whose child is preparing for GCSEs at Seaford, said she had never come across such warnings before.

She said including the information among exam tips showed a "complete disregard for the mental health" of pupils sitting exams. Those unlikely to attend may be experiencing "mental health concerns around exams themselves".

A new survey from the Association of School and College leaders found more than eight in 10 headteachers reporting higher levels of stress



and anxiety among exam pupils than in pre-pandemic years.

The letter could also place additional pressure on hard-up families, Goldsmith added. Most GCSE entry fees are around £40 but they can rise to nearly £80 for certain subjects.

"There's enough pressure on the children to turn up and do well," Goldsmith added.

However, Seaford Head said it was "normal procedure" to include the information in its pre-exam correspondence to ensure parents are aware in advance of exams. The school said it had never charged a pupil for missing a paper.

Tom Middlehurst, ASCL's assessment specialist, said there was "nothing new" about schools reserving the right to charge parents when pupils miss exams without good reason.

He said some schools may write to parents to make them aware of the right to do so "as a way of incentivising candidates to turn up".

Dan Morrow, chief executive of Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, said it was unusual for the school "to have it highlighted front and centre"

as they were usually part of the "small print that no one ever really worries about".

He said schools needed to find "the right balance between perceived persuasion and pressure".

Some schools mention the

charge on their website. Baysgarth School, in Barton-upon-Humber, says parents could be charged between £6 and £40 per exam "unless a satisfactory explanation can be given".

Meanwhile, the exam information page for Northfleet Technology College, in Kent, warns that "failure to pay may result in your results being withheld".

The Joint Council for Qualifications says schools cannot withhold results in this way. The school has since removed the line after being contacted by Schools Week. It said this was not policy and was included in error.

In 2017, Colchester Academy School improved its attendance by 1.1 per cent within weeks of warning pupils that non-attenders would be charged to enter their GCSE exams.

The school told media at the time that the number of students with an attendance figure below 90 per cent also decreased by half.

Matthew Clements-Wheeler, former chair of the Institute of School Business Leaders (ISBL) said schools were "doing everything they can to encourage" exam attendance but they should

"think carefully" about the "tone and the nature of communication with students".

The Department for Education said that schools "should make sure all options have been explored to support students and families to engage with exams, before considering recovering fees".



NEWS

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High Court legal challenge lodged over £121m IoT

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

A leading education charity has lodged a High Court legal challenge against Nadhim Zahawi over his department's handling of the flagship £121 million Institute of Teaching contract.

Schools Week revealed in March the contract was to be handed to a group of leading academy trusts. Rival bidders the Ambition Institute lost out over a financial compliance issue, despite scoring higher for the quality of its bid.

The charity – which is heavily reliant on government funding for its teacher training activities – has now lodged a legal claim against the Department for Education, Schools Week has learned.

The move is particularly damaging for the government, given Ambition is one of the lead providers under another of its flagship programmes, the early career framework (ECF).

The legal spat leaves the supposed September opening of the teacher training provider hanging in the balance.



However, Schools Week understands the department is still working towards the IoT launching in time for the new year. They are confident of a “robust” procurement process and that they have a strong case.

The IoT will be the country's “flagship teacher and leader development provider”. It is supposed to have 500 trainees from September 2023, and 1,000 the following year.

The School-Led Development Trust, led by the Harris Federation, Outwood Grange Academies Trust (OGAT), Star Academies and Oasis Community Learning, has won the contract, as first revealed by Schools Week.

Ambition lodged its legal claim in the High Court on April 22. It is not clear whether Ambition is pushing for the contract to be re-

awarded, or wants compensation for what it believes is a government gaffe.

Both Ambition and the DfE declined to comment.

It comes soon after the DfE had to axe Randstad from running the National Tutoring Programme – another flagship scheme – following poor performance.

The HR firm had won the £32 million contract despite a bid led by the EEF, which ran the NTP in year one, scoring more highly. Like Ambition, it lost out on a financial technicality.

However, the legal move is also potentially risky for Ambition. Its most recent accounts, for the 2019-20 year, show £12 million of its £16 million income was from the DfE – meaning any souring of relations could impact its future viability.

The IoT will deliver the ECF for new teachers and national professional qualifications (NPQs) for more experienced staff as part of the DfE's wider overhaul of teacher training.

The IoT will also attempt to replicate the approach of schools which “combine high standards of pupil behaviour and discipline with a broad knowledge-based and ambitious curriculum”, according to the DfE.

BILLY CAMDEN | @BILLYCAMDEN

38 BTECs ousted to pave way for T-levels

More than 150 level 3 qualifications taken by 66,000 pupils – including 38 BTECs – are to be axed as the government clears the way for new T-levels.

The Department for Education has finally published the first provisional list (see the full list on our website) of qualifications that it says overlap with the first ten T-levels and face being defunded.

In total, just 160 vocational and technical qualifications of the 2,000 overlapping courses will be axed from 2024. An impact assessment shows there are 66,000 enrolments on the courses, 27 per cent of which are students deemed to be the “most disadvantaged”.

There are 662,000 level 3 enrolments for 16-to-19-year-olds nationally – meaning one in ten will be impacted.

Pearson has the most courses on the axe-list (41, including 38 BTECs).

Sector leaders said they were pleased only a small proportion of level 3 qualifications are

to be cut.

But the Sixth Form Colleges Association said the BTEC diploma in health and social care – one of the qualifications set to be axed – is “enormously popular and well respected by universities and employers”.

The impact of its removal “will be felt by a significant number of young people”.

Awarding bodies have been given until July 8 to challenge the decision. The final list will be confirmed in September.

Pearson said over half of the axed qualifications were being withdrawn already as part of its usual cycle of updating products. It will be challenging “important qualifications” on the list, including the health and social care BTEC. Around 3,000 youngsters completed the qualification last year.

T-levels are the government's flagship new technical qualifications and sit alongside their academic equivalent A-levels.

Ten T-levels have been rolled out so far in four sectors: construction, digital, education and childcare and health and science. Thirteen more T-level subjects will be launched between September 2022 and 2023.

The DfE wants to strip funding for thousands of “poor quality” qualifications that overlap and leave pupils “confused”.

The department's response to the review consultation stated BTEC qualifications would become “rare” once it begins phasing in a new “streamlined” system for level 3 courses, initially planned to begin from 2023.

But education secretary Nadhim Zahawi announced in November he would delay the cull by a year following pressure from the Protect Student Choice campaign, which is led by the Sixth Form Colleges Association and has high-profile political backing from the likes of Lord Blunkett.

However more qualifications will be defunded in future years.

An open letter to schools using SIMS

Dear Headteacher,

I've never written an open letter before, but I think it's fair to say that the past few months have seen a lot of "firsts" in the Management Information System (MIS) space...!

You'll probably know by now that back in November SIMS announced it would only offer 3 year contracts to schools. Whilst thousands of schools used this as an opportunity to switch, many more felt they didn't have time to make the change, so renewed their contracts until 2025.

But it doesn't have to be this way. At Arbor we believe passionately that switching MIS is a real opportunity to change the way all your staff work for the better. And given the immediate and positive impact switching MIS can have on everything from workload, to staff happiness, parental engagement and school collaboration, **we believe you shouldn't be prevented from switching by your supplier.**

That's why we're launching our Pay-for-One Promise today.

The Pay-for-One Promise is our commitment that a school should only pay for one MIS at a time. Put simply, **if you're locked into paying for SIMS, we won't ask you to pay for your core Arbor MIS or payment license until that contract ends.** You get all the benefits of switching to the UK's leading cloud MIS, but don't have to worry about double-paying, or being out of pocket. In fact, by switching now and replacing multiple other systems such as payments, you'll actually save money (as well as loads of time).

You can learn more about the Pay-for-One Promise at bit.ly/POP-Arbor or reach out to us at pop@arbor-education.com with any questions.

We feel strongly that this is the right thing to do to help your school, trust or LA keep its options open and make the best decision possible. We look forward to hearing your feedback.

All the best,

James



James Weatherill, CEO at Arbor Education



NEWS

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Councils start school talks over spin-off MATs

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

A council has started talks with schools about launching its own academy trust, with detailed plans to be published later this year.

West Sussex County Council has written to schools to “engage ... about the value and interest in setting up a number of local authority sponsored multi-academy trusts across the county over the next few years”.

It is one of several exploring the move after the government’s white paper signalled that local authorities could launch MATs in areas “where too few strong trusts exist”. Ministers want to see all schools in trusts or in the process of moving to them by 2030.

Only 26 per cent of West Sussex’s 298 schools are academies, below the national rate of 39 per cent.

In a letter to heads, Paul Wagstaff, the area’s assistant director of education, said the council also wanted to discuss “the possible consolidation of existing localities and partnerships between schools and our strong multi-academy trusts”.

“We are starting a programme of engagement to test the appetite, to understand what schools and possibly existing academies may want from a local authority network of MATs and local authority-led partnerships.”

The council aims to share proposed models with schools and academies “before the end of the summer term”.

They will also be “exploring” whether each council trust would need a chief executive or whether a “different structure” could be operated.

Wagstaff told *Schools Week* the council would exercise its “broader strategic role” to plan for full academisation “whether it decides to sponsor its own multi-academy trusts or acts in a brokerage or strategic planning role in broadening the reach of existing multi academy trusts”.

Five other councils told *Schools Week* they were exploring the option, but most authorities said they wanted to see more details before progressing.

The government’s draft schools bill, published this week, confirmed a law change to allow



West Sussex (pictured) council scopes out setting up its own MATs

councils to request academy orders for some or all of their schools.

But allowing council-run MATs would involve a change in government policy, rather than the law. So details of how that would actually work, and which councils would be eligible, still remain unclear.

One leader, who spoke anonymously, said the West Sussex letter “shows more clarity is required from the department regarding its intentions as we are already seeing multiple interpretations of the same white paper”.

Schools Week understands that further details will be published this month, but that the current 19 per cent cap on the number of local authority-appointed trustees is expected to remain in place. A decision on whether to allow LAs to be controlling “members” of trusts is yet to be made.

West Berkshire, where just 13 per cent of schools are academies, said if it set up a MAT, “schools will be invited to join – both existing maintained schools, and stand-alone academies, nor would we rule out any small MATs wanting to join us”.

“We will, of course, consult local schools, both diocese and existing MATs. We may wish to work in partnership with neighbouring LAs around cross-border LA MATs.”

Hampshire also has an academisation rate of 13 per cent. Its lead member for

children’s services, Roz Chadd, said it was the council’s ambition “to work closely with school leaders to ascertain whether a local authority multi-academy trust model has merit locally”.

In South Gloucestershire, 27 per cent of schools are academies. The council said it would “explore the opportunities and potential benefits for our communities that a council-run multi-academy trust could offer”, and would “discuss options with our maintained schools”.

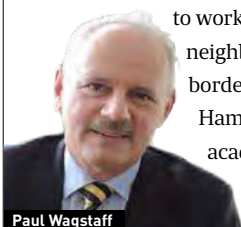
“At this very early stage we have not assessed whether a council-run entity or seeking to incorporate currently maintained schools into existing trusts, or a combination of the two, will be the best way forward, but we will formulate our plans in the coming months.”

Herefordshire said it was “in principle keen to explore establishing one or more multi-academy trusts within the county”. Thirty-five per cent of the county’s schools have converted so far.

And Northumberland’s children’s services director Cath McEvoy-Carr welcomed the “opportunity to form a strong local authority multi-academy trust for Northumberland”. The area has a 33 per cent academisation rate.

“We are delighted with the level of initial interest already shown by our schools and we look forward to working with them and the DfE as more information is made available.”

The DfE said further details would be published in the “coming weeks”.



Paul Wagstaff

NEWS

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£3k new teacher bonuses: how they'll work

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

Up to 7,000 early-career computing, maths, physics and chemistry teachers in 4,500 schools will receive bonuses to stay in the profession, amid fears of a growing exodus of staff.

The scheme is a reheated version of the "early career payments" bonus scheme the government scrapped in 2020.

But staff in some subjects and areas will no longer be eligible, while some staff at schools with lower-than-average poverty levels will be – despite it being dubbed the "levelling up premium".

At its most generous, the predecessor scheme was worth £15,000 for maths teachers.

Now the government has dusted off a similar initiative, focused on its new "education investment areas" and open from September.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi said it would give staff "the best specialist teaching".

But unlike the last scheme, languages staff



are ineligible, and computing staff now are.

Only new teachers in schools with the highest proportion of students receiving free school meals can apply. Officials did not say how to find out where schools rank by this measure.

Eligible staff in the 30 per cent of schools with the most pupil premium children will receive £6,000 for staying five years in the profession – or £9,000 if schools are in 55 newly created EIAs.

If they are in the top 50 per cent, they can take home £4,500, or £7,500 in ministers' prioritised EIAs.

Yet despite payments being dubbed the

"levelling up premium," some staff will receive bonuses in schools with lower-than-average intakes of poor pupils.

Schools only need to be in the top 70 per cent for some staff to be eligible if they are in EIAs, with £6,000 available. Staff at similar schools outside EIAs cannot claim anything.

The DfE expects staff at around 4,500 schools to benefit.

Zahawi said it would support jobs in low-income areas, adding: "Teachers shouldn't feel that they must leave their local area for a better paid job."

The DfE recently predicted a looming exodus of teachers delayed by Covid, and hiked trainee recruitment targets.

Meanwhile officials have also announced £500 million had been allocated in Condition Improvement Fund grants for building work and repairs next year.

The "most pressing" 1,405 bids submitted by small trusts, sixth-form colleges and some voluntary-aided schools received funding, out of 3,501 applications.

Acceptance rates varied by region, from 28 per cent in the south-west to 46 per cent in Lancashire and West Yorkshire.

£7m boost to school mental health training

The government has announced a further £7 million in funding for schools to train a senior mental health lead next year.

This brings the total amount of funding for 2022-23 to £10 million and builds on the Department for Education's pledge to provide designated training for every school by 2025.

The government said it is "well on track" to achieve this goal as new figures show over 8,000 schools and colleges claimed a £1,200 grant to train a senior mental health lead

between October 2021 and March.

This included over half of all state-funded secondary schools – surpassing ambitions to reach a third of these settings.

The new investment will allow up to 8,000 schools and colleges to apply for a training grant by the end of this financial year.

NHS England also confirmed over 500 mental health support teams will be rolled out this year – surpassing the target of having 400 by April 2023.

Exams to be more accessible

Exams will have to be more accessible by using "appropriate language" so they do not rely on pupils' "culture capital".

Updated Ofqual guidance says exam boards will now have to use source material, context, images and colour in ways that "do not disadvantage students".

Chief regulator Dr Jo Saxton said this wasn't about making exams easier. Instead it was "breaking down barriers that stop young people achieving their true potential and making sure that exams actually test the things they are designed to test".

An earlier consultation

said exams should not have "unnecessary negative, narrow or stereotypical representations of particular groups".

A qualification that requires students to have "a command" of complex language "must continue to test students on this".

For example, an English exam might use complex sentence structures, but maths papers testing numeracy should not contain overly complex text.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of school leaders' union, said questions "should not rely on a learner's cultural capital".

NEWS IN BRIEF

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EHCP requests rise (again)

Requests for education health and care plans soared again last year, new data reveals.

Department for Education data, published yesterday, also shows how more children with EHCPs are staying in mainstream schools, rather than special schools.

The number of initial requests for EHCPs rose from 75,951 in 2020 to 93,302 in 2021 – the highest figures since records began in 2016.

The number being refused has gone up slightly, from 21.6 per cent in 2020 to 22.3 per cent, but this is still below the 22.8 per cent in 2019.

The total number of plans was 473,255 in 2021, up 9.9 per cent from 430,697 in 2020. This

number has increased every year since 2010.

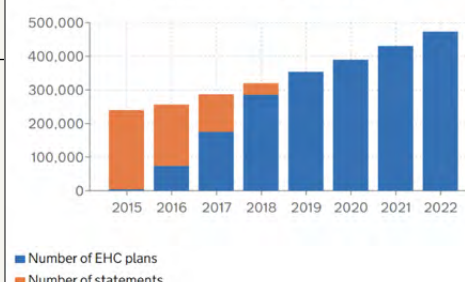
40.5 per cent of children with plans are now in mainstream education, up from 39.9 last year. The number in special schools has dropped again, from 35.8 per cent to 34.8 per cent.

It follows a *Schools Week* investigation showing how special schools were setting up classrooms in staffrooms and therapy spaces to cope with a surge in pupils with additional needs.

The long-awaited SEND review aims to incentivise mainstream schools to become “more inclusive”.

Parents can go to both mediation and the first-tier tribunal if they disagree with the local

Number of EHC plans and statements of SEN, 2015 to 2022



authority’s decision on the EHCP.

During 2021, there was an increase of nearly 1,000 cases of mediation – from 4,135 in 2020 to 5,097. The number continuing to tribunal has risen again from 1,104 to 1,302 last year.

[Full story here](#)

Tutor tables ‘not a stick to beat people’

Tutoring league tables will not be used as a “stick to beat people with”, the Department for Education’s top civil servant has claimed.

As first revealed by *Schools Week*, the government plans to publish data on schools’ usage of the National Tutoring Programme in the autumn term, alongside funding allocations and data on the number of deprived children.

The announcement has stoked fears that schools which shunned the flagship catch-up programme because it was too restrictive and costly will end up taking the blame for the failing initiative.

DfE permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood acknowledged that schools “have been anxious about the collection of data and the transparency around data.”

“But I do think the principle that, and the secretary of state is very passionate about this, that we try and use data and

transparency much more widely across the system, not as a sort of stick to beat people with.”

The data is supposed instead to provide “a way of shining light on what’s happening and allowing people to look at what each other are doing.”

“And that’s the spirit in which we said we’re going to make sure this data is going to be made available.”

Acland-Hood also revealed that the DfE was working on ways to make the collection of tutoring data “more seamless and easier for schools in the future”.

She said problems with the scheme, run by Randstad, are “better characterised as us learning rapidly about something having set up a new programme than as it being fundamentally broken”.

[Full story here](#)

‘Parent pledge’ budget warning

Schools have been told to factor in the government’s new “parent pledge” of support for children who fall behind when setting their budgets for next year.

The schools white paper stated that “any child that falls behind” in English and maths should receive “timely and evidence-based support to enable them to reach their full potential”.

Ofsted would hold schools to account for ensuring that parents are kept informed about the catch-up support.

The government has now urged schools and academy trusts planning their budgets for next year to “consider how to factor in the parent pledge”.

While “most” were already meeting the pledge, for some it would be a “shift in approach”, it added.

A Teacher Tapp poll in March found that only around half of English and maths teachers said their schools informed parents about interventions to stop their children falling behind.

Leaders were “best placed to understand the needs of their pupil cohorts and have the flexibility to prioritise their spending to support those needs”, a government email to heads said.

Schools should consider support available through the pupil premium funding and National Tutoring Programme.

The development comes after ministers outlined plans to name and shame schools that have not yet used tutoring, and to contact those that have not signed up to “discuss their plans”.

Government data from March suggests that two in five schools have still not used the scheme.

[Full story here](#)

3-week SEND review extension

A consultation on the government’s SEND review has been extended for three weeks after accessible versions of the document were finally published.

Last week, *Schools Week* reported how the near six-week wait had excluded some of the communities the SEND review seeks to support from the consultation process.

A large print version was published alongside the review in late March, with British Sign Language and easy-read versions promised in “early April”. The documents were published on Monday.

The government has now extended the consultation end date from July 1 to July 22 to “give participants time to use the new

materials and submit their responses”.

A guide to the SEND review for children and young people has also been published.

Children’s minister Will Quince said he had agreed the extension after “listening to concerns. A full, fair, open consultation is key to our vision for more inclusivity. We’ve published a suite of accessible versions of our green paper so even more people can get involved.”

Last week, Simon Knight, the head of Frank Wise special school in Oxfordshire, said the lack of accessible materials was “hugely concerning and is materially impacting on the ability of our students to have their voice heard”.

[Full story here](#)

FEATURE

'People are so open-hearted': Ukrainian families find refuge in English schools

Five-year-old Mykyta cowers when he hears planes flying over London, fearing they are about to drop missiles. His classmate Polina mistakes police sirens for the dreaded air raid alarms. Both are scarred by the war they fled in Ukraine.

The heart-wrenching stories of the children taken in by England's schools reveal the horror of Putin's war: fleeing Russia's bombs with all their worldly possessions in one suitcase; forced to leave their fathers behind. One child's school has even been reduced to rubble.

But, by opening their doors to refugees, schools are helping to write a new chapter in the story – one full of love, compassion and hope instead. Reporters Samantha Booth, Tom Belger and Freddie Whittaker visited and spoke to schools across the country to tell the story of the Ukrainian families they have taken in ...

'Childhood is lost'

The Balabanov family have had to rebuild their lives before, having fled Donetsk in 2014 at the start of the Donbas war.

Then, on February 24 this year, two hours after Russia invaded, the family of four crammed their car full of belongings and left Kyiv to drive west.

"I woke up from some missiles hitting the city and explosions," said Oleksandr, aged 15. "The



Kharkiv, Ukraine. Russian missile strike to a schoolyard

main concern for my mum was that her children should not see a second of it, because it's awful."

They arrived in London nearly two months later after finding a sponsor family. But five-year-old Polina, Oleksandr's younger sister, is still confused when police cars go by with sirens blaring, scared it is the sound of the air raid sirens heard across Ukraine since Russia invaded.

Oleksandr left behind a life of music. He was selected to represent Ukraine in the junior Eurovision song contest in 2020. His former school is still putting on Zoom lessons but he hopes to be placed in a school soon.

Polina now attends Riversdale Primary School, in south London, alongside five-year-old Mykyta Andrushchenko, who fled with his mother Viktoriia and grandmother Larysa from Bakhmut, in eastern Ukraine.

"We went for a walk, and we started to hear some noises, some explosions, and Mykyta started asking me what is going on," English teacher Viktoriia said.

"He started to feel disturbed about the air raid that he would hear all the time and he would try and hide in the bathroom to not hear it. That was

Continued on next page

'It's like Hogwarts school'

Parents were reduced to tears when a kind-hearted year 5 boy offered his Lego to a six-year-old Ukrainian refugee to play with in his first week of school.

Unable to speak English, Oleh instead leapt up to hug Luca, who handed him a box full of toys at Cumnor House Sussex school. The family arrive in the school car park every morning to more donations from parents.

Mother Anastasiia said: "We are not used to receiving presents from strangers, we never knew it could be like this."

Their other child, 12-year-old Sonya, has been baking with the host's daughter Kika using Google Translate. For Ukrainian Mother's Day this week, Kika made Anastasiia a blue and yellow cake.

Anastasiia added: "We always wanted to come [to England] but in different circumstances. When we came it was like all of the people were so heart-opened to us. We are really the lucky ones."



Luca and Oleh

In London, Kateryna Balabanov has been sending pictures of her daughter Polina at Riversdale Primary School back to relatives in Ukraine.

"Everyone is saying it's like a castle, it's like a Hogwarts school," 15-year-old Oleksandr said. "On Polina's second day, she was playing and she didn't want to leave."



"She told us that she found a friend who only speaks English, and we asked what's her name, and she said 'I don't know'."

"The language doesn't matter much... from playing she can point at something and just use gestures. She is expanding her knowledge quite quickly."

FEATURE



Oleh and Sonya



Polina and Mykyta

the key point when we decided to do something and to leave our country.”

When planes fly over London, Mykyta still asks if they are missiles. “He needs some time to forget, but is it possible for them to forget this experience?” Viktoriia wondered.

Both youngsters started at Riversdale – which has pupils who speak 42 different languages – just a day after visiting. According to headteacher Amy Roberts, Mykyta loved his new school jumper so much he would not take it off.

“It’s a privilege to have people who trust us to look after their children. On that first day, the parents’ courage to walk away from their children was amazing.”

In East Sussex, television anchor Natasha Kaplinsky has taken in a Ukrainian family whose children now attend Cumnor House Sussex, an independent school for two to 13-year-olds.

The family arrived in England with just one suitcase of clothes and toys after fleeing through Poland from Lviv hours after the invasion began. On the journey they stayed in a cramped house with other families, watching the news for updates from their home country.

Their 12-year-old daughter Sonya was talking to her friend online in Poland last week when she



Jamie Barton



Left to right – teaching assistant Nadia Caldecott, Larysa, Viktoriia and Mykyta Andrushchenko, Oleksandr, Kateryna and Polina Balabanov and Riversdale head teacher Amy Roberts

heartbreakingly said: “Our childhood is over.”

Mother Anastasiia hopes that now Sonya and six-year-old Oleh are at school they will “find” this again: “When we came there it was surreal. In Ukraine, you see all of the stress, all the tears, all this pain and, after you cross the border, it’s like another world.”

Schools offer more than a warm welcome

Pupils are going above and beyond to help children, with one child offering Lego to Oleh and reducing parents to tears (see box out). But not only are they providing a warm welcome, many schools are offering significant tailored support from their own budgets.

Core Education Trust’s four schools launched a joint “Core Hello” programme for migrants and refugees in September. The Birmingham secondaries were already offering it to Afghan, Syrian and other refugees before two Ukrainians joined them in April.

They now learn together in small classes with a curriculum tweaked to focus on intensive language and reading support, and a language-specialist teacher.

In the 10-week programme, pupils make progress “which normally takes years” before returning to regular classes, according to Rekha Shell-Macleod, head of school at City Academy, which hosts the programme.

“And they learn simple things like crossing the road, where to catch a bus, how to navigate safely around the city – things we take

for granted but which are hugely important for someone new to the country.”

For Jamie Barton, head of Jewellery Quarter Academy, the programme not only stops pupils being “thrown in with no English and asked to just get on with it”, it also lessens “culture shock” and builds belonging.

At Riversdale, the children will be offered “play therapy” by in-house therapists when ready, where they can re-enact any trauma and explore their feelings.

Like many London primary schools dealing with declining populations, Riversdale is undersubscribed so can take children in easily.

Teachers are used to helping those who have English as a second language, so use “clear messaging” and “lots of visual techniques”, Roberts said.

But funding delay causes friction

But some schools lack the support and resources to properly cater for their new pupils, with heads producing their own learning materials and calling for help from trauma experts.

Ministers have announced that local authorities will receive funding of between £3,000 and £8,755, to educate Ukrainian pupils depending on which school phase they are at. But Schools Week understands this will not be paid until July, right at the end of term and almost five months after Russia invaded Ukraine.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi has told schools to breach number limits to admit pupils. But leaders warned the lack of a separate admissions policy for refugees was creating

FEATURE

confusion.

Caldecote Primary School, in Cambridgeshire, has taken in two pupils, Myroslava Starkova, 11, and Alihan Ysupov, 10. They fled Kharkiv when their school was reduced to “rubble”.

Co-headteacher Karen Standon described the admissions process as “pretty dire” and said there was little support available.

Under the school admissions code, refugees are prioritised for places, but alongside other groups of vulnerable children. A *Schools Week* investigation in 2019 revealed some youngsters waiting over 10 months to gain a place in school.

Caldecote has provided uniforms and bought books in Russian, the pupils’ first language. “We wanted to provide as much stability and normality for them as possible because it has been horrendous [for them],” Standon said.

The school has even DBS-checked its Russian cleaner to come in during afternoons to play games and help the children with conversational English.

“They’re well-schooled and understand all the routines of school, but they can’t speak to anybody,” Standon added. “So their days are just spent in this bubble, with us trying to use Google Translate.

“We’ve asked whether there is any support for books and resources. There really isn’t. We’ve just been relying on our community here.”

Cambridgeshire County Council said it was awaiting further guidance from the DfE but had briefed schools and provided an admissions guide.

The government has also said schools should

teach their “usual curriculum” to the new pupils, though this could be supplemented with the Ukrainian curriculum.

But Dan File, head of Elham Primary School in Kent, said teaching a normal curriculum was “absolutely not” realistic. The school is focusing on language acquisition for its current year 2 Ukrainian pupil.

File is also still waiting for the £6,580 from the government, adding the “main thing” needed was access to experts in trauma. “They’re kids, they only have one chance. It’s madness.

“They haven’t given anything to schools – no resources, we’ve been building our own.”

The government had previously encouraged heads to lend laptops provided during Covid to Ukrainian pupils.

Private school waive fees

Meanwhile, at least 100 private schools have pledged to take in Ukrainian, according to the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference association.

Fees have been waived for the six refugees attending Cumnor House Sussex, for this term.

Fergus Llewellyn, headteacher, said it was “absolutely the right thing to do,” adding they can be “flexible because of the agility of our admissions processes”.

The children are not expected to learn, all subjects, such as Latin and instead are being given some extra English language support.

“Unlike many senior schools, we’ve got some freedom,” Llewellyn said. “I don’t have to worry about results because I don’t have a league table



Balabanov family



Andrushchenko family

that I’m beholden to. I’m not saying we don’t have high expectations of our children, but we don’t have that pressure.”

The Department for Education said it was “extremely grateful for the warm welcome, support and care that all schools are providing”. It is working to “refine our understanding of the costs we expect LAs will incur”.

Home Office figures show 46,100 people have arrived through its Ukraine family and sponsorship schemes, making up less than 1 per cent of Ukrainians who have fled abroad so far.

The department said it was unable to tell us how many Ukrainian children were in English

‘I want British people to come to see beautiful Ukraine, too’

War, family separation and a new country are not the only upheaval Ukrainian pupils are navigating. School life alone marks a significant change, going beyond language.

Yehor, 15, was surprised to receive a blazer and tie on joining Jewellery Quarter Academy last month. In Kyiv, only young or private school pupils usually wear uniforms, he said.

He also did not expect so many different nationalities, with 47 languages spoken at the Birmingham secondary. “You see more foreign tourists than other pupils in Ukraine,” he said through a translator.

While pupils’ mobile phones are a bugbear for staff and ministers here, Yehor said the situation was worse in Ukraine: “They play on them more during class – they’re told off, but still do it.”



Yehor, 15, from Kyiv, a pupil at Jewellery Quarter Academy, Birmingham

His English is not as good as he thought, he added, with the language barrier the “biggest issue” he faces.

But he is grateful to be on Core Education Trust’s special language-focused programme for new arrivals. “It’s incredible services are helping us, and I have an opportunity to study English.”

He is already getting used to this “very unusual environment”.

Separation from his father and grandparents has “hurt”, however. His biggest hope is that the war will end and he can return. “I want British people to come to Ukraine and see how beautiful it is too.”

At the end of the interview, he broke into English unprompted. After teaching *Schools Week* how to say thank you (“dyakuyu”), he replied: “You’re welcome.”



Family Learning Festival 15-30 October 2022

The Family Learning Festival brings families, communities and organisations together to celebrate learning. This year's theme is 'Inspiring Curiosity', encouraging the families you work with to discover a love of shared learning through curiosity.

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On tour with Ofqual: 'We don't want to be known as the kids who didn't do GCSEs'

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

Schools Week editor John Dickens joined Ofqual chief regulator Dr Jo Saxton as her tour of schools across the country ahead of the return of exams reached his home town of Blackpool

"You joke about it with your friends – 'we're the year that didn't do exams' – but you do think you got the easy way out," says Blackpool Sixth Form College student Megan Taylor, 18.

As the sun beams in through huge glass windows in a room on the college's second floor, offering tree-topped views across the Fylde coast, Taylor is one of six students giving their views on the return of exams this summer – the first since pre-Covid 2019.

For Megan, the chance to take exams is about "self-credibility and self-fulfilment... You don't have to worry about what other people think about you going through your young adult life and not having an exam."

It's a common theme. Earlier in the day we had visited South Shore Academy, also in Blackpool.

Students preferred to be taking exams. One said they were "more accurate". Another didn't want "Covid grades".

'The dynamic has changed'

But they were all nervous. A few talked about it being stressful. One of the reasons behind this, according to head Rebecca Warhurst, is that year 11 pupils have "not had the peers to look up to in the same way, due to lockdown."

"We noticed a change in ambience and dynamic but, with wellbeing at the heart of everything we do, we have been able to fully support our students."

Ofqual allowed adaptations this year to try and smooth out some of the Covid disruption. One year 11 pupil at South Shore said being able to have a formula sheet had "taken the stress off our shoulders".

But the youngsters – we spoke to around 10 across years 11 and 10 – also said the extra adaptations just added more things to get used to. Some exams this year will have reduced content, and there have also been coursework changes.



Blackpool sixth form principal Jill Gray (left centre) with Ofqual chief regulator Dr Jo Saxton (right centre) and Blackpool sixth form students

The government confirmed this week that exams would return to full subject content coverage.

While the intent is to return to normal "as quickly as possible", it has not ruled out allowing exam aids and advance information in next year's exams.

The year 10 pupils at South Shore think it only fair they should get some help. "We did miss a lot of school too," one said. Another felt they had not properly settled into the independent learning of year 10 because of Covid disruption.

Speaking after the visits, Saxton said her heart was set on assisting pupils but, with her regulator hat on, the right thing to do is to check the evidence after the use of aids this year. The government will "monitor the path and impact of the pandemic" before deciding.

'Classrooms are being taken out of action'

But back to this year, and schools are facing their own disruption amid a surge in pupils requesting access arrangements and reasonable adjustments to exams.

South Shore would usually have a handful of pupils asking to do their exams in a separate room. This year it is 20, most of whom say they are too anxious to sit in such a big room.

Four in five of the 527 heads surveyed by leaders' union ASCL said the level of stress and anxiety among exam pupils was higher than in pre-pandemic years. A similar number said they had received more requests from pupils to take exams in separate rooms.

A survey by training provider communicate-ed of 146 school and college staff found the average

STRESSED-OUT PUPILS: THE STATS

83%

OF HEADS SAY PUPILS ARE MORE STRESSED ABOUT EXAMS THAN PRE-COVID COHORTS

79%

HAVE HAD MORE REQUESTS TO PROVIDE EXTRA EXAM HELP, MOSTLY DUE TO ANXIETY

30%

AVERAGE RISE IN NUMBER OF EXTRA REQUESTS FOR ACCESS ARRANGEMENT REFERRALS

[READ MORE: OFQUAL'S TIPS TO COPE WITH EXAM PRESSURE](#)

ON LOCATION



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increase in referrals for extra exam help was around 30 per cent. The most popular requests were to sit the exam in a separate room, be given extra time, use a word processor or have supervised rest breaks.

But more than half of respondents said they felt their centre would not have the capacity to accommodate all the requests, as well as being overwhelmed by the time needed for the associated admin.

Stuart Ormson, assistant principal at Blackpool Sixth, said students were “struggling to cope with anxiety and stress more generally. But that is becoming more and more challenging trying to house it. It’s taking classrooms out of action.”

In the meantime, the college is looking to repurpose a restaurant as an exams hall. Unity Academy in Blackpool is looking at using 22 rooms for 120 exam pupils.

Saxton pointed to the lack of familiarity with exams – for both pupils and new staff – as a contributory factor. She said schools were going “above and beyond in a new way” to provide such support. She hopes things will get closer to normality next year.

But the issues are also exacerbating invigilator recruitment struggles. Blackpool Sixth had already lost some of its most experienced invigilators, who don’t want to “take the risk” after Covid. The ASCL survey found more than a third of heads had not recruited enough invigilators.

Some rules have been relaxed, including extending the normal ratio of one invigilator for every 30 pupils to 1:40. But staff we spoke to said they wanted to stick with 1:30 as having more adults in the room makes pupils feel more at ease. Blackpool Sixth has trained some of its senior leadership team as invigilators.

Challenges for new teachers, too

Like their pupils, many of the Blackpool schools’ early career teachers (ECTs) had not yet experienced exams.

Stephen Cooke, head of nearby Unity Academy, who joined us during the South Shore visit, said new teachers not knowing the exams process “puts a lot of pressure on the more experienced staff.”

“So you have pressure at both ends. Although a lot of ECTs have been through it this year, so a lot of that worry will disappear quickly.”

This all follows an unrelenting few years for staff. South Shore had to defer an Ofsted inspection this year because 22 people were off.

They collapsed year groups into the hall, with



Year 10 and 11 pupils at South Shore Academy, Blackpool, talk about exams

classes taught by new teachers or non-specialists, just to keep the school open.

South Shore serves eight of the country’s 10 most deprived neighbourhoods. Sixty-two per cent of its pupils are on free school meals.

During Covid the school, like many of its neighbours, had to provide resources such as pens and paper to families. They also gave out dongles with 30GB of data as some parents did not have internet access, but live streaming lessons meant that was sometimes burnt through in a day.

Warhurst added: “We’ve all been through the same storm, but in very different boats.”

The school is making great progress with a literacy-centric approach that includes 40-minute form periods where teachers read books to pupils. The current year 10s, the first group to go through a programme where progress is tracked via the New Group Reading Test, run by GL Assessment, saw their average standardised age scores shoot up from 86.2 per cent in year 7 (well below average) to 94.6 per cent (average).

But, overall, the Blackpool heads felt the pandemic had exposed the inequalities between poorer pupils and their peers. Ofqual has admitted

it was unable to come up with a solution that ironed out those differences.

However, with a “roll your sleeves up” attitude, staff have battled through to give students the best possible shot – and it means a lot to the youngsters.

Blackpool Sixth Form student Lloyd Paterson, who hopes to study journalism at university, said exams offered him the chance to “prove I can do it. I didn’t have that fulfilment when we finished school”.

“I don’t want people looking back and seeing us as ‘the year that didn’t do GCSEs’,” added Taylor.

OFQUAL ON TOUR

Saxton has now visited around 70 centres across the country, speaking to more than 107 leaders serving deprived areas. She set out to reach those schools that often feel they are not heard, and plans to keep the Ofqual tour rolling after exams season.

“I’ve found it so insightful. I’ve been really clear about my compass: one of the risks is not being in touch with those people you are regulating for.”



EXAMS 2023: HOW THEY ARE SHAPING UP



BACK TO FULL CONTENT FOR ALL EXAMS



PREVIOUS ADJUSTMENTS TO COURSEWORK AND FIELDWORK LIFTED



CONSIDERING SPACING OUT EXAMS AGAIN



NO DECISION ON EXAM AIDS AND ADVANCE INFO



PLAN TO RETURN TO PRE-PANDEMIC GRADE BOUNDARIES, BUT NO DECISION

NEWS



'Vindicated': Trust first to have termination notice withdrawn

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

The government has withdrawn an academy termination notice after the school's Tory donor-founded trust got an improved Ofsted following a legal challenge.

Landau Forte Academy Moorhead, in Derby, will remain within its current trust after Ofsted judged the school to be "improving" and removed it from special measures.

The decision draws to a close a years-long saga for Landau Forte Charitable Trust, which also led to the dismissal of an Ofsted inspector.

Ian Blaney, an education lawyer and partner at Lee Bolton Monier-Williams, said the case could provide "some source of encouragement" for other trusts to fight such decisions.

He added: "If they do not challenge it, not only will they potentially lose the academy but also the reputation of the trust."

Landau first received a termination warning notice over the Derby school in 2018. This was followed by two actual termination notices, one in 2020 and another the following year.

The second notice followed an Ofsted inspection in May that found that, while the school was taking effective action to move out of special measures, the trust had failed to bring about "significant improvements".

However, the trust launched a judicial review challenge in the High Court after being told that its funding agreement would be terminated in December.

In the meantime, an Ofsted inspection in April, published online by the school, rated it as "requires improvement" with leadership and management judged "good". As a result, the termination notice has been withdrawn.

It appears to be the first time such a notice has been revoked.

The online list of removed notices includes only termination warning notices or minded to terminate letters being withdrawn.

Blaney said it was "more embarrassing" for the government to "withdraw a full direction than the indication of a direction".

Trust chief executive Sarah Findlay-Cobb said the decision was a "fair reward" for the school and is the "best result" for pupils.

A DfE spokesperson said that "in some cases" a school will stay with its existing trust if it demonstrates capacity to secure "sustained improvement". The trust has now pulled its legal action.

Blaney added: "It was always in the DfE's deck of cards to pull the termination at the late stage ... the fact that they have done it suggests they were under a great deal of pressure in this case."

The trust was founded by property developer Martin Landau and luxury hotel group founder Sir Rocco Forte, who have donated £100,000 to the Conservative party election campaign in 2019.

Last year the DfE lost a High Court battle over an "irrational" academy order for Yew Tree Primary School, in Sandwell, West Midlands.

Following the first termination notice in 2020, Landau Forte commissioned an independent review which concluded that the school was making "good progress".

The review was conducted by James Kilner, an education consultant and at the time a serving Ofsted inspector.

As revealed by *Schools Week*, Ofsted said the activity "materially breached" the terms of Kilner's contract and terminated his employment – highlighting a grey area for Ofsted's part-time workforce.

Kilner told *Schools Week* this week he was delighted that the trust had "been vindicated ... [and] believed all along with the accurate assessment" of the school's strengths.

Covid inquiry chair wants better schools focus

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

The UK's public Covid inquiry chair wants to expand her remit to investigate how children and young people were impacted by the pandemic.

The draft terms of reference for the probe had just one mention of education, prompting "extreme concerns" that it would not properly investigate the problems faced by schools, parents and pupils.

Education committee MPs wrote to Baroness Heather Hallett urging her to broaden the remit during a consultation on the plans.

She has now written to the prime minister recommending that "the impact of children and young people, including health, wellbeing and social care" is added. She also wants "education and early years provision" to be included.

In her report, she said the original reference of "restrictions on attendance at places of education" would have covered provision of free school meals, the impact of inequalities in access to broadband and laptops and the impact on exam cohorts.

But she added that it was "clear the inquiry ought to be able to investigate a much broader range of impacts beyond education".

Hallett said she "hopes" that Boris Johnson will accept her recommendations "in full".

Robert Halfon, chair of the education select committee, "strongly welcomed" the news and said he was "grateful" for Hallett listening to calls for change.

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said: "This aspect of the government's pandemic response and pre-pandemic preparation needs to be at the heart of the inquiry's work, and it is essential the prime minister now accepts Baroness Hallett's recommendations."

EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Schools bill's sweeping powers need close scrutiny

Given the schools bill represents the first major piece of legislation for the sector since 2016, there is an extent to which the government should be commended for trying to put its reforms on a proper statutory footing.

Some proposals are well overdue. Illegal schools continue to ruin children's life chances, and Ofsted has been ill-equipped to stop them. Academy trust accountability has been clunky and confusing for years. It's high time it was sorted out.

But these sweeping new powers for the government, which hand far more control to Whitehall, must be properly scrutinised and should not be passed into law lightly.

After all, this government hardly has a good record when it comes to wielding its existing powers effectively and, as has been shown during the pandemic, it has a tendency to overreach.

The schools community must make its views clear, and the DfE must be in listening mode.

Ukraine: we must do more

The heart-wrenching stories of Ukrainian refugees show just how horrific Putin's war is. Fleeing with all their belongings in one bag; leaving their fathers behind. The scars are also lasting.

But our piece this week also tells another story - one of love, and also hope. Schools opening their doors to Ukrainian children shows our country at its finest.

But this shouldn't be down to the goodwill of our school leaders, who are desperate to help. While they've proved resourceful (one school has employed its Russian cleaner to run English classes), they need the funding promised for such pupils. Landing in mid-July, when schools break up, isn't ideal.

Guidance that refugees should also follow a school's normal curriculum is also causing confusion.

Schools have the potential to turn around these children's lives again, this time for the better. Let's give them everything they need to do this.

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British-Nigerian historian,
broadcaster and film-maker
Thursday 7th July | 12:15



**ARE OUR SCHOOLS
FIT FOR PURPOSE?**
**Sir Tim Brighouse,
Professor Mick Waters
& Laura McInerney**
Thursday 7th July | 14:15



TALKING ABOUT CHANGE
Jim Knight
Founder and Senior
Partner, Instructional
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KEYNOTE ADDRESS
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‘As much as I love free schools, they aren’t about exceptionalism’

Charlotte Pearce Cornish’s Premier Advisory Group has just won the contract to support free school applications. She explains how the group supplanted her old employer the New Schools Network, and how they will do things differently

At the end of March, New Schools Network lost the government’s lucrative contract to support free school applications. It was unexpected, to say the least.

Since being set up by Rachel Wolf, the policy supremo who co-authored the Conservative Party’s 2019 election manifesto, the charity had won the cash to support would-be free school founders for 12 years

running.

Displacing the well-connected charity for the two-year, £1.5 million contract is one of Wolf’s very first hires at NSN back in the heady days of 2011: Charlotte Pearce Cornish, with services firm Premier Advisory Group, where she’s now a director. She thinks she was the seventh person employed at NSN, as a fresh-faced graduate aged 21.

“The free schools policy was the big sexy

thing going on in education. It was really, really exciting,” she smiles. “There was a heck of a lot of interest from people not necessarily involved in education – the random man or woman on the street.”

She saw some quirky free school applications as an adviser. On the phone to one group of hopefuls, she asked to see their curriculum plan, only to be told “it was in the post”.

Profile: Charlotte Pearce Cornish



Pearce Cornish as a child with her two brothers

"A couple of days later, a big poster tube arrived addressed to me. They had done the most beautiful curriculum watercolour map," she smiles again. "I thought, 'There's no way I'm going to get that past DfE!'. But it was stunning."

Applicants of this sort struggled to convince the DfE they could be trusted with public money, she said.

On the other end of the spectrum were groups with highly professional articulations of their visions. "One of the most exciting ones, and now a massive success story, was Reach Feltham," continues Pearce Cornish, referring to the free school in Hounslow founded by Ed Vainker and Rebecca Cramer. "Right from then, I thought, 'These guys are going to be superstars.'"

In the charity, Pearce Cornish was among superstars, at least in the political sense. After Wolf left, her second boss was Natalie Evans, who became a Tory peer.

Directors of a supposedly independent and politically impartial charity being prominent Conservative party figures always drew the ire of critics. Mark Lehain, now an adviser to education secretary Nadhim Zahawi, and Nick Timothy, former Downing Street chief who is now a non-executive director at the Department for Education, both later led the organisation. Was Pearce Cornish political?

"So, I think I'm not a Tory by political affiliation – it wasn't some sort of slavish devotion to most of Tory policy. I remember the media represented NSN as a Tory



Pearce Cornish with her parents, both former headteachers, at her MA graduation

"If there's a rare species of newt or Roman artefacts, that can throw your programme off course"

quango, but it didn't feel like that internally. Those people who were Tory aligned were very broad church." She adds that Wolf was "an amazing boss" and she "could not have felt more trusted".

But Pearce Cornish kept a critical eye on what was going on around her. There were two contradictory "strands of thinking in DfE", she explains.

"One was school autonomy and parental choice, and free schools were in that bucket, and I'm strongly aligned with that. And then on the other hand, and the stuff that used to get into the headlines, was the quite prescriptive views around the curriculum, such as 'teach history in this very specific way'. They felt slightly in tension with each other."

Alongside this, Pearce Cornish saw that some potentially worthy applicants (like the watercolour group with their poster) were not getting through. "A big chunk of why I ended up leaving NSN was I felt there were groups like that, where if you supported them differently, they could go a lot further."

So she became a freelance consultant for three years, writing (rather than just supporting) between six and nine free school

applications per wave (rather than case-managing 50 applications per wave, as she had at NSN). At the same time, she returned to her alma mater, Cambridge University, and did a philosophy masters in autonomy in young people. Why the interest in autonomy?

"I think in part it was listening to my parents," Pearce Cornish replies. She comes from a long line of educators, with teachers at least as far back as her great-great grandfather. Both her parents were headteachers at SEMH schools.

The "needs of children and communities" were often discussed at home, she says. Pearce Cornish loved her education, attending a village primary school and then Barton Court grammar school in Kent.

But autonomy also comes with risks, she notes. A case in point is an academy trust Pearce Cornish helped get set up. Lord James O'Shaughnessy (a former David Cameron aide) employed her in 2016 to project manage the opening of eight schools for his new trust, Floreat Education Academies. The trust folded in 2019, sometime after she left, having just two schools.

"That's a really good example of the key risks that exist in the free schools

Profile: Charlotte Pearce Cornish



Visiting recently opened schools in New York

programme,” she adds. Everything from demographic populations changing, to procuring hard-to-find sites on time and to budget, can quickly threaten new schools, she explains.

“If there’s a rare species of newt [...] or Roman artefacts were found, that can throw your programme off course,” she adds. (Parkfield School in Bournemouth, for instance, was delayed after a colony of bats was discovered on the site.)

But now her company has won the contract to keep the free schools movement alive. According to Pearce Cornish, Premier Advisory Group will share the DfE funding with partners (essentially subcontractors) to help with delivery: including AMR Consult for capital and sites, Kinetic Marketing for marketing, Stone King law firm for legal, and also MLG Education Services.

The company had tried on one previous occasion to win the contract. Now that they’ve been successful, four staff members have transferred over from NSN, bringing the total staff team to 32.

So how did they beat NSN this time round?

“I hope what we were able to bring to the table was really looking at the free school programme within the broader context of the policy environment in the sector,” she says.

This seems to mean that Premier Advisory Group placed an emphasis on looking at the wider growth strategy of free schools and



Pearce Cornish saw the initial free school application for Reach Academy Feltham

“I think innovation is absolutely possible within MATs”

their role within trusts. Under managing director Tom Legge (an advertising man turned school services consultant), Premier Advisory Group has specialised in strategy and growth, with services to free schools, early years and the justice system all on its books. Legge himself is a trustee at a MAT (Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow) and formerly a trustee at another (Bellevue Place Education Trust).

“Almost everyone in a trust now is thinking about growth planning, particularly in light of the white paper,” continues Pearce Cornish. “As much as I love free schools, they aren’t about exceptionalism for us, they are about how trusts serve the community.”

It’s a different tone to that struck by Sophie Harrison-Byrne, NSN’s director. In February she warned an all-MAT sector “would be the death of one of the key drivers of innovation” – standalone free schools.

In response, Pearce Cornish points out the DfE still hasn’t released the “how to apply” guidance for free schools, so the details are not yet clear. The white paper outlaws new standalone academies, but includes a pledge to “consider” bids for high-quality standalone free schools.

“I would say very few of those groups like Reach Feltham and School 21 came in thinking, we’ll just run one school for ever and ever,” she continues.

“I think innovation is absolutely possible within MATs, and MATs do innovative things all the time. SATs are not the only place innovation can happen.”

Perhaps the innovative newcomers to the free schools market will be councils, I comment. They are set to get powers to found academy trusts – what about free schools?

“That’s a fascinating question, and I would love to see the answer,” replies Pearce Cornish, eyebrows raised.

Meanwhile, she admits there are fewer phone calls from the “random man or woman on the street” to open free schools than in 2011. But when her company got the contract, they still got “ten calls from people wanting to talk about a new school”.

The big challenge now is awareness, partly because free schools are much less controversial, with fewer “Guardian columns” about them than in the past.

“The programme doesn’t have the profile it used to,” says Pearce Cornish. It’s why, she explains, she and the team are in Yorkshire talking to trusts about where a free school “could fit into strategic planning” and proving it’s “not a scary process”.

“I think there will always be the next generation coming through with amazing ideas,” she smiles. “I don’t think there’s a time limit on that.”

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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DAVINDER JANDU

Principal, Yarnfield Primary School

Cost of living: offering families financial support pays off

Accessing the financial support they are entitled to is a struggle for many families, writes Davinder Jandu, and helping them with that benefits everyone

Headlines about the cost-of-living crisis are inescapable right now, and for good reason. Whether it's inflation, spiralling energy costs or squeezed budgets, many of us are feeling the financial pinch. What gets less coverage is the support that exists for struggling families, and the lack of information is just the start of the problems some face with accessing it.

As our primary school is in Tyseley, Birmingham, we serve a wonderful, diverse community in which many languages are spoken and many faiths are embraced. It is also a community within which the cost-of-living crisis is potentially devastating. At the best of times, I am particularly proud that our staff reflect the diversity within the community and that parents and carers can relate positively to them. But the worst of times is when that representation becomes a real asset.

We treasure our relationship with the local community and try and serve everyone in it as best we can. That's why our pastoral team has

been making extra efforts to reach out and help families with their finances in recent months. We know that the more difficult things are at home, the more likely it is that a child's learning will be affected, so we want to do everything we can to support children both in and out of school.

Sadly, without us many would

“ We have helped to complete 250 applications so far

never have even known about the household support fund and would have missed out on this much-needed boost to their finances. Having heard of it, many would still have gone on to miss out on it because of difficulties with applying. Lack of confidence, poor literacy skills, language barriers and assumptions that such support is 'not for me' are just some of the reasons communities like ours don't benefit from the help that is available to them.

So first, our pastoral team contacted all parents and carers whose children are registered for free school meals and arranged for them to come into school so that we could support their application



and ensure it would be submitted correctly. We did this over a five-day period, every morning after they had dropped their children off. And for those who were unable to attend a meeting at the school for various

was suspended for a while, but it has now thankfully reopened, so we are continuing to support our families with their applications.

Needless to say, they have been so grateful for the help and support as they have watched their bills continue to rise in spite of their best efforts to manage their finances.

Providing children with the extra support they need to minimise the impact of the pandemic means capacity to offer this kind of support is limited. But in reality, reaching out and offering this help is hugely valuable to the school in many ways. At the most basic level, it builds rapport with families – especially those who might otherwise be isolated from the school community. And it means our children are better fed, better supported and better able to focus on their school work.

So call it parental engagement. Call it early intervention. But whatever you call it, there is no question that investing in this kind of activity offers major returns for the whole community.

And when you're making a real difference to children's lives, who cares if it doesn't get headlines?

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Controversial comments from the social mobility tsar aside, STEM has a diversity problem and there's plenty we can do about it, writes Jo Foster

The days are getting longer and sunnier, and that can only mean one thing for secondaries: exam season. This summative period often causes us to reflect on the past year and how to create positive changes in the years ahead. And given the furore over comments from social mobility tsar Katharine Birbalsingh to the Science and Technology Committee last month, it feels like as good a time as any to make a case for doing things a little differently in STEM.

Too many students still feel that science is just not for them, and we need to look to the evidence to overcome that, rather than perpetuate myths. On a positive note, the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds studying STEM in higher education has increased over the past year. However, the number of girls and those from a BAME background are still disproportionately low, at 41 and seven per cent respectively.

There are significant barriers to engaging with STEM subjects, ranging from access to technology at home to a shortage of diverse role models. As a result, views and attitudes towards STEM are unlikely to change without a shift in approach from educators.

In response, our Research and Innovation Framework shows that science can be for everyone and outlines how STEM can flourish in secondary schools. It has been designed by teachers and school leaders, bringing together best practice from across the STEM sector and forming a toolkit for developing research and innovation opportunities in schools and classrooms.

DR JO FOSTER

Director, The Institute for Research in Schools



Widening STEM access is necessary and far from impossible

Teachers are a school's most important asset in terms of student outcomes, and we know they are working harder than ever. That's why our framework is intended to complement, not replace, the incredible work that goes on in our

makes teaching more enjoyable and makes the clock at the back of the classroom turn faster. Time does fly when you're having fun, and this framework is a tool for teachers to supercharge their lessons and extracurricular activities rather than

“We need to look to the evidence, rather than perpetuate myths

classrooms. The programme is about making the time that teachers are already spending on STEM even more impactful.

Strengthening engagement in STEM

bury them under more bureaucracy.

There is already a wealth of STEM enrichment activities taking place in many schools – from CREST awards to Greenpower car clubs



to extended and higher project qualifications. The framework makes it easy for teachers and school leaders to choose the most high-impact activities and, rather than implementing them as a series of one-offs, shows how to knit these together to pack a more powerful punch.

We have also seen first-hand that a greater emphasis on research creates a sense of momentum in lessons, motivating students and teachers alike. Approximately 97 per cent of teachers involved in IRIS projects say their students are more engaged and motivated by science after taking part in projects. Over one-third say they are more likely to stay in teaching because of the impact of these projects.

Not enough young people are going into science, and too many talented young people are lost to the sector because they see no career path in STEM. What's more, our vital subjects perennially suffer from teacher recruitment shortages.

But when students understand science – not only the theory but where it fits in the real world – they become active citizens empowered to solve some of the most pressing issues we face. The Department for Education has recently published its sustainability and climate strategy. This is a fantastic and timely initiative, which can only stand a much better chance of success with a wave of citizen scientists teaching and learning in our schools, rather than passively looking at textbooks.

At this time of reflection, we have a choice: to accept that unequal access to STEM is normal and unalterable, or to try evidence-based approaches to widen our subjects' appeal. With our new framework, sticking with the myths no longer has to be the more comfortable option.

Opinion

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TIM
WARNEFORD

Governor, Wootton
Academy Trust

Have ministers done their due diligence on the MAT-led system?

A rush to fulfil the promise of a MAT-led system carries financial risks for trusts that could undermine their improvement mission, writes Tim Warneford

Even as late as 2022, the war stories are still doing the rounds. Trusts have taken on schools without adequate due diligence and have then, after the transfer, discovered enormous liabilities.

Regardless of the drivers – an expansion model, RSC cajoling or simply altruism – too many trusts are making decisions based on insufficient evidence.

The recent schools white paper – the government's latest push to regain the momentum of an academisation programme that has seen conversions drop from 1,000 per year to one-third of that figure – carries enormous risks in that respect. Unchecked expansion could see trusts absorb, merge or join other trusts without first having fully understood each other's balance sheet of assets and liabilities.

So there is a fundamental question to be asked of ministers about how they intend to deliver on their promise: is the intention to model the system on the Falcon Education

Trust, whereby trusts only hold on to a school for as long as it takes to prepare it for further re-brokering? Or will trusts have the requisite funding to invest in a longer-term development relationship?

Many executive heads and CEOs have achieved their success by turning around 'failing schools', where the be all and end all is

the vendor's condition surveys, local searches and valuations, so why are so few trusts commissioning their own estate due diligence services? To fail to collect the data and use it as part of the transfer negotiations is, at best, to lose the opportunity for leverage. At worst, it's a costly mistake.

For example, despite my offering to undertake a desktop survey and audit of the existing condition, compliance and valuation data for a successful Midlands trust, they proceeded without undertaking this basic tyre-kicking exercise. They only instructed me after the transfer, at which point I identified £5 million of building liabilities. Following a detailed mechanical and electrical (M&E) services survey, the kitchen had to be closed for failing to meet even the most basic of hygiene standards.

During the lockdown period,

instructed to carry out post-transfer due diligence, I went on to identify liabilities amounting to £7 million over the next five years.

The liabilities now outstrip the valuation of the school, and its school conditions allocations (SCA), devolved formula capital (DFC) and reserves are now at risk, fire-fighting a large percentage of the £7 million to keep the school open and compliant. Neither school is eligible for the condition improvement fund (CIF), and nor do they meet the stated school rebuilding programme (SRP) criteria.

So at what cost and at what risk to a trust's other schools will the government's full academisation vision come? And where does this scenario leave advocates of general annual grant (GAG) pooling?

Both trusts feel that they were not told the truth by the various parties involved during the transfer process. Both feel that the service they were accorded by their professional advisors should have alerted them sooner to the extent of the liabilities. And both failed to appreciate that it is a question of buyer beware. One is considering their legal options.

Make no mistake: the government's ambition for every school to be part of a MAT by 2030 could create a rush, especially for the 'best' schools. But if our only measure of that is what's in the league tables and Ofsted reports, many MATs could find themselves facing circumstances that put their own successful schools at risk. Repeated across the system, the repercussions for school improvement could be the reverse of the policy's intention.

Conversely, failure to deal with the risks at a systemic level could see the policy stall altogether. Academisation is not a shortcut to properly funding our school estate.

“The repercussions could be the reverse of the policy's intention

improving pupils' academic outcomes and achieving higher Ofsted ratings. All well and good, but we can't afford complacency about the underlying business aspect of running successful schools.

We don't buy a house premised on

another client absorbed a secondary within its predominantly primary school MAT, again without undertaking their own detailed due diligence. They relied on a mixture of outdated, uncoded data from the school. Once again belatedly



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Loneliness is the theme of this mental health awareness week for good reason, writes Rachel Bostwick, and schools can supercharge how they combat it

Issues with mental health and wellbeing can stifle aspiration and prevent children from achieving their full potential. So creating a positive culture of wellbeing in schools is an imperative, and tackling loneliness and encouraging pupils to share experiences is at the very heart of this.

With good reason, loneliness is the theme of this year's mental health awareness week. It can strike at any age, and it is inextricably linked to poor mental health.

In our hyperconnected world of social media, messaging apps and online gaming, young people may feel that everyone else is out there making friends, and that makes their loneliness even harder to bear. Add two long years of pandemic disruption (with increased reliance on these technologies), and the result is that children's sense of isolation has heightened, with devastating effect on their wellbeing. According to NHS Digital, one in six children aged six to 16 in England had a probable mental health condition in 2021, up from one in nine in 2017.

The importance of shared experience

Many children find it difficult to articulate feelings of loneliness, or prefer not to admit to them. Reducing stigma as a barrier is an important reason for schools to encourage conversations about wellbeing.

Regular wellbeing events encourage an open dialogue among pupils, and that can stretch beyond the school gate. Inviting neighbouring schools to take part is an effective way to share



RACHEL BOSTWICK

Director, Carnegie Centre of Excellence for Mental Health in Schools

How to create a positive whole-school mental health culture

the message and to bring pupils together with other young people in their community.

But it can't be left to standalone activities. Rather than addressing mental health as a separate item on the agenda, embedding discussions about loneliness, anxiety or isolation

challenges. Nevertheless, more than 400,000 under-18s were referred for specialist mental health support last year alone, and only one-third accessed the help they needed. This leaves school staff picking up the slack.

Appointing a mental health lead

“Loneliness is inextricably linked to poor mental health

into the curriculum helps to normalise the theme.

For example, a PSHE lesson on e-safety can open up discussion about how social media can paradoxically make us feel less connected, creating an opportunity for young people to talk openly about their feelings. Likewise, an English lesson about a character in a play can allow a quieter child to talk about loneliness without worrying that they may be giving too much away about themselves.

Taking a lead

But just discussing the issues is not enough, and it's unreasonable to expect all teachers to be experts in tackling their pupils' mental health

to direct children and staff to the support groups or resources they need can help. A senior member of staff tasked with championing wellbeing provides not only a first point of contact for children and staff who need support, but also a bridge to the school's decision-making body.

And if that dedicated person also oversees pastoral services, they can reinforce a culture of wellbeing across the curriculum and send out a clear message that wellbeing is everyone's priority.

Pupil voice

And on the topic of decision-making bodies, it is important to accept that the culture shift required to



improve wellbeing will need pupils' buy-in. This ensures we avoid assumptions and don't dictate what action we think is needed.

Many schools conduct wellbeing surveys, but simply asking pupils what support they need rarely gets to the crux of the matter. Instead, capture your school's pupil voice by asking questions that enable you to take affirmative action. Asking "at what times during the school week do you feel stressed or lonely?" can direct specific initiatives such as mindfulness sessions or activities in breaktime. The pupils can then advise on what activities they would like.

Younger children respond well to questions like "what makes you a great friend?". By discussing the results of these questions, children will start to recognise how their actions can build friendships and reduce loneliness for others.

We can alleviate the pain of loneliness for young people by changing the way wellbeing is supported and nurtured. It'll take longer than a mental health awareness week, but what a truly positive legacy of the pandemic that could be.

Opinion

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DAVID
JAFFA

Founder, SAM Learning

Can we ever have an educational ten-year plan?

There's a real appetite for a clearer vision and long-term planning in education, writes David Jaffa, but is it a realistic expectation?

Let me dispense with the suspense from the outset: a ten-year plan for education is not only necessary, it's absolutely do-able. The problem for frustrated professional organisations and ambitious policymakers alike is that being 'vision-led' won't deliver it.

It's easy to convince ourselves we have the answer; if only others shared our vision, we could revolutionise young people's lives! That kind of thinking makes it easy to dismiss failure as someone else's fault, but it misses the important and unavoidable fact that practical solutions rarely work first time 'in the wild'.

Policy shortcuts

In my experience, it takes years to get a new solution ready for prime-time. We can do a pilot; get an efficacy study. Phew, job done, right? Well, no. The solution still needs to be refined in a range of contexts that differ from the pilot. There may be supportive leadership at the pilot site, but the solution also needs to work where leadership is

focused on other things. We must build new processes so the solution can be rolled out at a reasonable cost. And build a team. All in all, a successful pilot only gets you about a quarter of the journey to your destination.

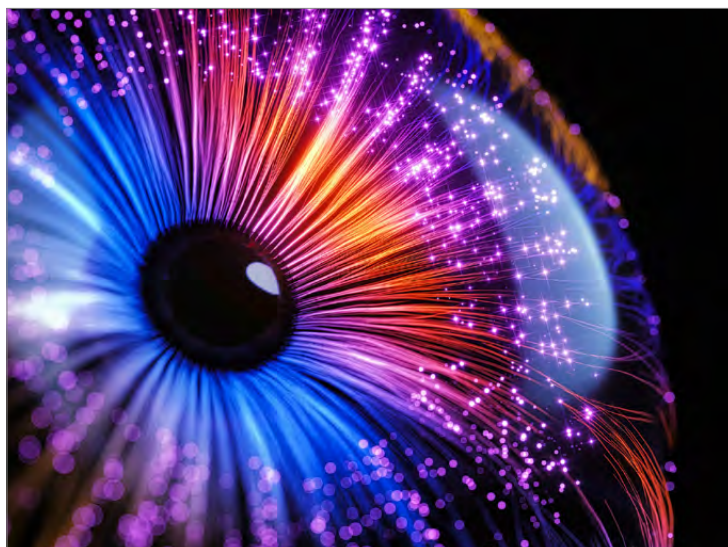
There's no shortcut for these

“Vision-led means solutions are guessed at and imposed on others

cycles of trial and refinement. Without them, we invariably roll out a solution that simply isn't ready, and that is not only hugely wasteful of people's time and public money, but consumes all the capacity in the system for effective change. No wonder the profession is strung out and wary of unwanted change.

For example: are T Levels the right way to go? We don't know because they haven't proven themselves yet. And we don't have alternatives with which to compare them.

Being vision-led is a form of top-down thinking, where solutions are guessed at and imposed on others. Instead, we need to learn from other sectors where innovation has worked. The key to success is to have multiple groups working with



the profession from the bottom up, identifying opportunities and co-creating solutions. Lots of them.

Signposting success

Trying to innovate through single, system-wide solutions is nonsense. It's much easier to know the best way forward when there are lots of good solutions to pick from and clearly signposted failures to avoid. It's the difference between plotting a route on an atlas and using an up-to-date satnav to adapt your travel plans as you go.

Take academisation. Six years ago, the *Educational Excellence Everywhere* white paper was roundly dismissed. Its singular vision simply wasn't practical or practicable enough. Last month's schools white paper was more positively received. Its vision of full academisation is the same. The key difference is that solutions have been tried – some successfully and

some less so. The result is not only a more amenable profession, but also policymakers who are more aware of past errors and practical challenges.

Creating a ten-year plan for education is a fantastic idea, not least because it offers the tantalising prospect of stability after such a disrupted few years. But while there may be an appetite for a clearer vision as part of long-term planning in education, this isn't a realistic expectation and it would be a mistake for any party to base its platform on one.

Instead, we should use a ten-year plan to create conditions for change in which everyone can play a part. Innovation isn't easy in any field, and in education we have a particularly hostile environment at the moment. That needs to change before we can believe in any vision.

But if we replace idealism with pragmatism and enable new solutions to bubble up to the surface, we can reset our expectations of what vision means and looks like – and truly revolutionise education.

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



The Voltage Effect

Author: John A. List

Publisher: Penguin Business

Reviewer: Thomas Martell, biology teacher and director, NELT Institute

What connects Jamie's Italian, an early education centre and Uber? Economist John A. List argues persuasively that the answer is scale, and that it is an issue relevant to everyone.

Scale permeates education, yet is rarely considered systematically. And this means some things fail for predictable reasons. For instance, there is really promising evidence about tuition, but the challenges of scaling this rapidly have proved considerable. At the simplest level, we scale things when we extend them; this might happen across a key stage, subject, whole school, or group of schools.

Scalability is crucial to national conversations such as the current focus on teacher development, Oak National Academy and the expansion of Nuffield Early Language Intervention – now used by two-thirds of primary schools. Sadly, List explains that things usually get worse as they scale: a voltage drop.

The famous opening line from Tolstoy – “all happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” – has given rise to the Anna Karenina principle, which List argues applies to scale; the principle being that scalable ideas share a common set of attributes, while any single factor from a long list can prevent an idea from scaling.

The first barrier is the false positive: when we mistakenly think something works. To avoid false positives, List recommends investing in evaluations – plural – before scaling. I think education may be particularly susceptible to false positives because

even the best interventions give modest improvements, and improvements in learning are hard to measure.

Another challenge is that if something works in one context, it does not guarantee success in another. Anyone who has tried teaching another person's lesson knows this issue only too well. List explains how writing to consumers about their energy usage successfully reduced demand, but the letters made no difference at scale. Why? Because the letters were tested in eco-conscious California, but then scaled to consumers with different priorities and values elsewhere in the US.

Scaling ideas across contexts is a fundamental issue in education. School improvement efforts often make strong assumptions about how things work across contexts. The EEF's Putting Evidence to Work guidance offers useful insights about fit and feasibility, but we are still in the early stages of understanding what researchers term ‘generalisability’.

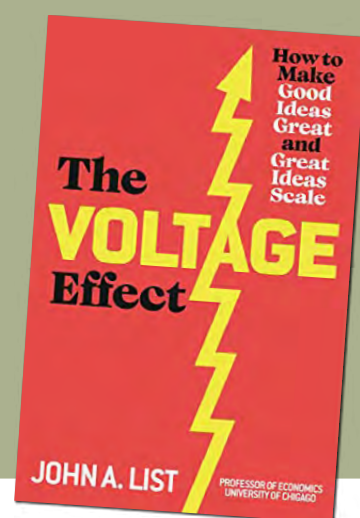
A key takeaway is that people are not scalable. So if an idea hinges on brilliant individuals, it probably won't scale. List invites readers to consider whether success relies on “the chef or the ingredients”; if an idea depends on the chef, it will likely lose voltage as it scales. He illustrates this point with a fascinating case study into the phenomenal rise and fall of the restaurant chain Jamie's Italian. It initially succeeded because other chefs could imitate Jamie's simple cooking style using fresh, quality ingredients, rather than trying to imitate complex techniques. Its downfall was due to other scalability issues.

In education, we often focus on individual people or organisations. For

instance, as secretary of state, Michael Gove's penchant for superheads was encapsulated by his remark that his ideal education policy would be to clone then headteacher Rachel de Souza. This was plainly a joke, but a similar logic underpins some serious education policies. “Is it the chef or is it the ingredients?” is a good question for anyone involved in scaling, including the newly appointed RSC advisory boards.

List is a captivating storyteller who offers readers insightful anecdotes to explain fundamental principles. Although he's an economics professor, it might be better to consider him as an empiricist due to the resourceful ways he applies and tests his ideas in real-world situations. His approach is perhaps best summarised by the Royal Society's motto, *nullius in verba* – take nobody's word for it.

It won't shock you to learn that I strongly recommend *The Voltage Effect*. I would offer to lend you my copy, but I now understand this is not a scalable solution.



Reviews



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

@gerryrobin5on

The positive impact of using British Sign Language in the classroom

Alysha Allen via @OUPPrimary

With deaf awareness week having just passed, Alysha Allen's post on the Oxford Education Blog is a timely read. As a primary school teacher who is deaf, Allen describes her initial hesitancy at working in a mainstream setting; she wanted to communicate directly with students but couldn't imagine how this could work in a classroom of hearing children.

Fortunately for all involved, her teacher training placement was in a primary where "inclusivity is an integral part of the school's ethos" and as a result "every pupil learns British Sign Language (BSL)".

Allen details the various advantages of using BSL in the classroom – from supporting vocabulary learning to building empathy – and few educators will finish reading it without wanting to explore how they may incorporate BSL themselves.

It is abundantly clear from her post that the entire school community, including Allen herself, has benefitted from her sharing her lived experience. It's a broader reminder that "inclusivity is a two-way street; we all need to work together to achieve it".

TOP BLOGS of the week

Building study habits and revision routines

@LouiseAstbury

With public examinations upon us for the first time since 2019, it's comforting to find students surrounding themselves with flashcards and highlighters, practising mnemonics and re-reading core texts. And it's understandable that we often feel as if there is just not enough time to pause and consider a different approach to revision, especially so close to exams.

However, I guarantee that this post from Louise Astbury is worth taking a moment over. Grounded firmly in research, Astbury identifies the revision routines that work most effectively, steering readers away from strategies that "lull [students] into a false sense of security" and towards admittedly more challenging but also infinitely more productive ones.

Many of the suggestions are not unfamiliar, but everyone will find something they can use, or at least reassurance that their students are maximising their time. Minor tweaks can make a huge difference, even in the last few days and weeks.

A highly valuable read, whether you're a student, parent/carers or teacher.

5 reasons why subject leadership training is a top priority

@AidanSevers

Looking beyond exam season, Aidan Severs provides five very good reasons to justify subject leaders being given every opportunity for professional development they could possibly hope for.

As Severs acknowledges, more cynical school leaders will be convinced enough to provide subject leadership training by the prospect of an Ofsted visit. After all, we know inspectors will expect subject leaders to be able to talk with confidence and insight about their areas as a matter of course.

But Severs makes a more positive case for the advantages of subject leader CPD, including improving students' educational experience, community cohesion and the careers of staff.

The summer term can be a time when schools, exhausted by exams, feel inclined to slow down. But it's also a fantastic opportunity for subject leaders to take stock and for schools to support them to continue their journeys. Most would surely relish the time and backing to invest in their own careers and the year ahead for their students.

Reigniting a healthy sense of well-being and belonging in schools

@CaptainsPoets via @DiverseEd2020

In this post for Diverse Educators, Jennifer Johnson explores a question many of us have been grappling with recently: "How do we thrive when the world is in such a state of upheaval?"

With students, staff and families contending with the pandemic, the cost of living crisis and numerous global conflicts, among other things, Johnson reflects on the "unprecedented levels of uncertainty" and the impact this has on young people's relationships and sense of identity.

Based in Canada, her schools-centred programme 'Captains and Poets' is grounded in the concept that thriving requires "inspired action" and "emotional courage" and that we all have a bold 'Captain' and brave 'Poet' inside.

It's an honest and empowering reflection on just how tough things have been in recent years (and continue to be) but also a voice of hope that "the cure for what ails us is closer than we think".

Research



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

How can you build an evidence-informed school culture?

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

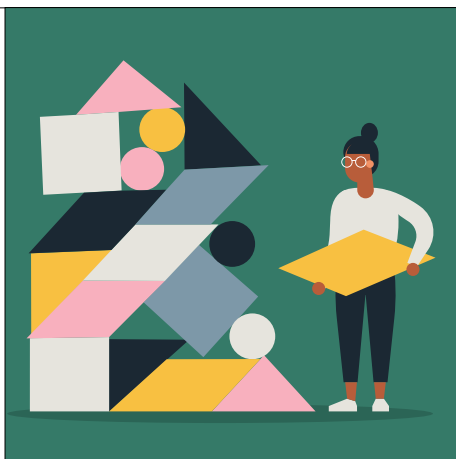
Education is quickly maturing beyond evidence-informed practice as a (albeit very powerful) 'grassroots' phenomenon. Being evidence-informed is now an aspiration that permeates the whole system. Government education rhetoric is full of 'research' and 'evidence', and there are numerous institutions dedicated to developing teachers' and schools' engagement with research. But how do we make sure that our schools (or MATs, or subject or year group teams) truly embed an evidence-informed culture? How do we prevent the phrase from becoming just another buzzword?

Leadership

It may seem obvious, but leadership itself being evidence informed is a good place to start. As ever with research evidence, there are some arguments about what this really means - including a long-standing (if perhaps misplaced) debate about the relative importance of 'domain-specific' or 'generic' leadership skills.

Our approaches to leadership and decision-making are crucial in setting a culture where evidence sits at the heart of what we do. In particular, this includes ensuring that our policies (and how they are implemented and enacted) are informed by the best available evidence; it is very hard to expect our classrooms to be evidence-informed if we have a school policy that requires extensive written marking on every piece of work, for example. In other words, it is vital to practise what we preach.

Crucially though, building an evidence-informed school is not about developing a culture where research is blindly followed. This can lead



to unhelpful practices and lethal mutations, such as edicts that every lesson must begin with ten minutes of retrieval practice. Evidence-informed practice is all about the integration of the best available evidence with teachers' professional judgment and expertise, within their contexts. Promoting evidence use should be about developing teachers' knowledge of the research base and giving them the trust and autonomy to make informed decisions. A strong evidence culture and a strong professional culture go hand in hand.

Professional development

Which leads us to CPD, which should be evidence informed on two levels. First, CPD approaches must themselves be evidence informed, drawing on what we know about how teachers best learn and develop their practice. In that regard, the Education Endowment Foundation's recent guidance report setting out the mechanisms that are associated with effective CPD is particularly useful.

Secondly, the content covered within the CPD (such as a particular approach to reading instruction or to giving feedback) should also be grounded in evidence - and it's useful if this evidence can be made explicit, as is the case in the ECF and NPQ frameworks.

This all contributes to building teachers' knowledge of the research base and ensuring they have the opportunity to reflect on and even critique it. To enable this, it may also be appropriate to ensure teachers have access to learning and resources that develop their confidence in appraising and using research. Wellcome recently funded pilots of several such approaches targeted specifically at science teachers.

Enable. Promote. Recognise

Crucially, teachers must feel motivated to engage with research evidence. An NFER survey found that teachers are generally willing to use research to inform their practice, but that this doesn't necessarily happen widely in reality. Ensuring teachers can easily access relevant research and have time to engage with it can make a real difference. This might include providing a regular research digest, supporting the Chartered College of Teaching and subject association membership, providing a CPD library or journal subscriptions, or covering the cost of attendance at a ResearchEd event, for example.

Staff should also see that research engagement is valued, through performance management discussions and even the creation of roles such as research leads - not only supporting staff with their research engagement, but also providing career progression pathways.

Finally, recognition is an important motivator. The Chartered College recognises this, and that's why we offer ways for staff and schools alike to gain formal accreditation for research engagement. The certificate in evidence-informed practice and our pathways to chartered status for teachers and leaders are part of that offer, soon to be complemented by the ResearchMark.

By taking these steps together, we can create an evidence-informed virtuous cycle that will quickly take us to system maturity.



Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

Double irony alert.

First, we get a photo of children's minister Will Quince visiting Passmores Academy in Essex posted on Twitter, where he was said to be talking about the importance of SEND inclusion.

So important that the government launched a consultation about changes to SEND provision without publishing accessible documents so the pupils it impacted could actually engage and have their say.

After *Schools Week* flagged this on our front page last week, the documents were finally published today – just the six weeks later.

Meanwhile, Boris Johnson tweeted his thanks to teachers for doing a "fantastic job" on catch-up during a visit to Field End Infant School in his Uxbridge constituency.

That must be why his government is introducing new tutoring league tables to name and shame those who, for the very valid reason of there being no tutors/ having literally no capacity because of Covid/the scheme being a nightmare (delete as applicable), might not have used it.

TUESDAY

Edu sec Nadhim Zahawi took a leaf out of the Gav book of blunders when he tweeted a heartfelt RIP to Pete Waterman. "A great actor, grew up watching Minder."

Alas, it was Dennis Waterman who had passed away (although he got the Minder bit, right).

TBF to the Nadz, he was replying to a tweet by Kay Burley which had also mixed up the pair.

Another week, another way to slice and

dice the academy data to further your own cause. The government first claimed academy Ofsted grades show that being in a MAT is the way forward.

Anti-academies union NEU then published its own analysis challenging this.

Now it's the turn of the Local Government Association, whose own analysis (they claimed) shows it's actually council-maintained schools that are outperforming academies.

Ten weeks is like, a fairly long time, right? In our research (uhum *Wikipedia* uhum) on what takes 10 weeks, we found that your pet cat can have a litter of kittens within this time.

It's also the length of time that Ofsted took to "investigate" how it uses its statistics. So they've obviously done a thorough job and come up with some concrete changes?

Certainly not on one aspect. Ofsted has committed only to "look at the practicality and limitations of routinely publishing data gathered" through the surveys schools fill out post-inspection.

Avid *Schools Week* readers will remember our Freedom of Information battle to get this data when Ofsted started cherry picking certain statistics that gave an overly-positive impression of its new framework.

WEDNESDAY

It's not been a great few months for former academies minister Lord Agnew. First, he resigned at the despatch box over the government's refusal to listen to him and crack down on covid business fraud.

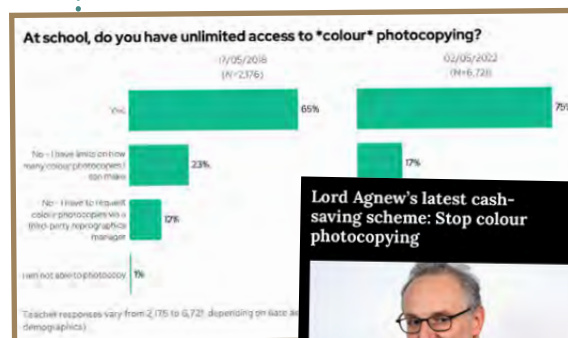
But surely this is the killer blow: schools

are no longer listening to him on colour photocopying!

Back in 2018, Sir Theo caused quite the stir by telling school business leaders that cutting down on "staggering" copying bills is "one small example" of how schools can save money.

In 2018, 65 per cent of schools said they had unlimited access to colour copying. But this has risen to 75 per cent this month – with only 17 per cent having limits.

Ag-new (photocopying) dawn has risen!



Lord Agnew's latest cash-saving scheme: Stop colour photocopying



Kate Green might not have lasted long during Labour's shadow education secretary merry-go-round recently, but she showed she can still be decent opposition in the sector.

Now on the public accounts committee, she got DfE permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood to apologise over the six-week wait for the accessible SEND review documents.

(She also name-checked *Schools Week* for one of our many revelations about the woeful National Tutoring Programme, which is in no way linked to a favourable write-up in this column.)



ACADEMY OPEN EVENING

...explore the Outwood Family to find your next role!

Tuesday 17 May

5:00pm - 7:00pm

Outwood Academy Portland, S80 2SF

Principals/Director talks from 5.30pm

Refreshments and catering available on arrival





Primary Curriculum Writers

United Learning is developing a coherent, ambitious and aspirational curriculum to support our growing number of primary teachers across England. The curriculum and its resources aim to both reduce teachers' workload, and ensure that all our pupils receive an excellent education.

We are therefore adding to our team of curriculum writers, and are recruiting for two roles in **History** and **Geography**. The subject specialists will each take ownership of their subject's curriculum and resources.

As a primary curriculum writer, your main responsibility will be to develop and refine an outstanding curriculum for our teachers to deliver. This will include the careful sequencing of substantive and disciplinary knowledge across the key stages and, where appropriate, across subjects. The sequencing should allow pupils to gradually develop second order concepts, and should have spaced retrieval built in.

You will also develop the resources that can help teachers explicitly teach this curriculum, for example: teacher subject knowledge packs; assessment materials; knowledge organisers; and slides and resources for individual lessons.

You will work alongside primary teachers to test, refine and improve the resources and, where needed, support teachers to implement the curriculum with bespoke CPD.

This an exciting opportunity to work alongside the wider curriculum team to help to shape our vision for our curriculum, and to develop resources that will have a very tangible and positive impact for teachers.

For more information about each of the roles, please visit the United Learning vacancies page: <https://www.unitedlearningcareers.org.uk/current-vacancies>



**St Ralph
Sherwin**
Catholic Multi Academy Trust

Headteacher

Saint Benedict Catholic Voluntary Academy, Derby



Salary: L32 – L38
(£90,379.00 to £104,687.00)
Start Date: 1st January
2023 or sooner
Closing date: 6th June 2022
Interviews: TBC



We are seeking to appoint an inspirational, ambitious and strategic leader who can work in partnership with staff, parents and governors to progress the school's journey to become Outstanding.

We can offer you:

- a strong, caring and proactive school community
- friendly, happy, enthusiastic and inspiring pupils who are eager to learn
- access to first class CPD opportunities to develop further
- a supportive Trust with 25 academies and 84 academies across the Diocese

We are looking for someone who:

- is a practising Catholic with strong, lived faith and deep commitment to Catholic

education, supports the Catholic identity and has a desire to live out and share the faith through work

- values all pupils as individuals and ensures that all pupils are confident and able to achieve their full potential
- can fully embed the principles of safeguarding
- knows about the principles of developing outstanding learning, teaching and assessment
- has the vision, passion and motivation to respond to changes in education, can continually raise standards and expectations and share our vision and achievements
- can maintain a culture of excellence among staff and pupils
- is a strong leader and innovator who

encourages, enthuses and motivates the school community through excellent communication and interpersonal skills

This is a reserved post and is open to practising Catholics only, please review the document on www.srscmat.co.uk/work-with-us produced by the Diocese of Nottingham.

The Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. This post is subject to satisfactory references, which will be requested prior to interview, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, medical check, evidence of qualifications plus verification of the right to work in the UK.

**Leeds East Academy**

PRINCIPAL

Leeds East Academy

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FIND OUT MORE



**St Ralph
Sherwin**
Catholic Multi Academy Trust

Deputy Headteacher

St Thomas More Catholic
Voluntary Academy, Buxton



Salary: L13 – L17
(£56,721 – £62,570)

Start date: 1st September
2022

Closing date: 18th May 2022

Interview date: 24th May 2022



We are seeking to appoint a passionate Deputy Headteacher.

We can offer you:

- a strong, and caring school community
- friendly, happy, enthusiastic and inspiring children who are eager to learn
- access to first class CPD opportunities to develop further
- a supportive, well-connected and highly innovative Trust with a network of 25 schools

We would like someone who:

- is a practising Catholic with strong, lived faith and deep commitment to Catholic education, supports the Catholic identity and has a desire to live out and share the

faith through work

- values all pupils as individuals and ensures that all pupils are confident and able to achieve their full potential
- can fully embed the principles of safeguarding
- knows about the principles of developing outstanding learning, teaching and assessment
- has the vision, passion and motivation to respond to changes in education, can continually raise standards and expectations and share our vision and achievements
- can maintain a culture of excellence among staff and pupils
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Required for September 2022

MPS plus SEN 2 allowance, NQTs welcome to apply

We are seeking to recruit a **Teacher of Food Technology** in an outstanding special school which serves the local community in Salford and caters for a range of special educational needs and disabilities.

This role would suit a proactive and innovative person with a passion for teaching and will involve delivering the Food Technology curriculum to pupils across Key Stage 3 and 4.

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- A leadership team that is committed to staff development and pupil outcomes
- Parents who are supportive of their children's education
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- A dedicated and motivated staff team who strongly believe in team work and building positive relationships across the school

For further information please visit our website www.oakwoodacademy.co.uk/about-us/job-vacancies/ including details of safer recruitment and checks applicable for this role.



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A high performing academy providing excellence for all

ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER, BEHAVIOUR & ATTITUDES

Required for September 2022, L12 – L16

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Postholders will lead on responsibilities which will include but not be limited to:

- All aspects of Behaviour Management
- Pastoral Provision including Student Wellbeing
- Student Standards & Expectations
- KS2 – 3 Transition

For further information about 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 checks applicable for this role.

Closing date **18th May 2022**

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