

SCHOOLS WEEK

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



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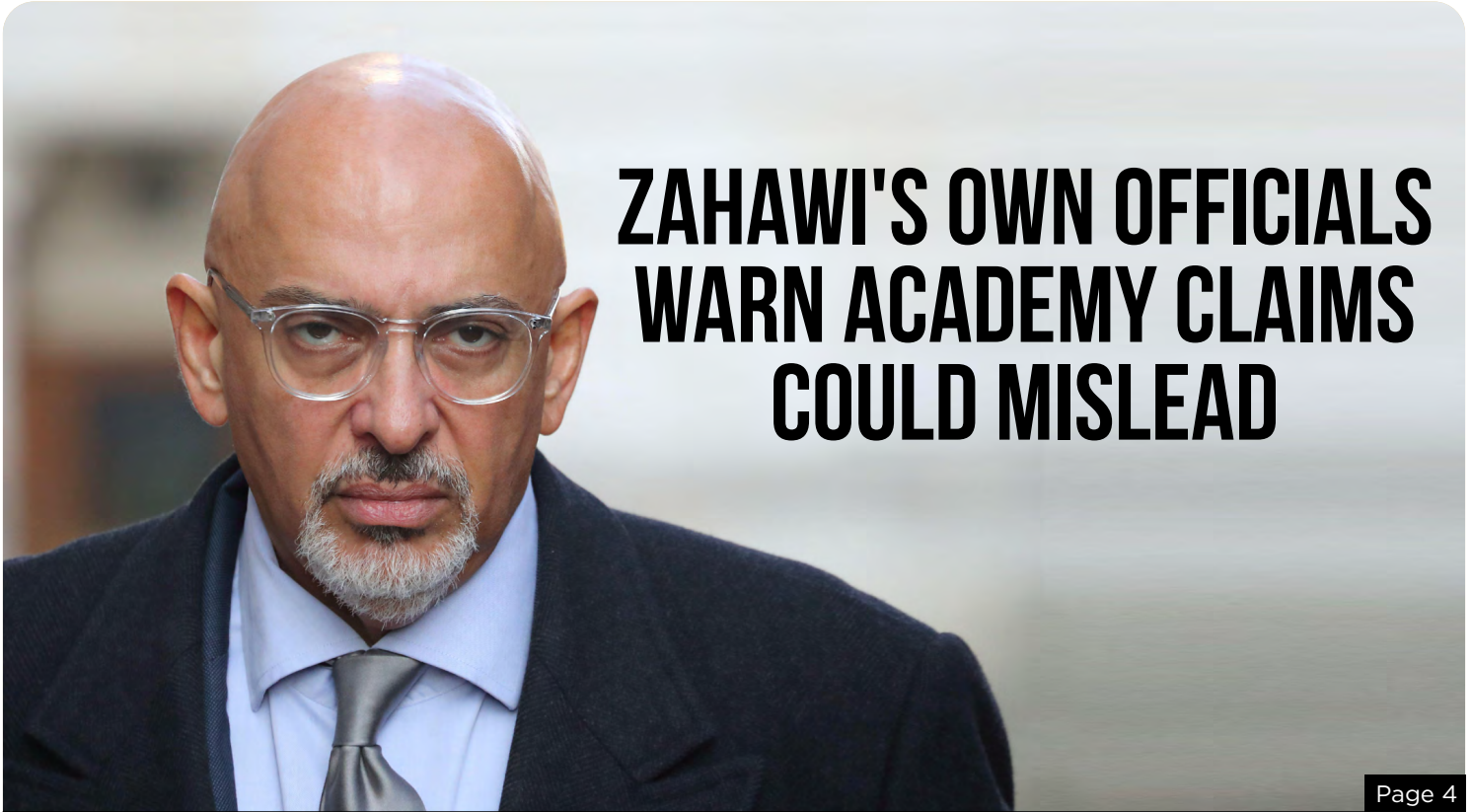


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Meet the news team



John Dickens
EDITOR

@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK



JL Dutaut
COMMISSIONING
EDITOR

@DUTAUT
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@LSECT.COM



Jess Staufenberg
COMMISSIONING
EDITOR

@STAUFENBERGJ
JESS.STAUFEENBERG@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK



Freddie Whittaker
DEPUTY EDITOR

@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK



Samantha Booth
SENIOR REPORTER

@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK



James Carr
SENIOR REPORTER

@JAMESCARR_93
JAMES.CARR@LSECT.COM



Tom Belger
SENIOR REPORTER

@TOM_BELGER
TOM.BELGER@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK



Nicky Phillips
HEAD DESIGNER

@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Shane Mann
MANAGING DIRECTOR

@SHANERMANN
SHANE.MANN@LSECT.COM

THE TEAM

Senior designer: Simon Kay | Sales Manager: Bridget Stockdale | Senior Sales Executive: Clare Halliday | Sales Executive Tony Hudson | Operations and Finance Manager: Victoria Boyle | Event Manager: Frances Ogefero Dell | Senior Administrator: Evie Hayes | Office Administrator - Apprentice: Zoe Tuffin | Office Administrator - Apprentice: Sanchez Nandi

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No desks for DfE office returners

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Revealed: More government procurement woes

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Mental health investigation up for top award

A *Schools Week* investigation into the crisis in children and young people's mental health services has been longlisted for the prestigious Paul Foot journalism award.

The eight-page special report was written by senior reporter Samantha Booth and commissioning editor Jess Staufenberg, and was published in February.

It revealed the devastating toll of failing support systems on families and schools, and documented testimony from scores of families and school leaders, alongside data from Freedom of Information requests to hundreds of councils, multi-academy trusts and the NHS.

The award was established in 2004, in memory of investigative journalist Paul Foot.

It honours the UK's "most brilliant, talented and determined journalists working in the fields of investigative and campaigning journalism today". The shortlist will be announced next Wednesday.

John Dickens, editor of *Schools Week*, said: "Jess and Sam showed dogged determination to uncover and tell the stories of families being failed by our collapsing mental health services."

[Read the investigation here](#)



Samantha Booth and commissioning editor Jess Staufenberg

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NEWS

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Zahawi under fire over 'misleading' MAT claims

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The self-professed "evidence-led education secretary" used data to back his all-academy push that his own statisticians admitted this week "may be misleading".

Labour has said that Nadhim Zahawi must now return to Parliament to "correct the record" over his claims that high-performing trusts "deliver the best outcomes".

The Department for Education was forced to amend and provide additional evidence for a document that makes the "case for a fully trust-led system" after criticism from the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) this week.

The watchdog raised issues about the "transparency, quality and replicability" of data in the document, which was published alongside the schools white paper in March.

But a new spreadsheet published by the DfE, supposedly to back up its claims, has cast further doubt on statements made by ministers.

A central government claim is that pupils in the top multi-academy trusts perform better than those in local authority-maintained schools. But, in sections of the spreadsheet that show the relative performance of pupils in different schools, the DfE itself warns that "direct comparisons between LAs, MATs and SATs may be misleading because the characteristics of the schools are different".

This has called into question claims made by Nadhim Zahawi in a Parliamentary debate on March 28, when he said the annex to the white paper showed "evidence that strong, high-performing multi-academy trusts really do deliver the best outcomes".

Shadow schools minister Stephen Morgan said the education secretary "likes to claim he is evidence-led, but his dodgy data is clearly flawed".

He added: "He should return to the House, explain himself and correct the record. The government are obsessing over structures without evidence to show this will deliver better outcomes for children in the classroom."

Labour plans to raise a point of order with the speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle next week,



Schools Week understands.

It is not the first time the DfE has admitted that comparisons between different types of school are not always clear-cut.

In its 2018-19 academies annual report, the department warned that "making fair comparisons between sponsored academies and LA schools is complex".

This is because the sponsored academies programme targeted poorly-performing schools, which in turn raised the "average quality of the remaining LA-maintained schools".

But conversely, many high-performing LA-maintained schools have become converter academies and "this can act to reduce the average quality of the remaining LA maintained schools".

This week's slapdown from the statistics watchdog follows a complaint from the National Education Union, which accused the government of "misreporting" data to back its academies reforms. The department cherry-picked trusts for comparison in its report, the NEU said.

In a letter to DfE chief statistician Neil McIvor, OSR director-general Ed Humpherson said it was "not always possible" to identify the exact data used to produce analysis in the document.

Links to sources of data "should be clearly set out and enable users to easily find the specific data referenced", he added.

He added that there was "insufficient information" on the methodologies used to

produce statistics.

The "limitations of these methodologies and the implications that these would have on the fairness of the comparisons being drawn have not been fully explained to users", the letter added.

The DfE should include "clear information on the methodologies and associated caveats so that users can draw reliable conclusions".

Finally, he said that "limited transparency" around the data sources and methods meant it was "difficult for users to replicate the figures presented and to draw their own conclusions".

Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the NEU, claimed the decision showed there was "no evidence that forcing all schools to join a multi-academy trust will improve schools".

But a DfE spokesperson claimed its evidence "remains clear that strong multi-academy trusts have a good track record of improving underperforming schools as sponsored academies".

"We welcome this input from the Office for Statistical Regulation and have updated our 'Case for a fully trust-led system' document to ensure even greater clarity and transparency, noting the department's conclusions relating to academies' performance remain the same."

The DfE has been criticised over its use of data several times in recent years. Between 2017 and 2019, it was reprimanded five times by the watchdog, with warnings relating to its claims about school funding.

NEWS

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Birmingham SEND caseloads hit over 500 children per worker

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

A government commissioner parachuted in to run special educational needs and disabilities services in Birmingham found that caseloads hit more than 500 children per worker, concluding that the place of vulnerable youngsters has become “unclear, if not lost”.

Ex-Hampshire County Council chief executive John Coughlan's appointment was mandated last year, the first time the government has made such drastic intervention in a council's SEND services.

In his first report, published today, he issued not only a damning report on the “dire” state of SEND provision locally, but also pointed a finger at government – including its 2014 reforms.

‘500-600 children per worker’

Following a local area SEND inspection in 2018, the government ordered Birmingham to produce a written statement of action (WSOA) in relation to 13 “significant areas of weakness”.

When inspectors revisited in May last year, they found that sufficient progress had not been made – prompting the commissioner's appointment.

Coughlan's 34-page report this week states that services are not only in “the dire predicament, as described”, but are likely to have deteriorated further.

The place of children, and particularly vulnerable children, in Birmingham is “unclear, if not lost”, with the director of children's services role “gradually eroded” and formal partnerships “all but defunct”.

He highlighted a restructure in the Special Educational Needs Assessment and Review team in 2020-21, and a linked backlog of cases and complaints. Over 18 months, “no case officers were holding cases, and case accountability was at best obscure”.

At one point, caseloads had “theoretically reached 500-600 children per worker”.

The 20-week timescale is not being met in most new education health and care plans, while annual reviews are “infrequent”,



John Coughlan



and there are around 300 tribunal appeals pending.

There is also “little coordination” over complaints and queries, and “deteriorating functionality” in the IT case-management system, to the point that some staff have reportedly stopped using it.

School relations with the council-led SEND system have been “severely strained” – with the commissioner highlighting “understandable but nevertheless unhelpful comments by some heads in their discontent with their LA colleagues”.

However, he said that schools were now represented in, and engaged with, improvement efforts.

At least three years of failings have not only had a “severe effect” on schools themselves, but also a “destructive effect” on council-parental engagement.

Recommendations for council - and DfE

The commissioner considered recommending wide-ranging potential structural reforms, such as handing over services to a newly formed trust. But he concluded that “the known costs and risks of such a step cannot be confidently assessed as outweighed by the potential benefits”.

Support for services remaining in-house is dependent on council support for other change, including the “continuing roles of the improvement board, a DfE-funded improvement

partnership, the retained statutory direction, and the commissioner.”

Proposed reforms also include recreating a “children's department”, promoting a children's partnership with a “clearly stated vision” and a drive to “reset the wider relationship” with schools. A better communication strategy with parents, new SEND data systems and a review of SEND information advice and support services locally were also advised.

There are also demands of the DfE, however, with the commissioner highlighting the “national context to this local crisis”. He noted all SEND services “appear to be struggling to varying degrees”.

“It must be acknowledged how hard progress can be in such a dispersed school system, in which individual schools are measured on virtually everything in support of their vitally important gradings.”

The DfE should not only “look to establish ways to assess schools on their duty of inclusion”, but also review its own 2014 SEND reforms “with regard to more stable funding”.

Birmingham City Council leader Ian Ward thanked the commissioner, acknowledging the “uncomfortable reading” – but said the council was “heading in the right direction” and accepted all recommendations. “For too long, families have not felt listened to, and that has been a key area for improvement.”

INVESTIGATION

ANOTHER procurement legal row emerges as DfE 'under stress'

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education was forced to row back on its decision to hand a contract to provide free school meal vouchers if schools close again to Edenred after a legal challenge by a rival bidder.

This means at least three major outsourcing contracts from the department have been at the centre of legal challenges.

A fourth – to award Randstad the £32 million National Tutoring Programme contract – came under intense scrutiny, with the HR firm later axed and a new tender launched.

Richard Moore, a commercial contract lawyer at Clarke Willmott law firm, said DfE's procurement disputes show "all the signs of an organisation under stress with regard to its current procurement performance and outcomes".

Schools Week revealed on Monday the government is facing paying out £750,000 in costs – or reversing its decision – to award the flagship £121 million Institute of Teaching to a consortium of legal trusts. Ambition says the award was "unlawful" (see page 7).

Earlier that day, the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA) took the first formal step towards legal action over the DfE's plan to move Oak National Academy into an arm's-length body.

Court documents obtained by *Schools Week* show that DfE "abandoned" a procurement to award a contract for a "contingency scheme" to provide meal vouchers in the event of another lockdown.

Edenred, which had run the national free school meals voucher scheme, was identified as the successful bidder. But this was canned in October after a legal challenge from rival bidder Wonde, an edtech firm.

As revealed by *Schools Week*, Wonde went on to win the year-long contract. But prior to this the firm had submitted two legal



challenges against the department.

After the abandoned tender was reopened, Wonde claimed the procurement design was "flawed" and "unlawful" as it did not meet the requirements of procurement law.

The company claimed the awarding criteria and scoring method were problematic. They also said imposing word counts was "disproportionate" and "contrary to the principles of equal treatment, transparency and non-discrimination", and the submission deadline gave "insufficient" time to apply.

Wonde claimed the procurement would "strengthen incumbency advantage enjoyed" by Edenred.

The company issued the claim to "protect its position" during procurement. It was dismissed in January after both DfE and Wonde "agreed terms of settlement", documents said. *Schools Week* approached Wonde and Edenred for comment.

Last year, DfE's director of post-16 strategy Keith Smith admitted his department "does do too much procurement".

Caroline Wright, director general of BESA, said it was important DfE "leads by example, following the best-practice principles and guidance that it rightly demands of others".

But Moore said some of the problems may not be of "their own making". For instance, with the Randstad contract, the DfE's "discretion [was] significantly fettered" due to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

These mean the DfE must focus on procuring "the most economically advantageous tender", he added.

Randstad's bid was millions cheaper than the bid from Education Endowment Foundation, which ran the scheme in its inaugural year.

However, a new procurement bill would change this wording to the "most advantageous tender", which Moore said could assist government in "avoiding being forced to award contracts based largely on cost, as opposed to quality considerations".

Schools Week revealed how Randstad had been axed from the NTP contract, with all the cash going straight to schools instead, from September. This followed numerous issues, including sluggish take-up of tutoring.

But there are already concerns about the new tender to run the scheme's third year, which closes on Monday. The work, to oversee the scheme and provide quality assurance and training, has been split into three separate contracts.

It is understood that Number 10 and some quarters within DfE were expecting this to be one tender.

A source told *Schools Week* it was a "major mistake to split it up in that way", adding the sector was "desperate to maximise the success of NTP" but this "risked dashing everyone's hopes".

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said it is "absolutely essential" there is "complete clarity and transparency" around how decisions are being made.

DfE did not respond to a request for comment.



Richard Moore

INVESTIGATION

Charity claims £750k damages over lost IoT contract

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

A leading education charity which is suing the government after it lost out on the flagship Institute of Teaching contract wants £750,000 in damages to cover “wasted costs”.

The Ambition Institute has lodged a High Court challenge against Nadhim Zahawi over the £121 million contract, *Schools Week* revealed last week.

Court documents show Ambition believes that the Department for Education’s decision to hand the contract to the School-Led Development Trust (SLDT) – a consortium of leading trusts including the Harris Federation and Star Academies – was “manifestly erroneous” and “unlawful”.

Ambition says DfE should now offer it the contract instead, or pay £750,000 for its “wasted bid costs”, court documents seen by *Schools Week* show.

We also understand that the government has applied to get an injunction on naming the winning bid dropped. The injunction was imposed as part of the legal challenge.

The court documents show the bid from Ambition – a teacher training charity largely funded by government grants – was rejected because of its “unacceptably high level of financial

risk”.

The DfE said most of Ambition’s delivery partners – which include the Ark academy trust – would need to outperform their three-year recruitment average and “grow very significantly” to meet the proposed volumes under the Institute of Teaching (IoT) contract.

It was therefore “considered likely that the institute could suffer a significant financial distress event from which it may not recover”, the DfE told Ambition in a letter in February.

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 by the following year.

But from this September it will also support 2,000 early career teachers and their mentors, 1,000 national professional qualifications and train more than 400 national leaders of education.

The legal action means the institute is well behind schedule. It was supposed to start a period of “set-up and mobilisation” from February.

Ambition said it could use operating reserves and call on loans from its partners, including Ark and Delta Academies Trust, if low numbers were recruited.



Ambition told the government that the

additional measures meant it would not generate a loss unless recruitment volumes fell to 32 per cent of those proposed, which it said was “very unlikely”.

The charity thought it had given the DfE the “necessary information to address its concerns about its financial model” after a meeting. But the government said it lacked “sufficient confidence” that the quality offer could be sustained on lower recruitment numbers.

It predicted a deficit of between £6.9 million and £10.1 million over the IoT contract term, based on the current three-year average for Ambition’s delivery partners.

The DfE also said Ambition’s bid would “very likely” need to “claim some of the existing market share of established providers”, including “reputable” universities, to meet its first-year targets.

Ambition scored 70.08 per cent for the quality of its bid, compared with 59.92 per cent for SLDT. *Schools Week* understands that the department is still working towards the IoT launching in time for the new school year. It is confident of a “robust” procurement process and believes it has a strong case.

TOM BELGER | @TOM_BELGER

BESA eyes legal action over Oak nationalisation plans

The British Educational Suppliers Association is taking legal action over the Department for Education’s plan to move Oak National Academy into public hands.

The trade association claims it was “unfairly and unlawfully excluded” from consultation over the move, subsidies for the online school are “unlawful” and the DfE failed to properly consider the decision’s impact on the educational services market.

Oak is due to become part of the DfE as an arm’s-length national curriculum body this autumn. Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi said it was “one of our greatest achievements”.

But BESA director general Caroline Wright said it had “no other option” than to take legal action. The move would “unfairly replicate”



hundreds of UK businesses’ own resources, threatening jobs and millions of pounds of investment.

It could “curtail” teacher and school autonomy, with the government “appearing to want to transform Oak into a national curriculum body that would work closely with Ofsted to deliver government-approved content for schools”.

BESA gave the DfE notice of its claim on Monday. It wants a resolution without court intervention but asked the DfE to put its plans on hold and for a consultation to be run.

BESA’s letter to the DfE argues there is “no evidence” it is creating the arm’s-length body as a last resort, as required by Cabinet Office guidance.

The government is accused of refusing to

release its business case – which must be drawn up for ALBs to show tests have been met to justify their creation.

Meanwhile the DfE is accused of failing to properly assess the proposals’ impact. BESA said its own survey found 63 per cent of schools were against the DfE creating and providing free curriculum content post-pandemic.

BESA claimed that “schools do not value free curriculum content” and just a quarter of primary schools and a tenth of secondaries believe it compares well with paid-for content.

BESA makes further arguments about alleged breaches of subsidy rules, suggesting there is no evidence of “market failure” or “equity rationale” to justify public funding for Oak.

A DfE spokesperson said the decision followed “careful consideration”. They were “confident due process has been followed.”

NEWS

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Top trainers snubbed in 'disgraceful' reaccreditation scheme

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The first university rated 'outstanding' under Ofsted's new teacher training inspection framework is among those snubbed over re-accreditation in the first round of the controversial ITT review.

The University of Nottingham said it was "disappointed and perplexed" by the decision. Only 80 of the 216 providers – just over a third – that applied went through in the first round.

Other rejected organisations spoke of being treated "disgracefully", while even successful providers described a "challenging" and "stressful" process.

Under the review, all providers have to apply for re-accreditation to continue training from 2024. But, while the government anticipated its reforms would disrupt the market, the low numbers threaten to exacerbate current recruitment woes.

Although it defended its "rigorous" process and urged providers to apply again later this month, the Department for Education admitted this week that it may now need to run a third round.

Among the 136 providers rejected are several organisations that have received Ofsted's seal of approval under its new ITT inspection framework, which has seen many providers downgraded.

The finding is even more surprising as Ofsted was involved in assessing applications.

Nottingham's teacher training provision was rated 'outstanding' across the board when it was inspected in March.

Inspectors found trainees appreciated the "remarkable efforts taken by leaders, tutors and mentors to ensure that they succeed".

Students gained a "scholarly understanding of the role of the teacher and are extremely well prepared for the realities of the classroom" and followed an "exceptional curriculum...taught by experts".

But the university told Schools Week it was unsuccessful in the first re-accreditation round.

"We are very disappointed and perplexed by this result, as it came so soon after we received confirmation from Ofsted that we had become the first university to be rated as 'outstanding' under the current inspection framework," a spokesperson said.

The University of Wolverhampton's primary and secondary provision was rated "good" across the



board last May but the faculty learned on Monday that it had not been re-accredited, after missing the total score needed by "just one point". It will re-apply next month.

Professor Diana Bannister said the process was a "disruptive and a deliberate threat to destabilise the initial teacher education pipeline when recruitment and retention to the profession are already challenged".

Another SCITT recently rated "good" claimed the DfE had failed to read its application properly and said it had received "no support whatsoever. We were left having a stab in the dark."

It also claimed that some providers were encouraged by the DfE to "tweak" their applications ahead of the announcement. But others, including their SCITT, were not. The DfE did not deny the allegations.

It asked: "Was this because there were even fewer providers who actually passed and there was a panic? And, if these providers were offered support, why were not all providers given the same opportunity?"

Another "good" provider said submissions were limited in length, but it then failed because of a lack of detail which it was "impossible to give within the word limit".

It added: "I feel we have been treated disgracefully. I put my heart and soul into teacher training.

"The idea that a large, effective organisation such as ours should be swept away by a process based on written answers with no possibility of appeal is too much."

Some providers chose not to apply in the first round, either to give themselves more time or because of plans to merge.

The Deepings SCITT in Lincolnshire, also rated "good" under the new framework, did not want to "risk" accreditation, instead planning to join forces with a larger provider.

But director Nikki Benjamin said the SCITT's proposed new partner was not re-accredited, although they plan to reapply.

"The timing is awful – I will of course support in the re-write of the bid, but we are now into assessment season for the current cohort and induction for the next, so capacity is an issue."

Even successful organisations criticised the process. Middlesex University said the ordeal was "very challenging", while National Modern Languages SCITT director Katrin Sredzki-Seamer said it was "very stressful and a drain on our resources".

"Many feel that this process may not have been fair."

The DfE said the accreditation process was "intentionally rigorous" and it was "confident in the robustness" of its assessments.

Schools minister Robin Walker encouraged submissions in round two so "together we can continue to develop and grow teacher training".

Emma Hollis, from the National Association of School-Based Teacher Training, said ministers "will want to avoid a potentially catastrophic risk to the teacher supply chain – and quality and availability of provision – which would come from losing significant numbers of providers from the market".

The government has hit its teacher recruitment targets just once in the past nine years.

Round two opens next Monday and runs to June 27. A list of successful applicants from both rounds will be published in the autumn.



Emma Hollis



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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Not enough desks for DfE staff sent back to the office

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Staff at the Department for Education have had to work in corridors and canteens after the government's return-to-the-office edict because the DfE has almost twice as many workers as desks.

Whole teams have been turned away from some offices because of over-crowding. And rural staff and those with caring responsibilities are considering their futures as even pre-pandemic flexibility is "deemed unacceptable".

Staff outnumber desks by almost two-to-one across the DfE's 12 offices, figures seen by Schools Week show. In Leeds, there are just 24 desks for 110 staff. Bristol has 95 desks for 299 staff.

But bosses have decreed that staff should work at least 80 per cent of their week in the office.

The PCS civil service union has written to the education secretary Nadhim Zahawi after accusing ministers of an "unprofessional and unfair political attack on our members". The FDA union, representing senior officials, said it had been "inundated with concerns".

Efficiency minister Jacob Rees-Mogg has called for offices to return to "full capacity". He even visited some departments to leave Post-It notes for absent employees.

Zahawi announced in April that he had instructed his team to "go back immediately to pre-covid working and offices". Leaked figures had shown that just 25 per cent of DfE staff were going in, the lowest level in Whitehall.

Following the intervention, DfE staff were summoned to a virtual meeting. Permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood, flanked by ministers, told staff to work 80 per cent of their week in the office, Schools Week understands.

However, even before the pandemic, the DfE only had an occupancy rate of 60 to 70 per cent. This was in part down to the department's support for flexible working. The DfE's occupancy rate is now "similar" to those levels, ministers confirmed this week.

But changes to the department's estate,



Jacob Rees-Mogg



including giving up space in the DfE's London headquarters for other government bodies, mean there are fewer desks to go around.

Data released this week in response to a Parliamentary written question shows the DfE now has 4,200 desks across its 12 offices, but 8,009 full-time-equivalent staff. In London and Manchester, there are more than double the number of staff than desks.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said Rees-Mogg's "Post-It note stunt has been exposed for what it is – an unprofessional and unfair political attack on our members".

"To try to shame them back into the office when they have been working hard and successfully at home throughout the pandemic is bad enough. But, when there aren't enough desks – when it's not physically possible – looks like the action of a bully."

He urged ministers to think about how their actions will "affect the recruitment and retention of civil servants" and added: "Our members have worked flexibly for many years and deserve to be treated with respect, not like naughty schoolchildren."

Schools Week understands that staff were sent home from the DfE's Sheffield office after a mass return earlier this month, despite some already using communal spaces like the canteen.

Zoom meetings were also run with staff perched on the end of shared seating because meeting rooms were full.

The government is in the process of moving thousands of civil service jobs out of London.

The FDA said it had been "inundated with concerns from members over the impact of the edict to return to offices".

National officer Helen Kenny told Schools Week the move was "unwarranted and shows no awareness of the impact on individuals".

"We are also aware of members whose pre-pandemic flexible working arrangements are now deemed unacceptable, which is impacting working parents and those with caring responsibilities in particular."

The DfE said hybrid working was "not new and does not stop offices being used at full capacity". Such arrangements were in place before the pandemic.

Full occupancy also "does not mean every civil servant working from their desk", the DfE said. It said it was "common for organisations in the private and public sector not to have space for all their employees".

DfE desk and staff numbers

LOCATION	DESKS	STAFF
London	1,100	2,268
Sheffield	790	1,489
Coventry	1,113	1,257
Manchester	500	1,249
Darlington	272	768
Nottingham	164	343
Bristol	95	299
Newcastle	36	120
Leeds	24	110
Croydon	40	48
Cambridge	42	35
Watford	24	23
TOTALS	4,200	8,009

NEWS

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AQA says biology advance info accurate after complaints

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

AQA – the country's largest exam board – has stated that its advance information for GCSE biology exams was accurate after scores of distressed pupils complained, claiming they had been given the wrong advice.

On Tuesday morning, AQA staged three separate biology papers; a single biology exam and two combined papers (synergy and trilogy).

Separate advance information was distributed for each exam, highlighting topics that definitely would and would not be assessed.

But pupils took to Twitter to question AQA, claiming they had provided the wrong information.

Despite the challenges, the exam board stated its advance information was correct.

In response, the board said it “sounds like students might have been using the advance information for a different biology paper from the one they sat”.

Students were told to check with their schools that the right information was provided.

One AQA tweet even suggested a school might have put the pupil into the wrong exam: “We’d recommend speaking to your school to make sure you sat the right paper.”

Advance information for the single science exam states the topic of cancer will not be assessed.

However, it appears a number of pupils sitting the combined papers read this advice. One message to AQA’s Twitter page warned the confusion had left “many in tears”, another pupil said: “AQA tell us there will be no questions on cancer to have to answer questions on cancer #shocking”. Parents of some pupils labelled the mistakes a “joke”.

An AQA spokesperson said the advance information for biology “was all accurate”, but “the issue seems to be that some students had unfortunately been using the advance information for a different science qualification in their revision”.

“We know this is a difficult time for students so we’ve added some extra guidance on our website to help them make sure they’re using the right documents.”

Elsewhere, school leaders were “cautiously



optimistic” after what they said was a largely smooth start to the first summer exam series since 2019. But they warned the situation remains “fragile” as a strained workforce – with more than five per cent of teachers still off – leaves limited room for error.

Schools Week spoke with more than ten education leaders at schools around the country, none of whom had yet experienced Covid-related absences from exams.

‘I don’t have any contingency’

At GCSE, a number of Ebacc subject exams had already been staged, with biology, English language and history this week.

Catharine Darnton, headteacher at Gillotts School in Henley-on-Thames, said attendance for exams has been “fantastic”, with “no signs of Covid”.

Earlier this month, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) expanded the invigilator-to-pupil ratio from 30 to 40 pupils per invigilator. It also said staff who teach the subject were allowed to invigilate.

Darnton said she was “grateful” for the guidance as “if somebody’s ill, I don’t have any contingency – my contingency would be to use the reduced ratio”.

At Community Schools Trust in London, chief executive Simon Elliott said his schools were already making use of the new rules.

Forest Gate Community School, in Newham, east London, only secured half of its usual eight additional invigilators, with teachers who taught the examination subjects filling the shortfall.

Andy Byers, headteacher of Framwellgate School in Durham, admitted it “has been a struggle” to secure invigilators, but they had been able to use the relaxations.

Pan Panayiotou, headteacher at Worthing High School, said there had been no disruption, and while it is “early days – I’m cautiously optimistic”.

Darnton likewise warned the positive start is “fragile” and has “come out of the very hard work of all school staff” preparing for exams.

Increased anxiety not seen across the board

A survey from the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) this month revealed eight out of ten headteachers reported higher levels of exam anxiety among Year 11s than pre-pandemic.

Caroline Barlow, headteacher at Heathfield Community College in East Sussex, said while she had a doubling in pupils requiring one-to-one invigilation, pupils were not “unusually nervous”.

Essa Academy, in Bolton, has seen the number of additional arrangement exam rooms increase from two to five.

But principal Martin Knowles said the “global anxiety about these exams has kind of died down now the kids are in it – they’re focused”.

Year 11 absence consistent in run-up to exams

FFT Education Datalab analysis of Year 11 attendance has revealed that absences among the year group since Easter were similar to absence rates earlier in the year.

Year 11s missed 11.5 per cent of sessions between the start of September and the start of the Easter holidays – compared with 11 per cent of sessions missed since then.

A session refers to either a morning or afternoon registration session missed by pupils, signifying half a day of lessons.

Since Easter, 17.5 per cent of Year 11s have missed at least a fifth of sessions – equivalent to one day a week.

The analysis is based on data from FFT’s attendance tracker, which includes around 2,700 secondary schools.

NEWS

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AQA to repay another £3.5m for cancelled exams

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Exam board AQA will return an extra £3.5 million to schools for last summer's cancelled exams, however it still lags behind other board's more generous rebates.

The country's largest board was widely criticised for returning only 26 per cent of GCSE and A-level fees to schools last summer. This was despite teachers shouldering the "lion's share" of work to create teacher-assessed grades, heads said.

But the charity told schools this month that it will return extra cash as the Department for Education covered costs relating to the autumn exams series. This takes its total refund to £48.5 million.

AQA did not provide an updated percentage figure for its overall rebate but, based on its previous figures, the extra £3.5 million works out at around 2 per cent, meaning the total rebate is now 28 per cent.

It therefore trails way behind OCR and



WJEC Eduqas, which returned 42 per cent of fees. Pearson returned 33 per cent.

Schools have not yet been told how much they will each receive, but accounts will be credited by the end of May.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of school leaders' union ASCL, welcomed the extra money, but added: "It isn't a great deal extra, but it's something at least.

"We have always recognised that AQA has certain fixed costs, and that there was a degree of work involved in last year's assessments despite the cancellation of

formal exams.

"However, its rebate really was very low given the fact that schools and colleges had to do the lion's share of the work in assessing their students, and this was a source of considerable frustration among many leaders.

"Still, we move on now and we are keen to maintain a constructive relationship with AQA."

Last summer, schools had to assess students and provide grades after exams were cancelled due to lockdowns, but exam boards did have to provide quality assurance assessments and test materials.

AQA did not say how much funding DfE had provided. Last year the board said its fees were generally lower than other exam boards, impacting the amount it could give back to schools.

The board said a more substantial refund would put its ability to run exams this summer at risk.

Both Pearson and OCR said their summer rebate had already taken into account any further funding.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

Markers locked out of Capita's SATs webinar

Teachers recruited to become SATs markers spent hours at the weekend trying to access a training webinar run by contractor Capita.

The consultancy firm ran the first virtual key stage 2 marker training over the weekend, which was attended by over 3,750 people.

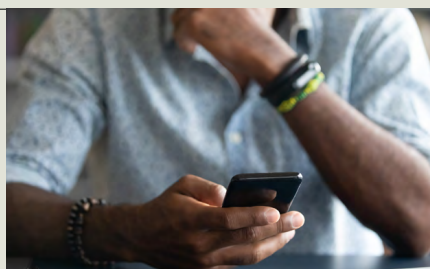
However, some teachers complained on Saturday they were unable to get into the online session and when they called the helpline, were met with no answer or were on hold for hours.

One teacher in North Yorkshire, who wished to remain anonymous, told *Schools Week* they emailed in their resignation after not being able to get access.

They checked everything was working the night before, but when they logged on the following morning it said "link not found".

"I sent an email to the marking team support and called the helpline which cut off after three rings. I haven't been able to get responses to any emails or messages."

Another teacher said on Twitter they were on hold for over two hours trying to get help, while



others have not heard back from Capita since.

As part of its £107 million government contract, Capita manages the recruitment of markers and the printing, distribution and collation of test papers for key stage 1 and key stage 2 as well as the phonics screening check.

Due to the pandemic, it is the first time the company has rolled out a full test cycle. Marking starts around now until June, with most completing their marking within three weeks.

A Capita spokesperson said some people experienced "issues with helpline waiting times on the weekend".

They added: "Following this, additional, experienced staff were made available across all contact routes to provide the necessary support. We would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused."

Another teacher, who managed to get through to the webinar, said the marking platform had been "slow" at times and stopped working at least once this week.

There have also been delays with the Standards and Testing Agency helpline, also run by Capita.

Jamie Barry, headteacher at Yew Tree Primary School, in Sandwell, was on hold for two hours on Monday to "check something that takes a minute". He said: "Frustration is an understatement. We are busy enough anyway with the impacts of statutory assessments."

The DfE said they were aware of issues with helpline waiting time last week and they made "additional, experienced staff available" across "all contact routes" so schools "received the support they required".

NEWS

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Details of schools' £1.5m cost-cutting success story withheld

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

EXCLUSIVE

The government will not reveal its cost-cutting advisers' recommendations to balance the books at two Hackney schools held up as success stories of the controversial scheme.

School resource management advisers (SRMA) have found savings totalling £303 million after visiting around 1,000 schools and trusts since being set up in 2018 by then academies minister Lord Agnew. Just £17 million of savings had been made six months after visits.

The Department for Education published a case study in March highlighting how advisers found savings totalling £1.5 million at Oldhill School and Children's Centre and Our Lady's High School, both in Hackney.

But neither the DfE, the schools nor Hackney council – which commissioned the visits – would release the reports following a Freedom of Information request.

The council said it was concerned that identifying the schools as "financially vulnerable" could negatively impact the settings, despite the DfE case study detailing they had a combined deficit of over £760,000.

Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said: "If you're going to say that if you get these cost-cutters in you can all save money, then there absolutely is an obligation to say how it is done.

"You can only judge the quality of their proposals by looking at what they're proposing to cut."

The case study said advisers recommended savings from "reorganising staff", growing pupil numbers to increase funding and embedding integrated curriculum and financial planning. They visited the schools in October 2020.

But Our Lady's school board minutes, from March 2021, suggest savings were down to



cutting staff.

It states: "The main stages are an admin staff restructure and technical staff restructure. This is forecast to lead to savings of admin staff - £97k, technical staff - £55k."

Elsewhere the minutes note: "There are some teachers leaving and these will not be replaced but work covered by existing staff. A teaching staff restructure will follow next year matching the new curriculum."

Leaders acknowledge "there will be costs involved with redundancy and also the creation of some new posts in education support".

The board minutes state that senior leaders acknowledge the cost-cutting recommendations are "difficult and will try to protect staff as much as possible.

"The key is to support the long-term sustainability of the school, and with this comes a high level of challenge."

The minutes also show how leaders will "look to see where the school can potentially invest more in curriculum support staff but can't allow this to jeopardise the budget recovery".

Bousted said the reduction of staff levels was "a retrograde step" and the "real issue is the continued underfunding of

education".

Schools Week previously revealed that SRMAs had advised schools to replace experienced teachers with support staff and limit pupils' lunch portions in a bid to save money.

The DfE, Hackney council and Oldhill claimed that releasing the reports would inhibit "free and frank advice" being shared in such situations, including the exploration of potential funding shortfall solutions.

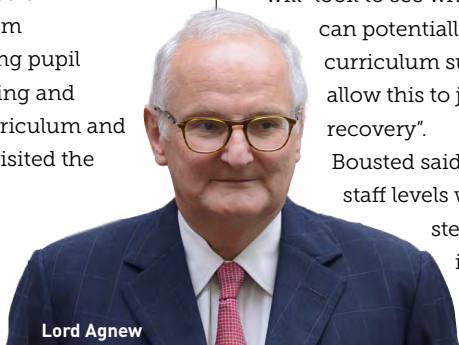
Hackney also claimed that exposing the "financial vulnerabilities" would be "counterproductive" to recovery and may deter families from sending children to the schools.

The DfE's case study states that, in 2019-20, Oldhill and Our Lady's had deficits of £536,000 and £225,000 respectively. Their financial troubles are likewise identified repeatedly in publicly available board minutes.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), the DfE's funding arm, said sharing "sensitive" recommendations around staffing, capital and spending costs "may also have a deterrent effect".

Councils and schools "may be less likely to share their experiences in the form of case studies" if SRMA reports were released, it added.

An FOI previously revealed that the government's own research indicated more than half of schools reported the advisers did not identify new ways of saving money.



Lord Agnew

NEWS IN BRIEF

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School sports scheme extended

Ministers plan to spend £57 million extending the opening hours of school sports halls and swimming pools to encourage children to be more active after the pandemic.

A cross-government plan has pledged to help pupils to access 60 minutes of sport and physical activity every day in part by "maximising the use of existing facilities".

The latest tender follows a £1.6 million pilot of the scheme in 2020 and a £10.1 million extended programme last year.

Sports England, which administered last year's funding, said 1,406 schools and more than 300,000 children and local people had benefited from the investment.

The Department for Education is now looking for a "national delivery partner" to support schools in opening their facilities in the evening,

at weekends and during holidays for the next three years.

Tender documents seen by *Schools Week* said the contract will identify at least 1,350 schools spread across England's nine regions. The contractor should reach 362,500 children and young people and at least 112,500 community users.

The aim is to create "national coverage" and support more schools to "provide inclusive facilities and opportunity for pupils with SEND".

The DfE expects 90 per cent of the funding to go directly to schools. It also wants schools with pools to "maximise the usage" both during and outside the school day, as the pandemic has had a "negative impact" on school swimming and water safety lessons.

Schools Week reported in 2016 how private



schools had almost as many swimming pools between them as the whole of the state school, higher education and further education sectors combined.

Geoff Barton, general secretary at school leaders' union ASCL, said the support would be "vital" if the cash is "transparently and directly available".

Recent government data shows a record number of primary school children were now obese or morbidly overweight.

Covid stalls youngest pupils' development

The development of the youngest pupils stalled significantly during the pandemic, new research suggests.

The proportion of children reaching expected levels in their first year at school fell from 72 per cent to 59 per cent between 2019 and 2021, according to the Education Endowment Foundation [EEF].

This equates to three more children in every reception classroom falling behind compared with pre-pandemic year groups.

Pupils were more likely to lag behind in all areas of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework, including communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development (PSED). Literacy and maths saw the largest declines.

Professor Becky Francis, EEF's chief executive, said Covid's impact on reception pupils appeared "particularly concerning", as it is "a crucial time for children's development".

Researchers analysed a sample of EYFS data for more than 3,000 children who started at 94 schools in 2020-21.

Three-quarters of the schools reported pupils needing "additional support" in September 2020. PSED, communication and literacy needs were most commonly cited.

The EEF also released a "practical guide" to recovery, focused on high-quality teaching, target interventions and non-academic barriers such as attendance.

[Full story here](#)

RSCs wants LA school chats

The Department for Education is encouraging maintained schools across the country to attend meetings about its white paper to learn about plans for an all-academy system by 2030.

England's regional schools commissioners, who oversee the academy sector and conversions, will hold webinars targeted at schools still under council control from next week.

An email to school leaders on Thursday encouraged them to register, saying sessions would "provide the opportunity to hear more" about the white paper, which includes levelling up plans and sets out the "case for a fully trusted system".

"Webinars are open to local authority maintained schools and provide the opportunity to hear more from your regional schools commissioner about the white paper and what it could mean for schools," the email said. Under the plans, more struggling schools face forced conversion, councils will be able to seek ministers' permission to academise all their schools en masse, and some will launch their own trusts.

But schools need only show "plans to join or form" a trust by the deadline of 2030. *Schools Week* revealed last week how many councils were exploring the possibility of setting up their own trusts.

West Sussex County Council has written to schools about setting up "a number" of trusts over the next few years.

Hoax exam papers warning

Pupils have been warned not to be "distracted" by hoaxers peddling "fake" exam papers on social media as GCSE and A-levels began this week.

In a blog, exams regulator Ofqual advised students "not to be distracted by these hoaxes". Anyone "trying to sell or buy such fakes could be disqualified from their qualifications", it added.

In early March 2020, before exams were cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic, then Ofqual boss Sally Collier wrote to

heads to warn that "sharing exam papers or questions, real or fake, could result in disqualification".

She told leaders to prepare pupils for the possibility that claims about their exams could circulate online.

In 2019, an independent report urged the Joint Council for Qualifications to make clear that attempting to sell hoax papers was "a form of malpractice and subject to sanctions".

[Full story here](#)

EXPLAINER

Shortage of computing specialists causes Ofsted concern

A lack of specialist computing teachers will have significant consequences for the education of pupils, Ofsted has warned in its latest subject review.

The computing review noted that school leaders must provide “sufficient professional development” for teachers so they can design and teach a high-quality computing curriculum.

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted’s chief inspector, added: “Computing is rich in complex knowledge, which can make it interesting for pupils to learn. Yet it is also hard to teach well.”

Previous reviews have included subjects such as maths, languages and geography.

1 SHORTAGE OF SPECIALISTS WILL HAVE ‘SIGNIFICANT CONSEQUENCES’...

The review identified a “low” number of subject specialists in computing with “a lack of new teachers to improve the situation”.

Ofsted said this would “have significant consequences for the quality of education that pupils receive in computing if nothing is done to remedy the situation”.

The inspectorate warned that teachers’ content and pedagogical knowledge “are important factors in high-quality computing education”.

In 2018 and 2019, fewer than half the hours of computing taught in secondary schools were led by a teacher with a relevant post A-level qualification.

Apart from in 2020-21, when there was a 23 per cent increase in new entrants to ITT for all subjects, the government has under-recruited for computing teachers every year since 2014.

2... AS WILL REDUCED TEACHING TIME

Ofsted said pupils should have “sufficient curriculum time” to acquire computing knowledge. But “the amount of curriculum time afforded to computing education is a significant concern within the sector”.

A 2019 report using government census data found that computing curriculum time in key stage 3 dropped from one hour to 45 minutes between 2012 and 2017.

Meanwhile, an earlier report from the Royal Society highlighted that one hour a week “was not adequate to teach the key stage 3 curriculum”.

The review also recommended that teachers should receive high-quality computing CPD to “develop and maintain their subject knowledge”.

3 DON’T ASSUME PUPILS ARE ‘DIGITAL NATIVES’

Teachers have been warned to avoid making assumptions about pupils’ prior knowledge and digital literacy.

“One of the barriers” to pupils developing knowledge was the belief they are “digital natives” and already experts, Ofsted found. But “for pupils to use computing devices effectively, they need to be taught how to use them”.

Novices required “more explicit instruction”, the review added.

4 KEEP ONLINE SAFETY IN MIND WHEN PLANNING CURRICULUM

A high-quality computing curriculum should carefully sequence knowledge related to online safety, or “e-safety”, to ensure that subject content is “appropriate for pupils at each stage of their education”.

Ofsted said it was not enough just to set out “what pupils should know and remember”.

E-safety should be “rooted in the design of the curriculum and taught by teachers who have had opportunities to develop subject knowledge in online safety”.

5 PUPILS SHOULD BECOME ‘SKILFUL PROGRAMMERS’

The curriculum should enable pupils to become “skilful programmers”, Ofsted said.

The review found that learning to program was considered difficult, and to do so successfully requires the learning of programming languages, programming styles and standardised solutions to programming problems.

6 DON’T TEST ‘GENERIC COMPETENCIES’

The review said that computing assessment needed to determine if pupils remembered what they were taught and applied this knowledge as intended. A drift towards “generic competency-based outcomes” could mean a loss of focus.

Ofsted said there was an “urgent need” for a better understanding of formative assessment in computing which focuses on knowledge.

Formative assessment should also be used to identify misconceptions early. Multiple-choice questions could be an “effective tool” in checking understanding.

NEWS

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Non-white candidates less likely to be accepted for teacher training

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Ethnic minority candidates are less likely to be accepted onto teacher training programmes than their white counterparts, despite showing a “clear and obvious interest” in the profession.

A report by the National Foundation for Educational Research also found that 86 per cent of state schools have an all-white senior leadership team and that non-white ethnic groups are under-represented in headships by as much as 88 per cent.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi warned last year that school leadership teams were not representative of the country at large. But the new report, which analysed government, UCAS and Teach First data, shows that ministers face an uphill struggle, with non-white ethnic groups under-represented in all stages of the workforce except initial teacher training.

Even then, although those from Asian, black and other ethnic minority backgrounds are over-represented among applicants to ITT, they are less likely to be accepted than their white peers.

Acceptance rates to postgraduate teacher training are 21 percentage points lower for applicants from black and other minority backgrounds, 13 percentage points lower for those from Asian backgrounds and 9 percentage points lower for candidates from mixed ethnic backgrounds.

‘Pool of talent not being tapped’

Sufian Sadiq, director of teaching school at the Chiltern Learning Trust, said the report showed “evidence of interest in teaching – from black and ethnic minority candidates – and a pool of potential talent that is not currently being tapped”.

He added: “Addressing the racial disparities that exist within teaching is therefore not only a moral imperative, but increasingly necessary if we want to tackle teacher supply problems.”

The report analysed the progression rates of different ethnic groups between different stages in teaching and found that those from most non-white backgrounds were less likely to achieve QTS, enter state-sector teaching and achieve



Sufian Sadiq

promotion to senior leadership.

Teachers from different ethnic backgrounds were more likely to progress to middle leadership than their white counterparts, however.

But the report said that this was driven by a concentration of teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds in London, “where rates of promotion into middle leadership are higher for teachers from all ethnic groups”.

After taking account of differences in characteristics such as region and phase, teachers from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds were “significantly” less likely to be promoted to middle leadership.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leavers, said disparities in progression were of “great concern”, adding that it was “crucial that we work together as a profession to address these disparities both in the interests of fairness and equality, and in terms of the message we send to children and young people”.

School leadership teams ‘predominantly white’

The research found under-representation of non-white groups was most pronounced at senior leadership and headship levels. For example, 96 per cent of heads were from white ethnic backgrounds, compared with 83 per cent of the wider population.

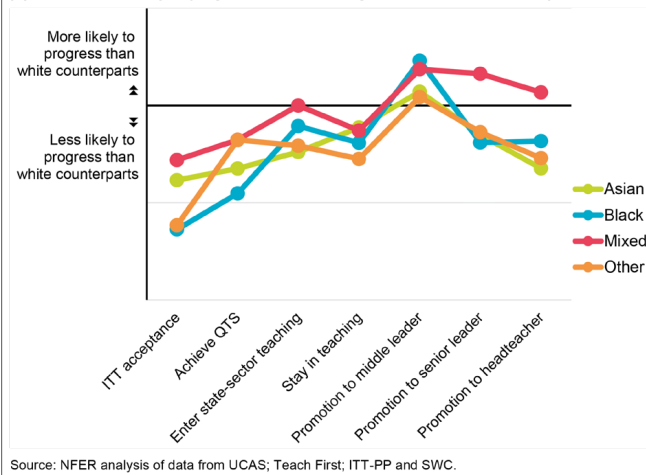
Among headteachers, mixed ethnic groups were under-represented by 60 per cent, black ethnic groups by 75 per cent, Asian ethnic groups by 83 per cent and other groups by 88 per cent, compared with the wider population.

The report warned that the trends identified contributed to school leadership teams being “predominantly white”. Eighty-six per cent of state schools in England have an all-white senior leadership team, while 60 per cent have an all-white teaching staff.

The make-up of school leadership teams also has an impact on teacher retention, the report found. Disparities in retention rates were smaller in schools with diverse leadership teams, and larger in schools where all senior leaders were white.

Report author Jack Worth said the research

Figure 2: People from most ethnic minority groups and at most stages of the teacher career pipeline are less likely to progress to the next stage than their white counterparts



Source: NFER analysis of data from UCAS; Teach First; ITT-PP and SWC.

showed we “currently do not have a teacher workforce that reflects the ethnic make-up of wider society and that opportunities to enter and progress within the teaching profession are not equal”.

More research into teacher training needed

The report concluded that leaders and decision-makers in ITT providers, schools and trusts need better support to make equitable workforce decisions. It called for further research, particularly around ITT.

Teacher trainers should also be encouraged to review their application and selection processes, and school leaders should commit to publishing institutional data on diversity.

The government should also conduct regular monitoring of progress in reducing disparities, it said.

Emma Hollis, from the National Association of School Based Teacher Trainers, said the findings posed important questions and “we now need to better understand the reasons why”.

She added: “Once we have that understanding, we can provide the necessary support to the sector and address inequalities quickly and appropriately.”

A DfE spokesperson said the teaching workforce was “becoming more diverse” but accepted there was “further to go”.

“We have put in place inclusive recruitment campaigns, tax-free bursaries and scholarships to encourage talented trainees from all backgrounds to teach key subjects, and removed barriers to initial teacher training to encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds.”

EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Procurement, not pelotons, should be DfE focus

Ministers are wasting a lot of their capacity on getting more civil servants back in the office.

Ignoring our report on page 6, showing how badly even this is going, there are much more pressing priorities.

One could be to sort out its handling and oversight of awarding hefty contracts for important schemes.

While you might switch off at the first mention of procurement, a flurry of apparent failures in these are having serious consequences.

For instance, the flagship catch-up scheme is not reaching as many pupils as was promised, a new teacher training institute might not even be ready on time and the promised new curriculum body is already heading towards a legal showdown.

Rather than headline-grabbing action to keep civil servants off their supposed pelotons, ministers should care more about the boring, and less headline-grabbing, work.

A good place to start would be ensuring it can procure contracts properly.

ITT shake-up has gone pear-shaped

The government was always clear its initial teacher training reforms would slim down what it thought was an overcrowded market.

While intentions to weed out the not-up-to-scratch providers was sound, the implementation has been close to a demoralising disaster.

Just one in three providers being accredited after round one is incredibly low. But our findings this week that trainers given flying colours under the new, tougher Ofsted inspections were among the snubbed suggests bigger problems. If failures are more about paperwork and box-ticking than quality, then what is the point?

Ministers are clearly jittery. They've suggested the possibility of more accreditation rounds. But it leaves a mad and even more stressful rush for the majority of providers to find out if they can continue to operate in a few years' time.

Meanwhile, the government has hit its teacher recruitment targets just once in the last nine years. Ministers' attempts to shake up the teacher training market may still come back to bite.

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FIRST FOUR FESTIVAL KEYNOTES ANNOUNCED



**BLACK AND BRITISH: A
SHORT ESSENTIAL HISTORY**
Professor David Olusoga OBE
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
Coaching Group
Thursday 7th July | 15:15



KEYNOTE ADDRESS
OFSTED CHIEF INSPECTOR
Amanda Spielman
Chief Inspector, Ofsted
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Profile

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'If anything is going to give you pause to reflect, it's Afghanistan'

Jonathan Timmis, the new chief operating officer at Astrea Academy Trust, has worked from bombed-out buildings to the White House. Jess Staufenberg met the former military adviser to NATO to find out why he has switched to helping run an academy trust

People switching careers to teach offer lots of reasons for doing so - but this could be the first time someone has joined the profession in part because the Taliban undid everything they had worked for.

Brigadier Jonathan Timmis, a former senior Army officer, had been in Afghanistan for 13 months when he left last June as part of the evacuation of Western troops. By

August, achievements of the previous 20 years had collapsed and now, Afghan girls are largely barred from going to school.

"The whole thing imploded, and if anything is going to give you pause to reflect, it's probably that."

Timmis has been in post as chief operating officer at the Astrea Academy Trust for less than a month. His role oversees HR, IT, finance and other trust infrastructure duties.

He explains the move: "I feel I can serve my country, but in a different manner, and that's investing in what's utterly vital, which is education."

The switch also allows the 52-year-old more time with his wife in north Yorkshire, their two sons and daughter, after years based everywhere from Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Iraq and, of course, Kabul.

It must have been an extraordinary CV to

Profile: Jonathan Timmis



At the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1992

land on the desk of Rowena Hackwood, chief executive at Astrea. She says she was "at first surprised, and then quickly very impressed" and "eager to meet him".

But the rise to a top military role, including with NATO, was not written in Timmis' stars. From a non-military background, Timmis spent his childhood outdoors with three siblings and parents on a farm in Shropshire. He attended Lilleshall county primary school, Haberdashers' Adams grammar school and the private Malvern College. Aged 18, he headed to Australia to surf and travel.

During this time he met his wife, whose father was in the army and who suggested he join too. Somewhat unsure, Timmis got a place at Sandhurst.

"From surfing to Sandhurst... it was a shock," he smiles, in what seems the understatement of the century. In week one, he approached his platoon commander to say he was having doubts.

"He said to me, 'Don't worry, get through the first five weeks, and if you still feel the same you can leave.' And I stayed 30 years."

The extraordinary range and challenge of Timmis' work becomes clear as he describes, in modest terms, those three decades.

At Sandhurst, he endured forced marches with heavy weights on his back, jumping over assault courses and simulated combat situations designed to test decision-making abilities. There was also "lots of marching around, which I never particularly enjoyed",



Timmis in Afghanistan in 2021

"From surfing to Sandhurst... it was a shock"

as well as lessons in history, international affairs and politics.

Next came a jungle warfare instructors' course on the island of Brunei in south-east Asia, learning how to catch food, drink from vines, make a fire, find shelter and navigate in a jungle. "Which is a complete nightmare, I hasten to add," he nods, eyes twinkling.

His first leadership role aged 23 was as troop commander in charge of 30 people. They went to Papua New Guinea, to retrace the footsteps of Australian troops during the second world war, along the Kokoda Track. It's an "incredibly hard trek, even with 21st-century equipment", says Timmis. "The respect I have for these old warriors is incredible."

His first taste of the brutality of war came in the 1990s. His troops were deployed outside Sarajevo with the UN – acting as peacekeepers in the horrendous Bosnian war.

That leadership experience is one of the qualities he hopes to bring to Astrea. "When

your team are frightened, or tired, you have to lead by example, and take people with you. Ultimately, in a position of leadership, you are responsible for everything."

This approach was tested to its utmost during Timmis' second tour in Iraq. One of his officers was "injured in a terrible accident – someone had accidentally shot someone else while cleaning weapons. Luckily he survived."

Timmis was hauled up in front of his seniors, despite not being present at the scene. He told the officer: "Fundamentally, I'm in charge, so I'm responsible."

The superior officer smiled, and allowed Timmis to stay in post. He found out later that a similar incident elsewhere had resulted in the Army leader being dismissed – because he blamed the officer, rather than take the blame himself.

Timmis soon climbed the ranks, eventually overseeing 50,000 troops and the related HR, logistics, engineering and finance. Although Astrea will be a much smaller operation, with

Profile: Jonathan Timmis



Timmis on his work commute

2,000 staff across 26 schools, Timmis said his "own experience maps well" on to the job description for the role.

His strategy skills were especially honed in a very senior role: as military assistant to the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO for Europe, from 2009 to 2011 (he worked for NATO again from 2018 to 2020). He advised James Stavridis, a now retired US Navy admiral who almost became Hilary Clinton's presidential running mate. Timmis travelled to the White House, Number 10, and political summits across the world.

"When you see all the prime ministers or presidents of a country surrounded by their huge entourages, it was just remarkable to see so much influence in one room," he says thoughtfully.

He especially remembers one journey: they were flying over the English Channel in a black ops helicopter during bad weather conditions for a meeting in Number 10, when the helicopter blades started to freeze up.

"We thought we might have to land in the channel. Thankfully, we didn't!" (Honestly, if you had to be in a helicopter and the blades were jamming, it would be with this man. He is calm without being cold.)

There is also the difficult question of how people in the forces come to terms with being expected to shoot somebody. Perhaps for some parents in schools, it is question they will wonder about.



As an adviser in Iraq in 2008

"If you push the body, you can push the mind"

"The level of training you get in the Army about the terms of the rules of engagement, weapons handling, understanding the situation, is absolutely superb," responds Timmis. "It's a last resort thing."

It also strikes me that, given the political state of the world, increased profile of NATO and polarising opinions on social media, the academy trust has someone with an unusual and extraordinary expertise about international affairs in their midst.

I ask Timmis whether political education should be taken much more seriously in the UK (as it is in countries with turbulent recent political histories, such as Germany)?

"It's a really fascinating point. Something I've learned over the years is it's about the importance of anthropology," replies Timmis. "It's the importance of trying to understand something from the other person's perspective."

"When you are trying to learn about politics and people, you need to invest in their culture, history, demography and geography. Otherwise there's a danger you can become institutionally arrogant."

It seems at odds with politicians' clamour for schools to focus on British history in the curriculum.

The other thing that emanates from Timmis is his character – careful, measured, unflappable, but evidently with strong values (he calls the Taliban's restrictions on women "like a nation committing self-harm").

His character is likely in part developed from being physically tested. "If you push the body, you can push the mind. That's one of my key tenets," nods Timmis. "When I've walked around a few schools here, I've been really impressed with the sports facilities, but it's something we can definitely do more of. That's something I would love to get involved in."

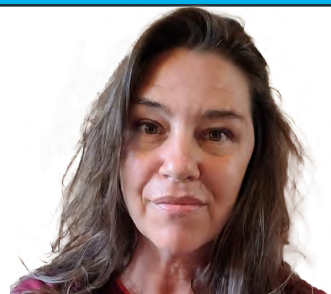
A major plus is that the people in teaching have blown him away. He admits he was worried he might be seen as "some institutionalised person". But he says the teachers couldn't be friendlier, and although he's not on any teacher training programme at present, he may consider it.

The government has long tried to get more service leavers into schools through 'Troops to Teachers' and 'Further Forces' programmes, assuming they will bring natural discipline with them.

But meeting Timmis, roles in operations and logistics seem a very good fit, too. And even more than that, it's perhaps his international knowledge, and his expertise in real physical training, that schools should really be mainstreaming.

Opinion

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TABITHA
MCINTOSH

Head of KS5 English,
Nower Hill High School

LGBTQ+: schools are a battleground against our rights

The international day against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia is a good time to acknowledge that all three are encroaching on our schools, writes Tabitha McIntosh

Seven years ago, the UK was rated the most LGBTQ+ friendly country in Europe. When the 2022 rankings were released this month, we had fallen to 14th place. In that same period, the number of recorded hate crimes against people based on sexual orientation or gender identity doubled in England and Wales. We simply cannot assume that our schools are safe from this rising swell of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia: it is coming to our classrooms, and it is coming for our staff and our students. It's already here.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the first London Pride in June this year, the government was due to host 'Safe To Be Me: A Global Equality Conference'. Instead, the event (meant to showcase and promote "positive international action on LGBT+ rights") was cancelled in March after a disgraceful week in which the government's pledge to ban conversion therapy was abandoned, only to be partially

reinstated a day later with transgender Britons excluded.

It turns out that it is not "safe to be me" after all. And every day it is getting less and less safe to be LGBTQ+. As Stonewall co-founder Lisa Power told the BBC, "Things were moving forward, but I'm afraid in the last few years they've gone backwards. [Phobia] is rising, I'm

afraid, and it's rising faster for LGBT people and particularly trans people."

Crucially for everyone in education, the classroom, the curriculum and the school library are the key sites in which anti-LGBTQ+ agendas are currently taking shape across the Atlantic world. In the United States, what began as an anti-transgender moral panic has expanded to include the rest of the LGBTQ+ rainbow.

In Florida, the so-called 'Don't Say Gay' bill makes it illegal for teachers to mention any sexual or gender identity other than cis heterosexuality. At least 15 other states have passed similar bills, including Ohio, Missouri, Tennessee, Louisiana and Alabama. In Kansas, teachers are forbidden from simply



putting up signs to say they are LGBTQ+ allies. And just last week a court in Texas ruled that the state could proceed in its plan to investigate parents and doctors who provide gender-affirming care for trans young people. If I lived in Corpus Christi instead of the Chilterns, my transgender teenager and any other children in my home would be taken into care while I was

teachers, has been targeted by pressure group, Transgender Trend for, in their words, teaching "queer theory and gender identity, based on an adult activist agenda".

Author Simon James Green had his World Book Day visit to John Fisher School cancelled in March after the Scottish group Catholic Truth launched a campaign to stop the school from hosting him, claiming students would be "misled into accepting as normal and good" homosexual "behaviour".

The group Men At Work C.I.C has started building a database of educators who support self-ID for trans people.

And the special adviser to the secretary of state for education is a man who left teaching in 2019 to set up the Campaign for Common Sense, an organisation that is relentless in its targeting of Stonewall, the transgender children's support group Mermaids, and any other form of gender-affirming care for young people in schools.

We're sleepwalking back into Section 28. Everyone who lived through it the first time round is warning you as loudly as we can, and too many of you are not listening. Today is the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia: it's time to start listening.

“Every day it is getting less and less safe to be LGBTQ+”

investigated for child abuse.

If you think it couldn't happen here, if you think that the bad old days of Section 28 and state-sanctioned discrimination are behind us, you are grotesquely mistaken. The current wave of transphobia, homophobia and biphobia is taking shape in one of the oldest and most vicious forms of anti-LGBTQ+ propaganda: accusations of sexual grooming.

Across the country, LGBTQ+ inclusive RSE (relationships and sex education) is increasingly under attack from organisations that portray it as a form of psychological child sexual manipulation.

Olly Pike, creator of Pop'n'Oilly, an LGBTQ+ educational resource for children, parents, carers and

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Heads' concerns about the NTP are legitimate, writes Ben Gadsby, but autonomy to spend on tutoring without accountability puts the whole reform at risk

As a big believer in tutoring, I'm sad that the troubles of the past year leave my titular question being asked. At Impetus, we believe that the national tutoring programme has the potential to be a game-changing, once-a-decade reform in terms of closing the attainment gap.

We worked with our sister charity EEF to put together a plan for what became the NTP. We partly funded an early pilot to test whether online tutoring was viable during school closures. And we supported EEF with the first year of delivery under the testing circumstances of the pandemic.

Clearly, over the past year or so things have not gone well for the NTP with less tutoring happening than hoped, and schools complaining of complexity. This has led to recent moves to end the contract with Randstad and to give schools a greater say regarding spending.

But the point of the NTP was never just to give money directly to schools; there are far easier ways to do that. It was never the point because it was never going to work. And that's because of a fundamental underlying problem with tutoring, particularly quality tutoring: it's simply not available everywhere that it's needed.

Tackling these cold spots wasn't the only thing NTP was originally designed for. Ministers set a sensible target for 65 per cent of the pupils who benefit from the NTP to be those who need it most – those eligible for pupil premium.

How do you combine a system where schools have more freedom over how to spend the money (which is what

BEN GADSBY

Head of policy and research, Impetus



Does the National Tutoring Programme still have a point?

they've asked for) with one that gives ministers the ability to actually drive an agenda forward? This is where accountability comes in.

Accountability is never popular, but it is necessary. To be fair, anything that is badly implemented is never popular,

isn't league tables; it's data-informed conversations.

So Nadhim Zahawi is right to want to see more data on what schools are doing with their NTP money. It's right that people ask questions about whether schools are making the right

“Accountability is never popular, but it is necessary

and too often, data is reduced to league tables and rankings devoid of nuance and story. But proper accountability

decisions for their pupils. And it's also right that the people asking the questions listen to the answers from



school leaders! Data means nothing without context.

There are things we need to know if NTP is to do the work it was set up to do. What percentage of the million or so pupils reached by NTP this year are eligible for pupil premium? Which types of school have been struggling to access the current NTP offer? How much money is being spent through the “schools-led” route on tuition agencies that didn't meet the quality threshold to become official tuition partners?

This is a specific case of a bigger general issue. The government is ultimately accountable to the public for education and wants to make stuff happen, not just on NTP. But schools want freedom to not do that stuff. This tension underpins a lot of schools' frustration with NTP, such as the desire to have more flexibility about group sizes.

And these debates end up distracting us from a simple truth: tutoring is one of the best-evidenced education interventions around. If it was more widely available, more schools would use it and NTP has the potential to be a reform of generational importance for closing the attainment gap.

Ultimately, for NTP to meet this lofty ambition it needs to win back the hearts and minds of the profession. This is the central challenge for the DfE and whoever is selected to replace Randstad delivering the three NTP contracts.

This effort must start with a determination to resolve schools' legitimate concerns so that NTP can deliver as efficiently as possible for them and their pupils.

But this can't be at the expense of founding principles like pupil premium requirements. Otherwise, what is the point of the NTP at all?

Opinion

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CHRIS HAMPSHIRE

Chair of trustees, Frank Field Education Trust

White paper: how autonomy could be a spanner in the works

Too few positive incentives exist to tempt headteachers to join MATs, writes Chris Hampshire, and headteachers' autonomy trumps them all

The schools white paper clearly sets out a policy direction that will see MAT growth stimulated through the integration of further local authority-maintained schools into MATs. The proposed legislation will allow regional schools commissioners (RSCs) to issue mandatory conversion notices to those schools with more than one successive 'Requires Improvement' judgment from Ofsted, but what positive incentives are there for all the other schools?

Regardless of any moral or legal obligations for a school joining a MAT, the number one reason should always be to provide an improved quality of education and improved pupil outcomes. Unfortunately, parochial factors are likely to come into play from the various school stakeholders, including headteachers, who may feel their autonomy and self-determination could be eroded within the structure of a MAT.

And they're right to some extent. It is the MAT governance hierarchy that determines the operating

framework with trust members at the top of the tree. Trustees follow, while schools report to them through their headteacher reports to the trust board. This reporting structure applies regardless of any devolved authority to individual schools or headteacher under schemes of delegation. Ultimately, it is the board who are responsible for the MAT

and the impact that might have on their level of autonomy. But on the positive side of the equation, MATs offer a level of support that standalone schools often don't have access to. This includes the provision of a range of central services that are more cost-effective because they spread fixed costs across a number of schools.

Realistically, saving a few thousand pounds is hardly likely to be sufficient to attract a headteacher or board of governors to join a MAT. Additional positive aspects could, though. For example, a MAT can provide a school with a range of improvement services covering school curriculum, improved behaviour and attendance policies and, crucially, the backing of a large (and more remote) leadership team. But headteachers of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools are much less likely to need these services, and

joining a MAT of their own volition without an incentive. So what incentives are left that could drive the delivery of this policy?

One option is career progression. Where a MAT CEO is retiring, a headteacher might be tempted to join on the basis that the role will be available to them. Similarly, there is scope to create trust-level positions that would represent a promotion for a headteacher who otherwise has already reached the top of the ladder in their context. But should the future of a whole community's asset really be decided by the career ambitions of one person, even if that person has delivered an 'Outstanding' school for that community?

In the end, successful integration of a maintained school into a MAT is more likely to occur when there is a clear alignment of the mission, vision, ethos and values between school and MAT. The meanings of these words may be vague and subject to individual interpretation, and determining what they look like in practice is no easy task; but coming to that understanding is the best shot a school and MAT have at a smooth transition. It is vital for all parties to get under the skin of each other's organisations.

Having said that, schools and MATs are unlikely even to begin that process if other incentives are not there – or rely heavily on the advances of MATs to even open a discussion.

For these reasons, the ambitions of the schools white paper will remain a distant destination unless incentives are re-thought. Headteachers value what autonomy they have, and as long as joining a MAT is seen as a loss of that, the climate will remain hostile – no matter the other tangible benefits on offer.

“Unfortunately, parochial factors are likely to come into play

as company directors and charity trustees.

As a result of this MAT governance framework, it is no surprise that headteachers may have a number of concerns about joining a trust

if they do, it is unlikely to be at the perceived expense of losing their decision-making powers.

Furthermore, the disparate stakeholder positions in schools and MATs don't really support a school



Opinion

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David Hourston explores how multi-academy-trusts and their schools could help their cash reserves work harder amid soaring inflation

At first, most commentators were expecting short-term only transitory inflation in response to short-term drivers. But supply chain issues and the appalling events in Ukraine have seen the price of oil rise spectacularly and threaten the country's grain and wheat exports, which make up ten per cent of the global total. The result is UK headline inflation now running at around seven per cent and expected to continue to rise further before easing at the earliest in late 2023.

Cash reserves

The bad news is that boards are unlikely to get a huge amount of help from the Bank of England. Higher interest rates are usually used to combat higher inflation but can also slow economic growth. With the pandemic recovery still fragile, central banks are walking a tightrope. Expectations are for the bank to raise rates again this year from 0.5 per cent to around 1.75 per cent – higher than we've seen for some time but still well below the expected rate of inflation. Any cash sitting on deposit is likely to lose value in real terms this year and next.

There is no 'correct' level of cash for trusts to hold on deposit. Some reserves are needed to cover operating costs and planned capital expenditure, with perhaps a little extra for unforeseen costs. However, if any part of the overall reserve is not needed for a specific purpose in the near term, it is certainly worth considering whether the funds could work a bit harder to offset inflation.



DAVID HOURSTON

Divisional director, Brewin
Dolphin charity team

Could your cash reserves be doing more as inflation takes hold?

Can the reserves work harder?

Considering a move that would see cash reserves reduced in favour of other investments should not be taken lightly. Placing capital at risk in the short term can lead to better returns in the long term, but the assets can also be subject to fluctuations in

Investing does not mean that all of the assets are going to be exposed to the vagaries of stock market volatility. While some involvement might be appropriate as part of the overall structure of the portfolio, there are other asset classes that can offer protection against inflation, such as

“Inflation is back with a vengeance

value along the way, which may not be suitable for all trusts. However, for those who can take a longer-term view with a proportion of their reserves, it could generate a better return than cash.

inflation-linked bonds, infrastructure, commodities and renewable energy. Selectively, company shares can also be appropriate, but investors should assess whether companies have 'pricing power' – the ability to put



their prices up at least in line with inflation – because ultimately their profits should follow.

A thoughtfully constructed combination of these assets can provide well-diversified exposure to a number of underlying investments, which help to provide some protection against inflation.

Careful review of risk

Before proceeding with an investment, there should be a thorough review of the overall level of risk the board is prepared to accept. As every good investment manager will tell you, the value of investments can go down as well as up, and it is important to understand what impact this may have on the overall financial position of the trust.

But the fact is that inflation is back with a vengeance, and it looks like it will be with us for some time. The sooner boards consider its implications and what they might be able to do to offset its effects, the better positioned they will be to deal with it.

In an environment where it is crucial to make the most of reserves, it is nothing more than due diligence to explore opportunities for investment, even if the ultimate decision is not to pursue it.

[DISCLAIMER] The value of investments and any income from them can fall, and you may get back less than you invested. Information is provided only as an example and is not a recommendation to pursue a particular strategy. Information contained in this document is believed to be reliable and accurate, and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily the views held throughout Brewin Dolphin Ltd.

Opinion

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ANNE
KISPAL

Research director, NFER

How to select texts for comprehension activities

The NFER's work on reading comprehension can help teachers make the most of the enjoyable task of choosing texts for their pupils, writes Anne Kispal

Choosing the right text for assessing comprehension is not an easy, five-minute job. However, for many of us - whether we are teachers or assessment specialists - it is one of the more pleasant tasks.

Browsing children's books, dipping in and out of old favourites, chancing upon moving, funny and exciting extracts, all offer a chance to get to know the vibrant world of children's literature. Our reading assessment team has been doing this job for over half a century and we have learnt a few lessons along the way.

The intended purpose is critical in selecting a suitable text. Is the text to be used as the basis of a collective classroom activity, or for solo test practice under exam conditions?

You have so much more freedom, if you are selecting a text to be introduced and mediated by you, if you are going to guide the discussion and adapt your questions, responding to issues arising on the spot.

Your text can be long (to be read

in chunks over several days) or short to focus on just one aspect of comprehension. For traditional paper and pencil comprehension practice, length is a mundane but major consideration. An average year 6 comprehension text is 600-800 words in length; at year 2 it is

“The unachievable principle is to create a level playing field

under 500 words. Though limited in length, a story extract chosen for test practice must still include the necessary ingredients: sufficient context to make the setting and the characters easily recognisable, an interesting scenario and some sense of an ending. One thing we have learnt is that abrupt cliff-hanger conclusions are not universally satisfying for children.

We must also beware of too many characters. In a short extract, it is hard to keep track of more than four characters - but, actually, two easily distinguishable individuals is perfect for the needs of a paper and pencil comprehension text.

Like story extracts, non-fiction texts used for test practice need an introduction and conclusion, but must also do justice to the chosen



topic so that readers feel that they have genuinely learnt something new and worthwhile from the text that has been put before them.

revolve around subject matter with which all children are familiar or none are. Ideal comprehension texts are 'free-standing'. They do not depend on background knowledge. We do not want a text that unfairly advantages some children through the confidence boost of pre-existing knowledge about the subject (e.g. dinosaurs, hip-hop, Harry Potter). We do not want a text that appears to favour one gender (e.g. dinosaurs, ponies, football). What we are primarily looking for is a text oozing with child-appeal and questioning opportunities.

The ideal text offers an engaging and valuable reading experience. Combined with this, it also possesses additional intrinsic merit that will generate a broad spectrum of questions - whether this stems from inspirational language use, from the meaningful message conveyed, from the heart-warming or hilarious or gut-wrenching episode depicted, or from the fascination of the information presented.

What we want to avoid - at all costs - is a text that leaves readers wondering, "What was the point of reading that?"

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



The Early Career Framework: Origins, Outcomes and Opportunities

Editor: Tanya Ovenden-Hope

Publisher: John Catt Educational

Reviewer: Sean Harris, trust improvement lead, Tees Valley Education Trust

Unless you have been living out the pandemic in an underground bunker, you will have heard of the early career framework (ECF). In response to recruitment and retention problems across the sector, the ECF is a mandatory professional development framework for early-career teachers (ECTs).

Editor Tanya Ovenden-Hope introduces the book as a collection of insights from those closely connected to the ECF. What follows are 17 chapters' worth of reflections from those who have played active roles in its design and implementation. These range from academics to school leaders, and include training providers selected by the DfE to deliver the ECF.

The first sections examine the ECF's origins, and this extends to inviting comment from the lead providers on their vision for it. But while Ovenden-Hope makes a good case that it felt important to give them an opportunity to explain their rationale, this decision leads to crowded literature on why different training providers think aspects of their programme work best. Despite my direct involvement in the delivery of the ECF and a confident understanding of it, I felt overwhelmed by the volume of information. So for novices attempting to make sense of the ECF, that's bound to be even more challenging.

The book's later chapters revolve around an analysis of the framework's implementation from the perspective of leaders involved in the day-to-day of

the ECF in schools. Fresh perspectives from academics are provided that shed light on sustaining learning too, and it is when offering such nuances and reflections that Ovenden-Hope's book becomes more than a read *about* CPD.

These pages offer road-tested insights into what effective CPD looks like, from school leaders who convey strongly that teacher induction is not a framework to be worked through but a grounding for a career-long commitment to ongoing learning. Among these chapters, there are a range of reflection points that serve as actionable and digestible pit-stops to consider the 'so what?' in relation to their practice, and these make for excellent CPD in themselves.

One noteworthy offering is provided by Rachel Lofthouse and Marc Turu Porcel of Leeds Beckett University. Both contributors explore the value of coaching and mentoring in relation to ECTs and, as teacher educators and researchers, compellingly caution against a technicist 'know that' and 'know how' structure to coaching and learning. I felt particularly challenged by this chapter to consider how I might better use coaching and mentoring to provide a more robust diet of challenge, critical thinking and discourse to my interactions with mentors and ECTs. If there is, "the potential to create sustained and reciprocal professional learning opportunities" that is as rooted in empathy as it is in evidence, I want to be a part of that!

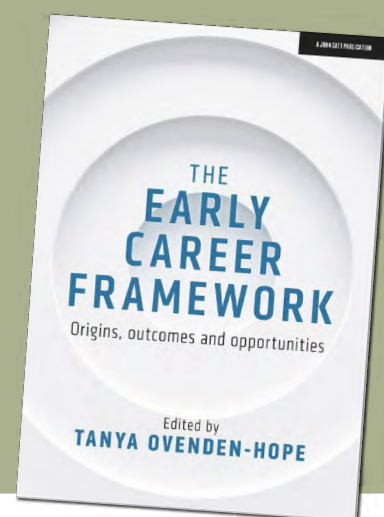
I'm someone directly involved in the daily development of ECTs, and Ovenden-Hope's book has provided me with greater

cohesive clarity on why we need the ECF, but also why we need to continue to learn from its early inception.

However, my frustration with it is that it isn't clear who its target audience is. There are some excellent and actionable case studies and reflections for system leaders, mentors, CPD leaders and even early-career colleagues, so it fulfils its purpose as a handbook of best practice and reflections. However, too much of its impact is lost amid the noise of a crowded marketplace of many voices that want to be associated with the ECF.

In spite of that, Ovenden-Hope reminds us that the development of effective teachers, especially early-career teachers, is not simple. That it is complex and demands our attention. And that it is about much more than just resolving a recruitment and retention crisis in the profession; it's about enabling colleagues to be highly effective so that children can be better served.

And those messages alone mean it deserves a read.



Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is MaryHind-Portley, assistant subject leader (English), Hillside High School, Bootle

@Lit_liverbird

Building on what they know @overpractised

Sarah Cottingham's blog has been popping up on my timeline for a while now, and well it should. She provides succinct but never simplistic summaries of key research ideas in neuroscience and how they apply to classroom learning, going beneath the surface of many usual approaches (e.g. retrieval starters, quizzing, etc) to explore how memory works.

Not for the first time with Cottingham, this post is already instrumental in our department's work of looking at how our pupils learn and what barriers they face in improving their progress. Tackling 'reconsolidation', she argues that simply reactivating memories through classroom activities won't of itself strengthen those memories, and her neat solution is to focus on mismatch.

"If incoming information mismatches a prediction," she explains, "we experience a prediction error." In response, our brains reconsolidate and strengthen our memory to improve our capacity to predict. Cottingham goes on to explain the process step by step so that we can apply it in first teaching as well as corrective feedback.

Consider my knowledge of memory and retrieval reconsolidated!

TOP BLOGS of the week

Making the juice worth the squeeze: the anatomy of lethal mutations @MrARobbins

How many times have teachers been guided or directed to adopt practices, only to find that these ideas have mutated from their original inception. Robbins's key questions in this fascinating post are "how do we keep ending up here?" and "how can we stop it?"

Providing a clear diagram of how ideas slip from their original iterations ("a gradual frame shift of community understanding"), the article had me reliving my own experiences of being introduced to approaches that were barely recognisable from their original uses by experts. Such experiences not only lead us to question the ineffectiveness of specific CPD activities, but undermine faith in CPD itself.

Time is the most precious (and expensive) resource we have in teaching, and we should not spend it on mutated approaches that won't deliver what they promise. We need to create the conditions that secure against lethal mutations, and this post is an important primer for doing exactly that.

There must be a better word - refining words @Xris32

If, as an English teacher, you haven't read Curtis's blogs then you are missing out! Having said that, his most recent post

focusing on how students write in exams and how we can help them to be more considered and skilful in their writing choices is relevant well beyond the confines of the English classroom.

Here, Curtis focuses on choice of words and whether students are sufficiently discriminating, and makes a compelling case that "refining [word choice] makes students explore and develop an idea". He provides several examples and structures that relate to a specific exam question, but the central premise is valuable for any English exam and teachers whose subject demands extended and nuanced responses.

Change vs. Stasis: the tension at the heart of teacher development @Josh_CPD

Teacher development is a subtle and challenging process that leaders manage alongside their core job of developing pupils. But how do we disrupt established but ineffective practices without upsetting the delicate balance of departmental harmony? This post by Josh Goodrich has been shifting my thinking about how I approach this key responsibility.

Goodrich acknowledges the importance of stability and being able to draw on our automaticity in the challenging environment of the classroom. In that sense, stasis is a key part of our development as it allows us the space to think and focus on the variables, but it can become a barrier to improvement. The genius of Goodrich's post is that he outlines how teacher educators can use stasis to support growth in a manageable way.

The latter, detailed section of the post shows how we can help move teachers from stasis, through managed disruption and back to balance and a new stasis. It's a longer blog than most, but worth setting time aside to read and discuss with a colleague; a moment of stasis over a cup of tea will help you to brew up new approaches to teacher development.

Research



Our guest research contributor is ImpactEd's Rachel Crowdy.
If you would like to discuss this research, contact @ImpactEd_tweets

Research: why, how and with whom do children read?

Rachel Crowdy, school partnerships manager, ImpactEd

Our series of reports under the 'Impact in Practice' banner are designed to help schools learn about what is working in other schools, particularly as they navigate the challenges of pandemic recovery. The first of these focused on the link between disadvantage, learning and wellbeing, and our latest, 'Reading Well', explores the link between reading and wellbeing. It focuses on understanding when, how and why children read and what schools and parents can do to promote reading in support of wellbeing and learning.

By partnering with the National Literacy Trust, Place2Be and Innovations for Learning UK, the Reading Well project was able to gather data from over 80,000 pupils across England. And the results highlight some striking trends, particularly in relation to gender differences.

Those pupils with the greatest confidence in their reading abilities tended to be the ones who reported better wellbeing and less anxiety. Pupils who scored a 5 in confidence in reading (the highest level) had wellbeing levels that were 31.8 percentage points higher, and anxiety levels that were 20.8 percentage points lower than pupils who scored a 1.

The relationship between reading ability, reading confidence and wellbeing is complex, but it was evident from the survey results that gender was a strong predictor of levels of wellbeing and anxiety. Our earlier research, 'Lockdown Lessons', found that female pupils experience wellbeing levels 7.5 percentage points lower, and anxiety levels 9.3 percentage points higher, than their male peers. And while this data was gathered during the peak of the pandemic in 2020, that trend remains relatively similar now.

Reading Well casts more light on



this issue. Female and male pupils have approximately similar assessments of their own reading ability. But female pupils are less confident when reading out loud and are more concerned about what other pupils think of their reading.

Pupils' motivations for reading also had a gendered dimension. Almost half of female pupils said they read because it gives them a break, while just over a quarter of boys said the same. More girls recognised the benefits of reading for their mental wellbeing and almost half of girls surveyed agreed that reading makes them feel better, compared with a third of boys.

We've suggested that schools may want to communicate the wellbeing benefits of reading to parents and carers to further strengthen the case for reading at home. This is particularly important for girls, who seem to place greater emphasis on the wellbeing benefits of reading relative to boys.

When working with parents, however, it's important to note that gendered attitudes to reading don't start and end in the classroom.

When we looked into when and where pupils read and with whom, we found that adult engagement in reading can benefit pupils of all ages,

even older pupils. Those most likely to be independent readers in key stages 4 and 5 still expressed a desire for the opportunity to discuss their reading with an adult and to share recommendations for further reading with a parent or carer.

That's encouraging, but where pupils do read with someone at home – which is the case for 77 per cent of key stage 2 pupils and around half of key stage 3 pupils – it is twice as likely they read with their mother than with their father.

That begs important questions around how the load of parenting is split and how this influences children's attitudes to the activity of reading. Unpicking that is also complex and multi-faceted, but our recommendation is simple: schools can signpost all parents to ways they can hold positive reading conversations with their children, noting that reading is a joint effort, not just something for schools.

We all know that reading brings academic benefits, and our research suggests there is a further important wellbeing benefit too – which appears particularly important for girls.

Our report is designed to help schools embed and encourage reading in the most impactful ways possible, and we hope these research findings offer some food for thought for how this might be achieved.



Week in

Westminster

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

SATURDAY

"We see knowledge as being central in terms of our lessons."

No prizes for guessing those were the words of Britain's so-called strictest head, describing Michaela's philosophy in 2020.

Knowledge might be king in the classroom for Katharine Birbalsingh, but she didn't say it mattered in the rest of the school...

Trumpeting a new documentary about Michaela, Miss Snuffy tweeted a photo of herself alongside an inspirational Winston Churchill quotation on a Michaela wall.

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it's the courage to continue that counts," it reads.

Slight hitch. Churchill never said it. This is according to the International Churchill Society, based on "careful research in the canon of 50 million words by and about Churchill".

As Otto English, the eagle-eyed writer who pointed it out, told Birbalsingh: "Suggest you get some paint."

MONDAY

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi had the "great honour" (his words) of opening parliament's "humble address" to the Queen following the state opening last week.

One would have hoped for an interesting, informative speech setting out the government's grand vision for a country that is the "best place to grow up and grow old".

But what followed was simply a greatest hits, although we should probably think twice before actually using the word "greatest".

Zahawi reeled off the same old spiel about education recovery, creating a stronger school system and the need to tackle

disadvantage. All important issues, but without any real ambition to match.

The schools white paper and SEND green paper are now almost two months old. The fact the government doesn't appear to have moved beyond the basic talking points doesn't bode well for the reforms they hope to deliver.

Zahawi is obsessed with talking about delivery, and to some extent we can understand why. During his tenure as vaccines minister, the NHS undoubtedly pulled an absolute blinder.

But the ed sec isn't new to the job any more, and school leaders are waiting to see the same zeal with which he handled the vaccine rollout applied to education reforms.

TUESDAY

Children's minister Will Quince was given a characteristically warm welcome to Mumsnet virtual towers to answer questions on the SEND review.

For instance, @duvetdayforeveryone said: "To be honest, I couldn't be bothered to ask a question as I know society doesn't care about people with special needs, but then I saw a £200 voucher was up for grabs

and I desperately need a new washing machine."

Quince tried to quell this person's concerns, assuring them he does care and wished them "good luck with the £200 and the washing machine!"

Also, it's not every day you see a minister saying "hi and thank you for your question @BigLlamaLady" and "thank you to @Ilikecheeseontoast".

But fair play to the minister for bothering to answer questions in the first place. At least there were **some** answers!

The bi-monthly attendance update showed the number of staff off was still above five per cent – with pupil attendance falling from 92.3 per cent to 91.9 per cent last week.

While the regular publication has lost much of its relevance after Covid stats were omitted, it's a helpful reminder that things are **still** not back to normal for schools.

THURSDAY

A former government minister rather put his foot in it this week when he suggested top academy trusts wouldn't take on schools in "left behind" areas because of the risks – seemingly forgetting that many...already have.

Lord Jim O'Neill, vice-chair of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, claimed at an Education Policy Institute event in parliament that "some of the best MATs would not dream of going anywhere in the north, because it's too hot".

We know a few trust bosses working in the north who would take exception to that...



Department for Education



St Laurence School
Care • Inspire • Succeed

Head of Computing

Permanent, 0.8-1.0 FTE | MPS/UPS + TLR2b (£4,704)
Weff 1st September 2022 | Closes: 9am Monday 23rd May 2022

We are seeking a suitably qualified teacher to continue the development of Computing in an exciting period of curriculum development.

This is a new department (having recently been held within the Maths Department) and one where an ambitious and driven leader could make their mark. We have decided to establish Computing as its own department to support the next steps in its growth which will be guided and informed by the new head of department. You would be joining an enthusiastic and mutually supportive team with a healthy mix of experience and backgrounds. St Laurence is a school where induction arrangements are well established.

The Computing team comprises 1 full-time and two part-time specialist teachers with responsibility currently for teaching Years 7 to 11 including GCSE Computing.

St Laurence is a high performing and successful Church of England

co-educational secondary school situated in Bradford on Avon close to the heritage city of Bath. We are fully inclusive and comprehensive, welcoming students and staff of all faiths and none. We believe that 'People are our Treasure' and regard our staff as our most important resource.

Since our core business is learning, we are committed to the professional development of each of our staff, whatever their role in the school. If you would like to join a committed, professional and passionate team in our journey to being a school which is outstanding in every way, please consider applying.

To apply, please refer to the Letter to Candidates, complete an application form and send it with a covering letter to Mr Tim Farrer, Headteacher to jobapp@st-laurence.com

For further information please refer to the Job Description, Person Specification and Recruitment Pack.



HEADTEACHER

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L23 - L29 (£72,497 - £83,971)

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The Governors at Westminster Primary School wish to appoint an inspirational Headteacher for this rewarding leadership role. The school is seeking a strong leader and team player who will build on existing strengths to ensure the school achieves its ambitions for excellence and success at every level.

Visits to the school are welcomed and encouraged but are by appointment only.

For the full information pack and application form please visit **Vacancies - Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust** (bdat-academies.org)

Closing date: Monday 13th June 2022 at 9am
Interview: Day 1 Monday 20th June 2022
Interview: Day 2 Tuesday 21st June 2022



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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



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(£90,379.00 to £104,687.00)

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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:

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- 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.