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#### Correction:

Last week's page 11 story, headlined 'AQA shunts blame to schools for wrong advance information' incorrectly stated the advance information was wrong. We amended the headline to read: 'AQA says biology advance info accurate after complaint'.

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# DfE reveals the first step of academy reforms

Ministers have set out the first steps of the route towards having all schools in a “strong” trust by 2030. Here is what you need to know about the introduction of academy reforms next year ...

## 1. ‘Area commissioning’ and council MAT pilot

From September, the government will adopt an “area-based approach to commissioning trusts” in its 55 education investment areas (EIAs). It will work with trusts, councils, dioceses and other groups to encourage more academies.

New intervention powers for schools rated less than “good” in their past two inspections will also be targeted at these 55 areas, pending the outcome of a consultation and parliamentary vote.

Its other priority for 2022-23 will be “test and learn projects”, including a “small number” of local authority MATs “where they are needed”, or projects to respond to “local demand” or progress “at scale”.

## 2. ‘Strategic delivery plans’ for every EIA

“Initial regional planning conversations” in those EIAs will also take place in the summer term of this year.

A strategic delivery plan for each area will then be published in the early autumn, setting out “key educational priorities” for MAT development.

Existing trusts, dioceses and other faith bodies and groups of schools will then submit responses to the priorities.

The DfE will “learn lessons about local capacity, strategic planning and working at pace”, which can then be applied across the country from September 2023.

The documents are confusingly called “prospectuses”, “local area plans” and “area-based plans” elsewhere in the guidance.

## 3. Engage early, double-RI schools told

The DfE is advising schools with successive Ofsted ratings of “requires improvement” or below – and which are in investment areas but not yet in MATs – to “engage early with regional teams in the department to discuss which trusts would be best to support the school”.

However, new regional directors will make the final decision.

The department said it would notify those schools eligible for intervention. It expects all bodies to work “alongside us to identify a solution that can support rapid improvement”.

## 4. Trusts without capacity told to merge

Ministers will focus on “strategic, not incremental, growth of strong trusts”, overseeing the movement of schools “in a way that is well planned and communicated”.

It will find trusts that can grow to support “vulnerable schools” beyond their own area and establish hubs in new regions. The DfE will also identify areas where new trusts are needed and where there are sufficient strong trusts locally.

However, trusts that do not have “capacity or space” for further growth are encouraged to “focus on existing practice or join another trust”.

## 5. Councils wanted for academies drive

In 2022-23, the DfE will also invite expressions of interest from councils and dioceses that want to “work with us to move at scale to a fully trust-led system and who have secured the in-principle agreement of schools” (full story on page 7).

LAs will also be able to include proposals for their own MATs in area-based plans where there is “insufficient capacity of established strong trusts”.

## 6. New ‘discretionary fund’ for LAs

A new “discretionary fund” will support councils “in meeting the costs associated with the conversion of maintained schools where the scale of that activity is exceptional”.

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

The trust capacity fund will also be changed to allow trusts to receive more than a single-year grant for the first time, in “recognition of the planning timeframe for larger projects”.

## 7. Tell us about ‘concerning’ trusts, councils told

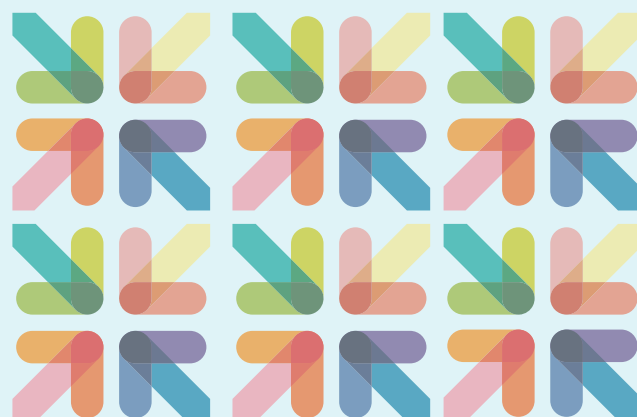
In its advice for local authorities and dioceses, the DfE said it would be asking local leaders to “engage with us” in considering the context of their area, where the trust strength lies and whether there are “trusts operating in your area that you have concerns about”.

The DfE added: “We expect the LA to play an active role in forming local plans, feeding in their knowledge and history of the area to create a future of strong families of schools.”

## 8. Trust ‘support’ projects

The DfE will also work with external providers to deliver “events, learning sets, peer review, knowledge sharing, trust-to-trust support and challenge” for academies.

A MAT leadership development programme will also launch in 2023-24, but initially only in priority education investment areas.





## WHITE PAPER

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# Ministers want veto on MAT trustees

TOM BELGER

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EXCLUSIVE

Academy trusts will have to seek government approval for trustee and member appointments, new documents on the schools bill reveal.

The government will also hand itself the power to chop and change new national standards for academies and rules on intervening in trusts – without passing new primary legislation.

The Department for Education published fresh details on how it will overhaul academy rules this week.

Trusts will need governance arrangements that “state no board members or trustees are appointed before the secretary of state has had an opportunity to assess their suitability”.

Sam Henson, policy director at the National Governance Association, said it “feels like a power grab”.

For appointments of chairs, trusts currently send proof to regulators of enhanced DBS checks, identity verification and extra checks on individuals who have lived abroad. Officials also confirm they are not banned from teaching or management.

But chairs themselves currently handle checks



on other trustees, members and local governors.

NGA’s “assumption and hope” is the proposed reforms only expand current rules for chairs and members to all trustees.

But Henson added: “Extending this seems like unnecessary bureaucracy at best... If it’s anything more, we could potentially have a real issue.”

Governors already report delays when DfE countersigns chair appointments, prompting fears it could exacerbate recruitment challenges.

“We’re not sure how the department has the capacity to do it for all,” Henson said.

The changes are among several in the schools bill sparking fears of ministerial overreach.

The draft schools bill, currently making its way through the House of Lords, is primary legislation.

But it will create “delegated powers” for the education secretary to make further changes through secondary legislation, which is easier to get through parliament.

These will include new changes to the academy

standards, replacing funding agreements which currently differ depending on when they were signed.

However, the government said the new standards mostly consolidate existing duties in one place. But there are some new duties.

Trusts face a new duty to work “constructively with each other, local authorities and the wider public and third sectors”. They will have to “behave with civic responsibility, working broadly to benefit children in their communities”.

Meanwhile, a “minor change” to complaints-handling processes allows government to “assess the reasonableness of complaint decisions made by academy trusts”. They can already do this for local authority schools.

Standards will also cover areas including curriculum, welfare, cultural development, school day and term length, assessment, whistleblowing, premises, leadership, admissions and spending.

The DfE has said that any update to standards will be subject to a debate and affirmatory vote in both houses of parliament every time they are updated.

It pledged to consult with sector representatives on the first set of standards and “any subsequent changes”.

EXCLUSIVE

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## Warning over finding thousands of trustees for new MATs

The government has been warned against complacency over multi-academy trust board recruitment, with the schools bill potentially requiring more than 10,000 new trustees.

National Governance Association figures suggest average boards have at least 11 individuals. If all 11,682 non-academy schools joined new ten-school trusts, that would require 12,850 more trustees.

Lord Knight, a former Labour minister, warned about the potential demand in parliament this week.

“We have to work out whether a system in which you are dictated to on everything you have to do is the right environment for people to want to be trustees. I would question that,” he added.

Former national schools commissioner David Carter also warned of a leadership and governance “capacity issue” for an all-MAT system. “Some of the really poor practice I saw

in MATs was a product of bad governance.”

Steve Edmonds, NGA director of advice and guidance, said the association shared Knight’s concerns, and two-thirds of its members had already reported recruitment challenges.

“The system will become increasingly reliant on skilled individuals with the time and capacity to give this level of support at the same time as being held to account in a rather acute, robust way.”

He said the need for new MAT trustees also “doesn’t seem to reconcile” with the potential abandonment of the academy ambassadors scheme.

The government is currently reviewing the trustee recruitment programme after other DfE funding cuts led current provider New Schools Network to close.

Edmonds added: “To assume they’d be prepared to do it without more support or



encouragement would be naive. There’s no question that governing a MAT is much more complex.”

Carter also warned that chairing large MATs takes “two or three days a week”, and floated the idea of payment for chairs.

But government officials said they expected actual numbers needed to be “lower than suggested”, with MAT boards typically smaller. Standalone trusts and maintained school boards would include skilled individuals who could fill trustee roles, they added.

## WHITE PAPER

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## 'Game-changing power grab': Former ministers sound alarm

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The schools bill is a "real grab for power" that will effectively make Nadhim Zahawi "the chief education officer" for thousands of schools, former ministers warned this week.

The draft law is currently making its way through the House of Lords. It seeks sweeping

new powers over schools, which mean the Department for Education could dictate the make-up of trust boards, the length of the school day and even staff pay.

During its second reading, former education secretaries and ministers expressed deep misgivings about the proposals. Labour and the Liberal Democrats revealed plans to amend the legislation to require consultation on the new

powers and greater transparency.

The bill passed at report stage and will be debated by a committee of the House of Lords, where amendments are likely to be tabled. It will next be discussed in June.

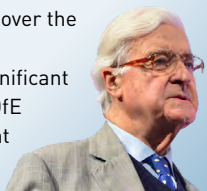
While the government usually accepts some amendments, and is likely to table some itself, it has a big majority in the House of Commons so can vote down changes.

## LORD BAKER

(EDUCATION SECRETARY, 1986 AND 1989)

"It's a real grab for power by the Department for Education. You must remember that the DfE since 1870 has never run a school. "It does not know how to appoint heads or how to determine any of the aspects of running a school because it has never had to do that, but now it is going to take complete control over the education system..."

This is really a game-changing bill of a very significant nature and I think it is totally unproved that the DfE actually knows very much about the improvement of schools."



## BARONESS MORRIS

(EDUCATION SECRETARY, 2001 TO 2002)

"This bill is dealing with the failures of past policies... It makes all academies maintained schools and gives them all the restrictions that apply to maintained schools but leaves them with the name 'academy'..."

"If you have no levers, you cannot implement change. However, I question why the government and the civil servants are best placed to lay down those standards."



## LORD KNIGHT

(SCHOOLS MINISTER, 2006 TO 2009)

"The government is trying to solve the right problem: academy agreements and the multitude of contracts between the secretary of state and the academies and how confusing that is... However, the solution is jaw-dropping – making the secretary of state effectively the chief education officer for 25,000 schools – and what is being proposed around standards, intervention and termination..."

"Do they really want to give future secretaries of state the power to do what on earth they like to schools in this country?"



## LORD NASH

(ACADEMIES MINISTER, 2013 TO 2017)

"The government needs powers to intervene in the event of [a] 'serious failure' of MATs, the bill purports to go far further than that."

"The academy and MATs sector is very concerned about the far-reaching, vague and potentially draconian provisions that the government appears to be seeking in the bill in relation to intervention powers..."

"This appears to be an attempt by the department to micromanage schools, which it is ill-equipped to do and which should be left to education professionals. It is an attempt to drive a coach and horses through academies' fundamental freedoms."



## Baroness Barran, current academies minister, responds ...

**On power grab concerns:** "The examples provided in the [academy] standards clauses reflect matters already covered in existing funding agreements, legislation and the academy trust handbook... The intention is to replicate this freedom in the standards regulations..."

"We are keen on consistency of ambition but very keen not to be prescriptive in how those results and outcomes are to be achieved."



**On eroding autonomy:** "These reforms will maintain the central freedoms and autonomy of the academy programme."

"Our 'strong trust' definition and standards will set out clearly what we expect all academy trusts to deliver, but trusts remain free to design, innovate and implement operating models that they believe will deliver the best outcomes for their pupils."

**On DfE capacity:** "It is precisely to ensure that we are properly equipped to oversee a system where all schools are in trusts that we are launching a formal regulatory review. That review will establish the appropriate model and options for how best to regulate the English schools system when all schools are part of a family of schools in strong trusts."

## WHITE PAPER

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# Council MAT trial: Caps on size and number

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The government is inviting local authorities across the country to bid to run multi-academy trusts, with a trial to “test the concept” over the next year before deciding on a wider rollout.

But new Department for Education documents say it will initially only support a “small number” of LA MATs in areas with few strong trusts. It is likely to reject some applications.

It will also initially cap their size at 10 schools or 7,500 pupils, and not “typically” let them sponsor underperforming schools, though they can still apply to sponsor.

## Council MAT trial: How it will work

Schools Week revealed plans for LA-run trusts earlier this year, and more recently that some councils were already consulting schools.

The DfE has now confirmed it will scrap the current 19.9 per cent cap on the number of “local authority associated persons” who can be trust members. Members are the founders of trusts, responsible for safeguarding governance and board appointments.

Trusts will be able to appoint an unlimited number of council employees, councillors or officials at council-run bodies as members, with only one independent member required.

However the same current cap on council involvement in trust boards will remain. This could significantly limit their right to get involved in day-to-day operations.

“This is to reinforce the separation between the role of the LA and academy trustees in the management of the MAT and to minimise conflicts of interest,” the DfE document stated.

## Trial with a ‘broad mix’ of councils

Councils have until 31 July to register their interest as part of a “competitive” process, with more applications expected than the “small number” that will be approved.

The “test and learn” trial will help the DfE to “review and refine” its approach before “any further decisions are taken on proceeding with the wider rollout”.

It will also help identify issues early that are “distinctive to LA-established MATs which require different handling”.

The DfE is looking for a “broad mix of high-



performing LAs, which together reflect the geographic diversity of the country and a mix of school types and phases”.

The DfE is especially keen to work in new education investment areas, as well as highlighting rural areas “where small primary schools could benefit from coming together”.

Schools with a religious character will be allowed to join where trustees and religious authorities agree, though the DfE’s “expectation” is that most will continue to join trusts led by dioceses or other religious authorities.

The trial will run over the next academic year “with a view to applying identified best practice nationwide” after a review on trust regulation and once the schools bill becomes law (expected from 2023-24).

## DfE to check on LA MAT ‘ethos’

Councils will have to set out why they want to form a MAT, its vision, ethos and school improvement strategy. They must reveal when they envisage launching it, school numbers, and the areas it will serve.

Proposed governance and leadership structures and financial arrangements, as well as who will be asked to be members and trustees “where known”, are also required.

They must set out how potential conflicts of interests will be managed, amid trust leaders’ concerns over councils being both “poacher and gamekeeper”.

Councils first need to consult schools on

whether “in principle” they would want to join the trust, work with them on applications and “take opinions” from parents and staff.

The DfE’s regional schools commissioners, currently being rebranded as regional directors, will assess whether applications meet the white paper’s definition of a strong trust.

They will also assess the need for new local capacity, expertise of proposed members and trustees, and LA “plans, capacity and capability” to support the MAT.

## Extra cash – but size capped

No timeline is given, but DfE said trials were a priority “through academic year 2022-23”.

Successful applicants will be able to register new MATs as companies and consider seeking trust capacity funding – as well as a new discretionary fund for LA conversions at an “exceptional” scale.

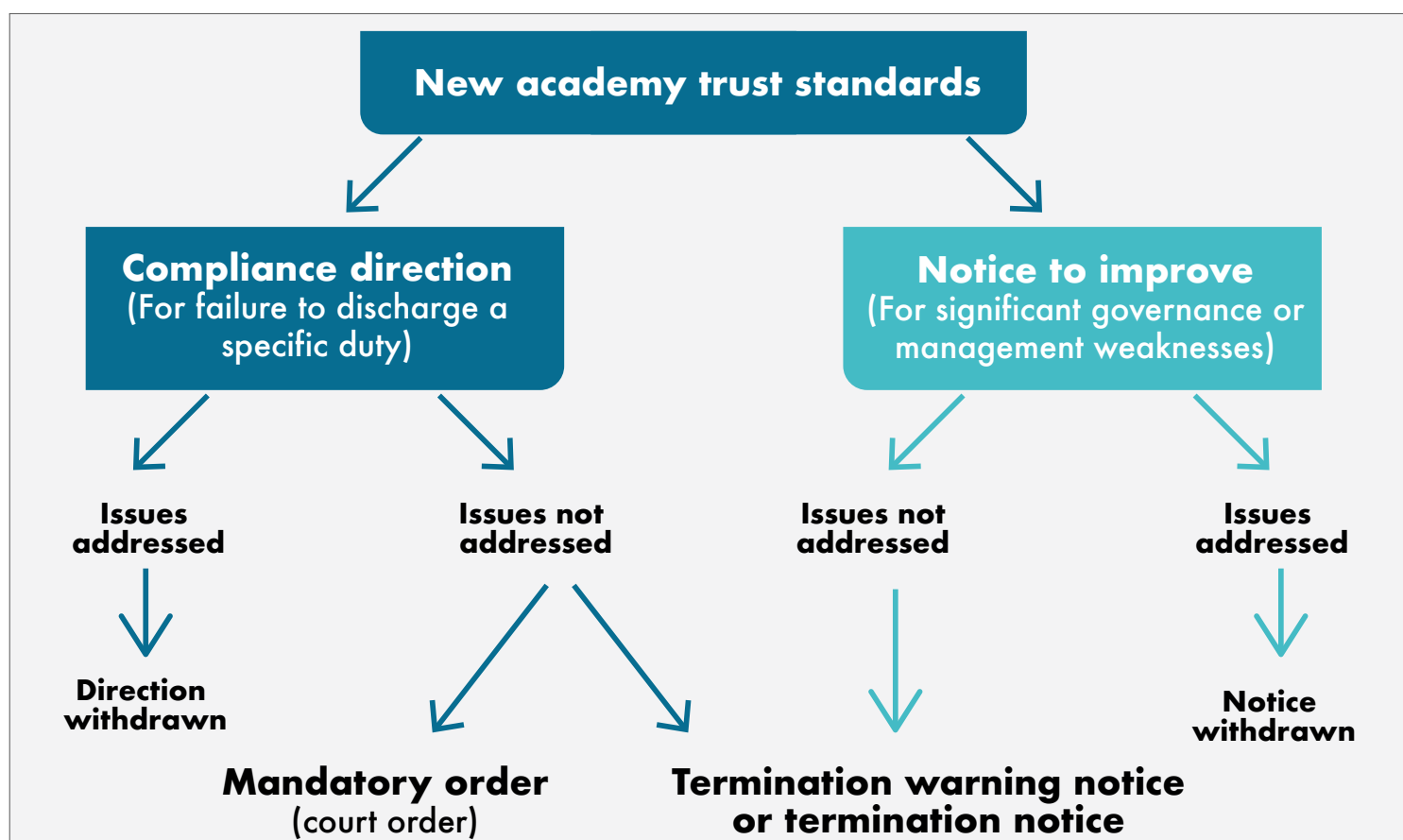
Schools will then apply to convert and join them in the usual way.

The DfE will “agree a bespoke package of support” for the new trusts, “especially around governance and finance”, and offer regional events, networks and peer reviews via a new “trust development fund”.

The government will talk to rejected applicants “about if, or how, proposals could be taken forward in future”.

A Local Government Association spokesperson said councils should be able to run trusts in all areas, with no cap on appointing trustees.

# New intervention powers: how they will work



## Academy standards

New standards for all academy trusts and intervention powers to uphold them are key planks of the government's school reforms.

The schools bill, which will make these powers a reality, is currently on its way through the House of Lords.

But the law, once passed, will grant the education secretary the power to set standards for schools through secondary legislation, making it easier to amend or introduce new standards.

Here's what we know about the new intervention powers...

## Compliance direction

Allows the government to order academy trusts to do things to meet particular legal duties, such as the new academy trust standards.

An example could be if a trust's attendance policies do not conform to the new duties introduced under the bill, or if an academy has been found to have reached an "irrational conclusion" in dealing with a parental complaint.

The government can also order a trust to stop

doing something that may be in breach of rules.

If the requirements of the direction are not met, the government would then consider issuing a termination warning notice or termination notice.

## Notice to improve

These notices will be issued when there are "significant weaknesses" in management or governance, or if legal obligations or funding agreements are breached.

Similar to current notices to improve, they will impose certain financial restrictions and require trusts to get certain transactions signed off by the government.

Again, failure to comply with such a notice may result in a termination warning notice or termination notice.

## Mandatory order

This is a court order that compels public authorities to fulfil their duties.

This is already a power across the whole public sector, but the schools bill specifically seeks to clarify that it will be used if compliance

directions are not met.

## Termination warning notice

These will be issued to trusts in relation to either individual academy agreements or master agreements, requiring specific actions or representations within a specified timeframe.

Such warnings already exist in the current system but are only issued in relation to individual academies, rather than whole trusts.

Warning notices don't need to be introduced before a termination notice but may be used when the government feels a school has the capacity to improve with its current sponsor.

## Termination notice

These are issued to trusts when the DfE has decided to terminate either an individual academy's funding agreement or the trust's master funding agreement.

They will sometimes be issued as a result of failures to meet compliance directions or notices to improve but can also be issued immediately if an academy is rated "inadequate".



## NEWS

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# New institute finally launches – but programmes delayed

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

The new trust-led National Institute of Teaching has vowed to analyse the link between teacher development and pupil outcomes to discover “what truly makes an impact”.

This week ministers finally revealed that the institute (NIoT) will be led by the School-Led Development Trust (SLDT), a coalition of four trusts. They are Star Academies, Harris Federation, Outwood Grange Academies Trust and Oasis Community Learning.

The government has been able to announce the winners after agreeing a pay-off to settle a contract dispute with rival bidders Ambition Institute.

However the protracted dispute means some of the programmes have been delayed. It will run training for the early career framework from September 2023, a year later than originally planned.

Supporting national professional qualifications will launch in February next year, six months later than planned.

Initial teacher training will start from September 2023 and national professional qualifications and national leaders of education training will start this September – both as planned.

The institute will also investigate how staff development impacts children's outcomes, something it claimed was currently only done in North America. It will make the research free to all teacher training providers.

Founding chief executive Melanie Renowden, currently executive director at Star, said the



school-led consortium was “perfectly equipped to translate evidence on best practice into action that can be implemented in schools up and down the country”.

Training will be delivered through four regional campuses, each supported by one of the trusts. Its headquarters will be in Blackburn, Lancashire.

Once degree awarding powers are granted, the SLDT said it will become the only UK university “solely focused” on the development of teachers and school leaders.

Twelve regional “associate colleges” (see box) will also be established to “deepen and extend” the NIoT's impact.

It also has 13 “specialist” partners – including Microsoft, ResearchEd and Teach First.

Sir Dan Moynihan, SLDT chair and Harris chief executive, said “assembling specialist expertise and collaborating with the sector will be key to the success”.

The “world-class teacher development that results” will “enable and inspire the nation's school workforce”.

The DfE said the NIoT would create more than half of its new jobs in the North West and North East. It would also recruit 20 per cent of staff from the least socially mobile areas in the country.

It “aims to positively impact every teacher in

England by 2028, either directly via its training courses or through the best practice guidance that it will distribute”.

But Geoff Barton, general secretary of school leaders' union ASCL, was “concerned about exactly how the institute will work alongside established teacher training providers where there are regional campuses competing for the same pool of graduate trainees.

“It is going to be important that the institute complements the existing system rather than leading to a muddle of teacher training routes,” he said.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi said the institute would “revolutionise” the way teachers and school leaders receive training.

## Associate colleges and delivery partners:

- Bright Futures Educational Trust
- David Ross Education Trust
- East Midlands Education Trust
- Education South West
- Flying High Trust (Inspiring Leaders)
- Future Academies
- Inspiration Trust
- North East Learning Trust
- Sea View Trust
- South Farnham Educational Trust
- Trinity MAT
- Unity Schools Partnership

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR\_93

## Staff at small schools given £200 incentive to start free NPQ

Staff at small schools are being offered a £200 grant if they take up the government's offer of a free national professional qualification.

The Department for Education committed £184 million last year to provide 150,000 NPQs over the next three years. The free courses are available to teachers and leaders in all schools.

Participation data for the NPQs released on Monday shows that, on April 20, a total of 29,153 NPQs had been started since autumn last year.

The government said it “expected that

the number of confirmed NPQ starts will increase later in the academic year”.

It has now set aside £22.6 million for the Targeted Support Fund to provide a £200 grant for each participating teacher or leader from schools with 600 or fewer pupils. This will ensure “that where a child lives has no bearing on the quality of teaching they receive”.

Under current guidance, teachers and leaders employed in state-funded schools and state-funded 16 to 18 organisations can access the NPQ training scholarships.

But, in another sign that the scheme may

not have been as popular as first thought, the free NPQs are also being made available to settings including young offender institutions, hospital schools and independent special schools.

Schools minister Robin Walker said the government wants to make sure that teachers are “supported to be the very best they can be, so that every single pupil – wherever they live – is taught by an excellent teacher”.

Two further NPQs will be available from autumn 2022, one for leading literacy and another for early years leadership.

## NEWS

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## Failure to focus on poorer pupils will widen gap, say NTP providers

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE

The National Tutoring Programme's failure to focus on poorer children will widen the attainment gap, the government's own tuition providers have warned.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi told the Sunday Express he was "determined" that tutoring "has to be available for everyone".

But seven providers under the NTP have written to him urging him to ensure the scheme's "core original focus" on disadvantaged children is not lost.

Schools Week revealed in March that providers no longer had to ensure their catch-up reaches at least two-thirds of poorer pupils.

The government said its overall pupil premium target remains in place, but tutoring organisations had "operational flexibility".

However it is unclear what will happen next year, leaving the six charities and one social enterprise tutors with "serious concerns".

If the scheme "does not reach those for whom it was originally intended, and if the interventions provided are not impactful, it could actually stand to widen the attainment gap, which would surely be a travesty", they wrote.

The signatories include Action Tutoring, Tutor Trust, TalentEd and CoachBright Charitable Trust. One of the NTP's founding charities Impetus also signed the letter along with the Fair Education Alliance.



The intervention comes as new figures show the two tutor routes run by Randstad have delivered just a third of their targets – with only four months until the end of the contract.

The HR firm will be stripped of its contract after slow take-up. Next year's contract is out for tender.

Just under 1.2 million tutor courses have been started since September. It means the government is still 40 per cent off its target of two million courses by the end of August.

It is now allowing tutoring over the summer in a bid to hit its target but would have to secure 47,215 starts a week to reach it. It currently provides an average of 34,209 starts a week.

The letter calls for a government campaign to "win the hearts and minds of the teaching profession back to tutoring" after the programme's brand was "damaged" by the "complexity" this year.

It also calls for "ambitious" pupil premium targets and for the DfE to "publicly track" the NTP's impact on the attainment gap to "build schools' confidence" in the programme.

Susannah Hardyman, Action Tutoring founder and CEO, said it would be a "devastating loss" not to make a "game-changing difference to the outcomes for pupils facing disadvantage".

The organisations say they support "well above" the original target of reaching 65 per cent of poorer pupils but claim that "high-quality" tuition is "unavailable in many parts of the country".

Although there is no recent specific data, latest up-take figures for tuition partners – where approved providers offer catch-up – give a picture.

As of May 8, just 6.5 per cent of schools in York used the pillar while take-up was just 7.1 per cent among schools in Gateshead. Overall, one third of schools are still to use the NTP this year.

Sutton Trust research from 2019 found that 51 per cent of 11 to 16-year-olds in London have used private tutors, compared with 25 per cent of young people in the north.

The organisations say they hope the DfE will "work with providers with demonstrated impact to expand into cold spots".

The new school-led tutoring pillar of the NTP, where money goes directly to schools, remains the most popular with 913,388 starts this year. This accounts for 76 per cent of tutoring courses this year.

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## More pupils eligible for 'recovery premium' funding

The government has expanded its "recovery premium" funding to cover all pupils in special schools and alternative provision, not just the most disadvantaged.

The Department for Education published per-pupil cash rates for 2022-23 yesterday for the fund, including doubling grants for deprived secondary pupils.

The pot is one of multiple "premium" and other one-off Covid-related grants in recent years.

Funding is allocated based on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals in the past six years, and the number of looked-after children.

But next year it will be widened to cover every pupil in special educational needs and disability units in mainstream schools, as well as special schools, pupil referral units,

alternative provision and hospital schools.

Funding rates show disadvantaged or looked-after children in mainstream secondaries will now receive £290 per head, up from £145 last year.

Secondary special schools and mainstream SEND units will receive £552 a head, compared with £290 last year for disadvantaged and looked-after pupils and nothing for the rest.

Schools minister Robin Walker said doubling the recovery premium for secondaries would help young people to "get back on track". The doubling was first announced last year.

But the overall funding floor of £2,000 per primary school and £6,000 per secondary has been frozen, despite soaring inflation.

Funding remains flat for eligible pupils

at mainstream primaries at £145 a head. It has been cut from £290 to £276 a head for special primaries and mainstream SEND units, although this is likely to be offset by the eligibility being widened to cover all pupils.

The DfE said the average secondary would receive more than £60,000 and the average primary almost £7,000.

Like the pupil premium, schools are also able to spend funding on a "wider cohort of pupils than those eligible", with freedom to direct spending "where they think the need is greatest" so long as it is "evidence-based".

But they are not allowed to spend it on covering National Tutoring Programme costs, whereas last year it was suggested that they did so.

NEWS

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# 'Rigorous checks' to ensure schools make time for training

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR\_93

Ministers are proposing a new crackdown to ensure that schools face "rigorous checks" on their legal duty to give new teachers and their mentors time to train.

Schools Week revealed new figures in April showing that nearly half of mentors said they were not given additional time off timetable to work with early career teachers (ECTs).

One in five leaders confirmed they were not allocating extra time for the role, despite getting funding to do so.

The Department for Education is now consulting on proposals to tighten up the checks on schools by reforming the appropriate body (AB) system.

ABs are responsible for making sure that ECTs and mentors receive their statutory entitlements, such as time to train and regulator mentoring.

Under the proposals, councils would no longer act as an AB from September next year. This fits with the DfE's white paper vision for local authorities to step back from "directly maintaining schools" in favour of academy trusts, the consultation added.

Teaching school hubs,

which currently share the AB responsibility with councils, will now take full control.

## 'Ensure rigorous checks on all schools'

The early career framework (ECF) reforms were rolled out nationally last year. The ECF extends the induction period for new teachers from one to two years, providing funded additional time off timetable for second-year teachers.

Teachers also get a mentor, with schools given the funding to allow them 36 hours off timetable over the two years.

The next academic year will be the first time that schools nationally have two cohorts of new teachers undertaking statutory induction at the same time.

The consultation says it is "especially important that we make sure all ECTs receive their statutory entitlements and that mentors are given

sufficient time to conduct their role effectively".

It is seeking to improve the consistency of support provided by developing policy which clarifies how ABs should operate.

"We are asking ABs to ensure that they provide rigorous checks on all schools to ensure that ECTs and their mentors are receiving their full entitlements and support," the consultation adds.

It seeks feedback on the challenges

that ABs face and about what contributes to high-quality services which will allow the DfE to "develop policy ... and clarify how ABs should operate".

## Schools avoiding scrutiny crackdown

The government had warned that a "lack of consistency in the quality" of AB services "remained an unresolved issue".

A "small minority of schools" switched their AB midway through a new teacher's induction "to avoid challenge from their original AB", the consultation said.

It said this was not in the best interests of ECTs and part of the reforms will "consider how to prevent this practice from happening in the future unless there are exceptional circumstances".

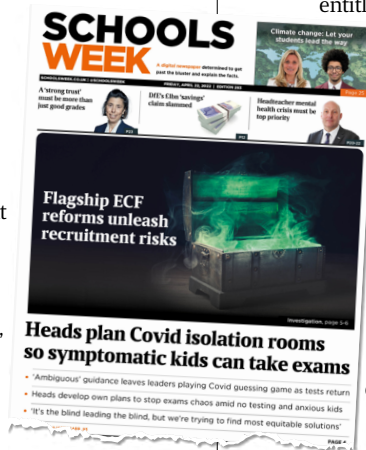
The AB role will be taken forward by a network of 87 teaching school hubs.

Schools will be encouraged to use local teaching school hubs. Larger trusts may choose the AB closest to the majority of their schools.

As the DfE already has a contract in place with each teaching school hub, it can hold them to account against key performance indicators. In contrast, there are "no direct accountability mechanisms" to ensure the quality of council ABs.

The Independent Schools and Teacher Induction Panel will continue to act as the AB for its members. Views are also being sought on formal assessments, which new teachers have at the end of their first two years.

The consultation closes on July 21.



## New recruits and mentors struggle to balance teaching and training

Around half of new teachers and their mentors have struggled to balance training and support with their teaching commitments, the government's own evaluation of the early career framework (ECF) has found.

A report on the first term of the ECF, which was rolled out nationally last September, was published yesterday.

A survey of participants revealed that 45 per cent of early career teachers (ECTs) found it difficult to spend time on provider-led training alongside their teaching workload, while 54 per cent of mentors found it difficult to spend time supporting their ECTs alongside teaching.

However, the report noted that heavy workload was "also a theme" emerging from

annual surveys of new teachers under the old system.

It follows warnings that difficulties with the reforms could result in schools taking on fewer early career teachers.

Seventy-three per cent of mentors said they struggled to spend time on their own training to be a mentor. Induction tutors also warned of workload issues, with 62 per cent reporting the workload was too much for mentors, and 52 per cent saying it was too much for ECTs.

Schools Week revealed last month that nearly half of primary heads were considering taking on fewer ECTs because of issues with the flagship reforms. New mentors were working at weekends to complete training.

Polling by Teacher Tapp found just 14 per cent of ECTs and 9 per cent of mentors

thought the training was a good use of time.

In March, the schools minister Robin Walker promised extra flexibility for mentors, following complaints the reforms had become a "straightjacket".

Thirty per cent of tutors and 27 per cent of teachers in the DfE survey said the tailoring of ECT training was "poor".

Thirty-nine per cent of mentors believed ECT provider-led training was too heavily balanced towards theory with "too little" applied content. Thirty-eight per cent said the same was the case for mentor training.

But there were also "high levels of enthusiasm" for the programme, with 65 per cent of mentors and 54 per cent of ECTs rating their enthusiasm between 7 and 10 out of 10.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER



## NEWS

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# SATs markers held up as Capita struggles to keep pace

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Outsourcing giant Capita had to pause SATs marking for nearly two days to allow more test scripts to be scanned in this week after teachers "exceeded expectation".

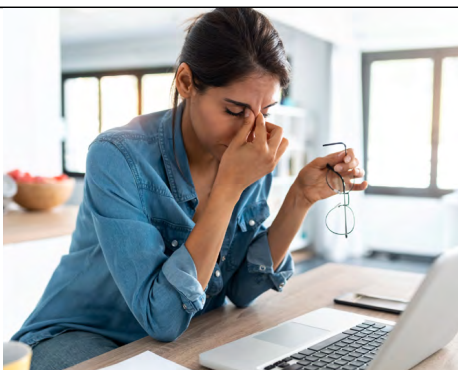
Markers said the lock-out left them with less time to complete their marking commitments to meet future deadlines, on top of teaching full-time.

The consultancy firm halted marking from Monday morning until 5pm on Tuesday to "manage demand".

Due to the pandemic, it is the first time that the company has overseen the testing and marking arrangements for a full set of SATs.

Marking started last week and runs until June. Most markers complete their work within three weeks.

In an email on Monday, Capita said that "marking progress over the weekend exceeded expectation and as such we know at some periods there were a limited number of segments



available for you to mark in some subjects.

"In order to overcome this and to allow our scanning operation the time to replenish supplies, we will be pausing marking activity now until 5pm on Tuesday 24 May to help satisfy demand. We ask you not to continue marking segments through this period."

A marker, who wished to remain anonymous, said it had become a "slow process. So on top of teaching full time, we have to wait for the systems to catch up so we can mark."

Markers had raised concerns with Capita about completing their marking allocations in time for future deadlines. But, in an email, the company

reassured markers they would "not be penalised in you are unable to meet these milestones".

It followed recent problems when teachers could not access a virtual marker training event at the weekend, leading to some markers resigning.

Heads have also complained after waiting hours on hold to the Standards and Testing Agency helpline, run by Capita. Extra staff had to be drafted in.

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.

A Capita spokesperson said they were "pleased with the strong performance" of markers. "We paused access to the marking system for a brief period to manage demand, but this has now been restored."

The Department for Education said the marking process involves scanning "millions of pupil test scripts".

They said that although they aim to "maintain provision, peaks and troughs of script availability in the online marking system are inevitable".

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## Gav gave mince pies and wine for DfE lockdown party

Fifty staff were invited to "festive drinks" in the Department for Education canteen during lockdown two years ago, with then education secretary Gavin Williamson providing wine and mince pies.

At the time, London was in tier 2 lockdown, where gatherings of two or more people indoors continued to be prohibited unless an exception applied. For instance, where the gathering was "reasonably necessary for work purposes".

A report by senior civil servant Sue Gray said the DfE began planning an event to "thank members of staff who had been working in the office during the pandemic" in early December 2020.

It was discussed between "senior officials" in the DfE and Williamson, who asked members of his private office to make arrangements.

Officials chose the canteen on the basis that it is a "well-ventilated space that would permit easier social distancing".

Williamson's private office invited

"approximately 50 staff" via email on December 7, at 3.52pm.

The email read: "Hi all, We're planning on having some 'socially distanced' festive drinks in the canteen on Thursday. It would be great if you could join us. This is open to Private Office staff and ministers if they are around..."

"For those working at home...there are plans for a Christmas Divisional where people will be able to dial in and have a Virtual Festive gathering..."

About 20 to 30 staff gathered in the canteen at about 5pm on December 10. The report said staff had been invited to bring their own refreshments, including a suggestion to "bring their own bottle".

However "there was wine, some of which, along with mince pies, was provided" by Williamson and his private office.

Williamson "thanked staff at the event, leaving shortly afterwards to travel back to his constituency. Some people remained in the canteen for a short

period. The event lasted around 60 minutes."

Susan Acland-Hood, DfE permanent secretary, told MPs last year that it was "to some extent" an organised event. The invite email was sent on the same day she was appointed to the role on a permanent basis.

She confirmed that if any staff were found to have broken rules, they would face disciplinary action. The department said this week it does not comment on internal disciplinary action.

The Metropolitan Police did not investigate the party as it was "not considered to have reached the threshold for criminal investigation".

Gray said many of the events, including several at Number 10, should "not have been allowed to happen. Many will be dismayed that behaviour of this kind took place on this scale at the heart of government."

A DfE spokesperson said that while the event was "work-related, looking back we accept it would have been better not to have gathered in this way at that particular time".



## NEWS

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# Councils commit extra cash to keep special school trust afloat

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

Councils have been forced to find more cash to keep a special academy trust afloat, after it claimed insufficient funding had left it paying wages from its reserves.

The Queensmill Trust, which runs two schools in west London, is now fighting not only for its financial survival but to keep its flagship school after receiving a government warning notice last week.

Experts and school leaders said it highlighted the wider financial challenges for special schools, including a reliance on local authority goodwill to pass on extra government cash.

Yet a shortage of places means that councils themselves are also heavily reliant on special schools to avoid paying for more costly private provision.

The government has threatened to rebroker the trust's flagship Queensmill School, an all-through school for pupils with autism, if it cannot show sufficient improvement capacity.

Ofsted had rated it "inadequate", stating that DBS checks were not completed for all staff and leaders lacked a "clear picture" of when pupils received medication.

But the potential further upheaval comes less than a year after the government allowed the over-subscribed, previously "outstanding" school to set up an academy trust and open a second school.

It also comes after the trust warned that its precarious finances could undermine its work, urging councils to step in.

Queensmill's 2020-21 accounts reveal that it had reserves of just £4,625. Auditors highlighted trustees' acknowledgement that "there may be material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt on the company's ability to continue as a going concern".

The trustees claim reserves have been eroded by council top-up funds failing to increase for seven years. They have used them to fund rising pay, pension and pupil costs.

They say that, without extra top-ups, "it will be very difficult for the academy trust to maintain a balanced budget, manage its cashflow and



deliver the excellent service that they currently provide".

Councils provide top-up funding to cover extra costs beyond the £10,000 place funding that special schools are allocated by central government. It is understood that most councils agreed to increase Queensmill's funding.

Camden, which funds fewer than 10% of its pupils, hiked top-up fees by 11.6 per cent to £19,189 per pupil, as requested by the trust in January. A spokesperson said Queensmill had not previously asked for extra funds.

A spokesperson for Hammersmith and Fulham said it had given Queensmill an additional £745,000 since last year, when it agreed to fund 50 extra places and enhanced provision.

But it is understood that the council, which funds almost two-thirds of pupils, has so far not agreed to raise top-up funding levels specifically.

A spokesperson said it would keep working with the government and councils on the school's funding, "while encouraging the trust's management to undertake a full review of all its costs".

Other London councils and the trust did not comment.

A recent Schools Week investigation highlighted the shortage of state-sector special school places, with more than half of settings taking more pupils than commissioned.

Warren Carratt, chief

executive of Nexus Multi-Academy Trust, which includes nine special schools in Rotherham, said he was "absolutely not surprised" to see such financial challenges.



Warren Carratt

He said it was "typical" of councils not to have increased top-up funding for special schools for many years, while per-pupil place funding provided by central government had also stagnated for years.

Micon Metcalfe, a school finance expert, said: "Alternative provision and special trusts are heavily reliant on council top-ups and that funding hasn't even increased in line with mainstream funding."

The average special school's per-pupil income fell 10 per cent between 2015-16 and 2020-21, according to analysis by the National Education Union. That compares with a 4 per cent drop for mainstream primaries and 9 per cent for secondaries.

Both Carratt and the Confederation of School Trusts recently challenged the government over some councils' reported refusal to hand over new funds intended to cover rising employment and other costs.

Government officials highlighted a £1 billion increase in high needs funding in 2022-23 and £2.6 billion planned SEND capital funding.



Micon Metcalfe

## SPEED READ

# Social care review: what schools need to know

The independent review of children's social care has called for a "dramatic system reset", with several recommendations relating to schools. The government will respond to the report later this year. Here's what school leaders need to know ...

## 1 GIVE SCHOOLS 'CORPORATE PARENT' LEGAL DUTY

In Scotland, organisations such as schools, the police and primary care providers have been made "corporate parents" and now have a legal duty to promote the wellbeing of those who have experienced care.

The review found that this had led to "tangible and meaningful changes which could be replicated in England".

Making a similar change to the law here would "more accurately reflect the role that schools, colleges, universities, health agencies and other parts of the public realm play in the lives of children in care and those with a care experience".

The report also called for a review of the role of council director of children's services to give it greater "clarity".

## 2 MAKE SCHOOLS STATUTORY SAFEGUARDING PARTNERS

Statutory safeguarding partners – currently local authorities, health services and police – are responsible for safeguarding arrangements in their areas. But leaving schools out means the voice of education is "missing" in "too many places".

The review found the relationship between social care and education was "consistently fraught". Children who have needed a social worker are more likely to be excluded and less likely to achieve a strong pass at GCSE English and maths.

The report said that schools and children's social care "need to be brought into lockstep". It recommended that the law be changed to make education the "fourth statutory safeguarding partner".

The DfE should work with social care and school leaders to "identify the best way to achieve this".

## 3 BASE NEW 'FAMILY HELP TEAMS' IN SCHOOLS

The review proposed a new category of "family help" to replace "targeted early help" and "child in need" work, providing families with "much higher levels of meaningful support".

These family help teams "would be based in community settings, like schools and family hubs, that children and families know and trust".

## 4 LET TEACHERS KNOWN TO CHILDREN FOSTER THEM

The culture of care meant it was "often considered inappropriate" to ask a teacher or friend's parent to consider

becoming a specific child's foster carer.

This "needs to change". In circumstances where fostering within a family network is not going to work, then adults known to the child and willing to foster – such as teachers – should be identified.

## 5 HOLD VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADS TO ACCOUNT FOR PROGRESS

Virtual school heads have a duty to promote the educational achievement of children in care and manage their pupil premium funding.

But although the review found that virtual school heads hold "important levers" to improve educational attainment, there is a "lack of real accountability".

Progress 8 for children in care should be a "key measure" by which the performance of virtual school heads is judged. Ofsted should assess this through its framework for inspecting children's services.

## 6 USE FREE SCHOOLS CASH TO CREATE STATE BOARDING PLACES

The review found that "more could be done" to increase the supply of boarding school places for children looked-after in the state sector.

The DfE should therefore "consider investing some of the free schools capital budget into a new wave of state boarding capacity".

This should be led by the "highest performing state schools that have a track record of providing excellent pastoral care".

## 7 REPLACE YOUNG OFFENDER INSTITUTIONS WITH SECURE SCHOOLS

The government and sponsor the Oasis Charitable Trust are in the process of opening the country's first secure school for young offenders in Medway, although the project is three years behind schedule and massively over-budget.

The review said young offender institutions and secure training centres should be "phased out" entirely within the next ten years and replaced with secure children's homes and secure schools.

## 8 TRAIN ALL STAFF ON MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE

The identification and response to poor mental health issues should be a "core part of training programmes for any professionals working with children and young people that have involvement with children's services".

Mental health support teams should also be rolled out faster, and senior mental health lead training provided to all schools and colleges in England.

## NEWS

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# Overcrowding hampers bomb scare evacuation at DfE office, staff say

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Staff at the Department for Education's office in Sheffield struggled to evacuate following the discovery of a "suspect package" because of overcrowding, civil servants have told *Schools Week*.

Workers at the offices in St Paul's Place, Sheffield, were ordered to evacuate at around 1.55pm on Wednesday last week, the same day that DfE permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood visited.

The department has asked staff to work from their offices more often, but the Sheffield building has nearly double the number of staff than desks.

However, the evacuation resulted in queues in the building's stairwell and exits from the upper floors, staff reported, due to the volume of people working in the building.

*Schools Week* spoke to two civil servants and understands several more have complained about the incident.

We revealed last week how staff at DfE offices had been forced to work in corridors and canteens after the government's return-to-the-office edict because of a shortage of desks.

Figures obtained by this newspaper show Sheffield staff outnumber desks at St Paul's Place by almost two-to-one, with just 790 workstations for 1,489 staff. It is not known how many worked from the office last Wednesday.

## DfE admits evacuation 'quite slow'

In a message to Sheffield staff after the incident, the DfE said the evacuation was caused by a "police incident due to a suspect package". South Yorkshire Police was unable to find a record of the incident when contacted by *Schools Week*, however.

The DfE said it understood the evacuation was "quite slow as we needed to push building occupants to evacuate at the front of the building and away from the incident".

Staff were asked to re-enter the building "approximately ten minutes later, following the direction from police", the DfE said.

However, one civil servant, who asked to remain anonymous, said they had not managed to make it out of the building by the time the order to return came through.



"There was that many people in the building that no one could exit. I didn't even get more than 15 steps from my desk before the crowd of people in front meant there was nowhere for me to go.

"The stairwell was full of people and it did not move, we were trapped. There were fire wardens stuck on each floor not able to get out and direct people away from the building."

They described the incident as "really scary", adding: "We had been told to evacuate and yet couldn't do it. There was an air of panic."

## Top DfE boss visited the same day

Another staff member said the building was particularly busy on Wednesday as DfE permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood was visiting.

The order to return to the office follows pressure from the government efficiency minister, Jacob Rees-Mogg. DfE came last in a leaked list of department occupancy last month, with just 25 per cent of staff working in the office.

One staff member said the DfE was "only interested in their position in the cabinet office league table".

"We as a department do not have the appropriate infrastructure in place to cope with the return to office arrangements as they stand. There is not enough space for us all, we cannot be accommodated safely and it's having a devastating impact on morale and mental health."

## Some staff missed evacuation order

*Schools Week* understands the order to evacuate was also not heard by some staff because the tannoy system did not work in all meeting rooms.

"There is a health and safety disaster waiting to happen," a staff member said. "Imagine how panicked everyone would have been standing still on a staircase trying to evacuate if there was a smell of smoke, or visible signs of smoke.

"There would have been a stampede, a crush, which would have led to many people losing their life due to inadequate evacuation plans, poor planning and an office that has too many people in it for the infrastructure to cope with."

The DfE's message told staff to familiarise themselves with fire and security plans for the office, "including the location of the evacuation assembly points".

"Any staff trained as fire wardens should support and clear the floors as part of their role."

The message also called for feedback from staff and fire wardens to "support the team in improving the management of future incidents".

The DfE declined to comment on the incident.

However, the department confirmed it has asked staff to "start by looking at" spending 80 per cent of their working time in the office. But managers had "flexibility" to adjust that to as low as 60 per cent.

The DfE claimed the approach "fits with the amount of desk space we have, gives us full and vibrant offices but also retains flexibility to work in different ways when needed".



## NEWS IN BRIEF

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## Dom-in-nick: Herrington to prison role

Dominic Herrington will leave his post as national schools commissioner after nearly four years in the role to take up a new post at the Ministry of Justice.

The exit, announced yesterday, comes ahead of the planned restructuring of the government's team of regional schools commissioners, who currently report to Herrington but will soon answer to a new director-general.

The senior civil servant has a new role "on transforming prisons delivery in the Ministry Of Justice".

"Wanted to say a massive thanks to all the colleagues I have worked with in trusts, schools and regional teams – you have been and are incredible," he tweeted.

The current eight RSCs will expand to nine and morph into the DfE's new regions group

from September.

It will serve as the DfE's regulatory arm and will also deliver the government's ambitions to move toward a fully trust-led system by 2030.

According to a job advert posted earlier this year, the regions group will be led by a new £135,000-a-year director general.

The advert states the successful candidate will "lead a group comprising nine regional teams and a central function, which delivers for, and responds to, local needs, and understands impacts on children and learners, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people".

Herrington's resignation suggests he either did not put himself forward or was unsuccessful in applying for the role.

Herrington was first appointed as NSC on an interim basis in September 2018, before taking



on the role permanently in April 2019.

Before his appointment, Herrington was the RSC for south-east England and south London between July 2014 and September 2018.

During the pandemic, he helped oversee the regional education and children's teams (REACT) project, which saw nine regional REACT teams established to help the most vulnerable children.

He also increased transparency in headteacher board minutes.

[Full story here](#)

## Extracurricular handbook on way

Ministers will publish a handbook for schools on how to use extracurricular activities to support pupils' wellbeing.

Cross-party MPs on the education select committee had urged government to make sure all catch-up plans included "specific roles for activities that focus on mental health and wellbeing".

In its response, the Department for Education said it will publish a handbook for schools on enrichment and extracurricular activities.

It will work with schools and multi-academy trusts "with broad enrichment and

extracurricular offers". The document will emphasise how "provision can be used to support pupils' mental wellbeing".

DfE also said it is reviewing 'Teaching Online Safety in Schools' guidance, first published in 2019, to ensure it remains up to date. The non-statutory guidance will be published in the autumn.

But the committee says their warnings about persistent and severe absence have not been "fully addressed". They say the government's response does not yet commit to a "targeted support plan".

[Full story here](#)

## Eight more attendance advisers



The Department for Education will hire up to eight new advisers as part of its drive to improve attendance support offered by councils, academy trusts and schools.

The move will only increase the size of its squad of advisers to 13 at most, however, after a decade-long squeeze on budgets that saw many local authority attendance jobs axed.

The government set out prescriptive new minimum national standards for council, trust and school attendance policies and support earlier this month.

A £350,000 contract will expand the team of five central advisers created last year. Between three and six new staff will receive £500 a day to help councils over the next two years.

Another one or two advisers will be hired to work specifically with multi-academy trusts.

[Full story here](#)

## Quarter of kids off in autumn

Almost one in four pupils in England was persistently absent from school last autumn, with Covid and other illness to blame.

Department for Education statistics show 23.5 per cent of pupils, around 1.6 million children, missed ten per cent or more of possible sessions in the 2021-22 autumn term, up from 13 per cent in 2020.

The government said the spike in persistent absence was "largely due to illness, including positive Covid cases".

It pointed out that a "single full Covid

isolation period would count as persistent absence, with seven days being roughly equivalent to ten per cent of sessions missed".

This also prompted a rise in the overall absence rate, from 4.7 per cent in autumn 2020 to 6.9 per cent in autumn 2021.

Ministers have made tackling absence, particularly persistent absence, one of their top priorities in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic.

[Full story here](#)



## SPEED READ

## The key takeaways from Ofsted's English subject research review

Ofsted has highlighted the key principles of teaching a "high-quality" English curriculum as its latest research review warns the subject is "fundamental" to pupils' success in all subjects.

The watchdog this week published its tenth subject research review, which focuses on English. Previously it has covered subjects such as science, maths and computing.

The latest review focuses largely on the importance of reading progression, but also warns that the subject is declining in popularity – with the number of A-level pupils dropping from 84,037 to 57,912 between 2010 and 2019.

Ofsted's chief inspector Amanda Spielman said: "More than any other subject, English – and especially reading – is fundamental to pupils' educational success."

Here's your trusty *Schools Week* speed read.

## 1 DON'T RELY ON DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES FOR SEND PUPILS

The review states that research has found pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) "do not generally benefit from differentiated teaching, activities or resources to achieve a curriculum goal".

Ofsted says that struggling pupils should have "more opportunities for repetition" to secure essential knowledge, but high-quality teaching "does not rely on differentiated teaching".

The report added: "Teachers may attribute weaknesses in reading to a pupil having dyslexia, rather than having gaps in their phonic knowledge."

This, it states, can also lead to teachers using interventions that have an alternative teaching approach, rather than systematic synthetic phonics.

But the review adds that "reading requires the same phonic knowledge for all children".

## 2 PUPILS SHOULD READ INCREASINGLY COMPLEX TEXTS

Ofsted said that the choice of texts studied is "critically important" to pupils' development, and an effective curriculum will feature "increasingly challenging texts".

Understanding the different factors that contribute to the "challenge of a text" will allow schools to construct a curriculum "that builds readiness for future reading".

The review states that pupils will benefit from the opportunity to read whole texts and the study of "one substantial complex text can do a lot of curricular 'heavy lifting'".

Research from the University of Sussex found weaker readers aged between 12 and 14 made "16 months' progress in reading comprehension when they read two challenging novels in class in 12 weeks".

## 3 NARROW THE GAP BETWEEN WORD-RICH AND WORD-POOR

Ofsted warns that at both primary and secondary level, the gap between word-rich and word-poor "correlates with lasting socio-economic and health inequalities".

Pupils with a language deficit at five-years-old are four times more likely to have reading difficulties as adults, the review states.

As such, teachers, especially in the early years, must explicitly develop vocabulary and "enable disadvantaged children to develop their vocabulary faster".

## 4 CURRICULUM DEVELOPS A 'GENUINE LOVE OF LITERATURE'

The curriculum should be designed to develop in pupils a "genuine love of literature" and the ability to respond to texts personally, the review advises.

Teachers should encourage pupils to read for pleasure but they should also introduce them to texts "that they would not choose to read for themselves".

Spielman added: "Through studying literature, pupils' eyes are opened to the human experience; they explore meaning and ambiguity as well as the beauty and power of language."

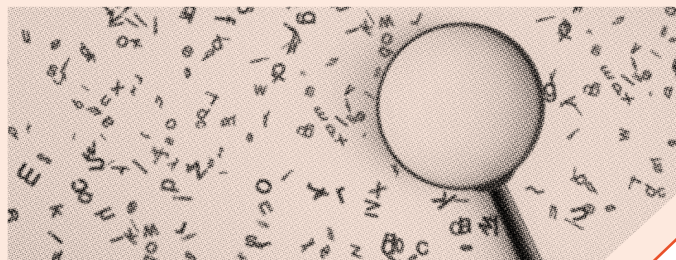
## 5 FOCUS ON BUILDING KNOWLEDGE – NOT ANSWERING EXAM Qs

Teachers should use assessment information that identifies pupils' misconceptions, gaps and errors to "adapt the curriculum".

But teaching should focus on "building pupils' prerequisite knowledge, rather than on practice for answering examination questions".

Ofsted explains this is because mark schemes for English exams "typically describe differences in the quality" of pupils' answers, rather than "the range of curriculum content that pupils need to learn".

Treating mark schemes as the curriculum for pupils to master means pupils "may not acquire the very prior knowledge they need for final summative assessments".



# EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Prioritise poorer pupils for tutoring, or provide the full cash

When the founding charities first came up with the National Tutoring Programme in June 2020, there was a real buzz in the sector that this could be the golden key to solving the attainment gap.

But the government has increasingly moved the goalposts. In a mad rush to catch up after a sluggish rollout this year, it has dropped the focus on tutoring reaching the poorest pupils.

We know these are the pupils most impacted by the pandemic. We also know the government's subsidy for schools to pay for tutoring is reducing this year.

And of course it's not just poorer pupils who have been impacted. But if government is not providing the full whack, then the focus on poorer pupils should remain in future years.

The comment that all children will get tuition might make good newspaper headlines, but it risks poorer pupils missing out – and the attainment gap widening.

It would be the opposite of the whole point of the flagship scheme. Keeping the target to provide two-thirds of catch-up to pupil premium youngsters is sound.

## Clarity needed on schools bill powers

The Lords have made their views clear on the government's schools bill: it's a power grab that central government is in no way equipped to even oversee.

There is no doubt academy regulation needs to be sorted out. While we wait to see firm proposals on this in the upcoming consultation, the speed at which the current system evolved left plenty of loopholes that were unfortunately exploited by a few.

But does the government need to have a veto over the appointment of every academy trustee in England? This smacks of micro-management and government overreach.

And this is a particular problem for ministers because their whole academy dream was sold on schools gaining autonomy.

Sources say some of the more overreaching parts of the schools bill are actually down to over-zealous lawyers and will be smoothed out in time.

But the government is already facing a fight to win over academy sceptics. Making enemies of academy converts by imposing more bureaucracy is not what ministers want. The sooner they can provide clarity, the better.

**SCHOOLS WEEK**



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## Feature

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ

Left to right: Sue O'Farrell, trustee, Jon Culpin, chief executive, Claire Lawton, chair and Kerrie Jones, head of governance support, compliance and risk at Anglian Learning academy trust, with their NGA award outside Parliament



## 'Parent governors are a necessary nightmare. The system won't work without people who don't agree'

The Anglian Learning academy trust won a top award for excellent governance at the start of the year. As the white paper puts academy governance centre stage, Jess Staufenberg finds out what good looks like

Governance has posed a big question mark over the multi-academy trust model, ever since academisation was turbo-boostered in 2010.

Maintained schools always had a governor board, usually with two parent governors, as standard. But under a MAT, the trust has its central board of trustees, who sit above governors of individual schools.

That has at times caused tensions, and ones which have often bubbled to the surface.

Some trusts were open about their wish to scrap them. In 2016, the E-ACT academy

chain got rid of local governing bodies, relieving them of key duties to oversee staffing and budgets and instead rebranding them as "academy ambassadorial advisory bodies". They would now take responsibility for soft tasks such as "celebrating the school's achievements".

Meanwhile, Julian Drinkall told *Schools Week* last summer the local governing bodies for Academies Enterprise Trust were "awful" when he arrived as chief executive in 2016. He ditched parent governors altogether, a move the National Governance Association's Emma Knights said looked like

a "power grab".

But the other side of the argument, made by pro-academy voice Leora Cruddas, is that LGBs – or rather, "academy committees" – exist only to execute the trust board's overall vision.

The recent white paper revealed government ambitions for all schools to be in "strong" MATs by 2030, so those tensions are likely to start bubbling up again. Is there a model that works for both trustees and their school communities?

In September, Anglian Learning academy trust, which has 14 schools across



## Feature: The Anglian Learning academy trust



Primary school pupils at Howard Community Academy in Suffolk

Cambridgeshire, Essex and west Suffolk, was the joint winner of the National Governance Association's award for outstanding governance, picking up the trophy in parliament.

Chief executive Jon Culpin says the trust decided to empower, not fear, their local governing bodies. "If you think about trusts where there is a high level of uniformity and alignment – that's not how our trust operates," he says. "In comparison to many other academy trusts, we don't see governing bodies as academy committees.

"We make clear when the school joins us that the local governing body should be empowered."

The approach reflects the fact many of the trust's schools had strong identities prior to academising. For instance, Anglian Learning has a number of "village colleges", which is an educational movement specific to Cambridgeshire founded by a former chief education officer, Henry Morris.

The village college model believes schools should be open to secondary-school-age pupils and to adult learners (usually in the evening).

"Morris had a vision of cradle-to-grave learning, where schools would be at the heart of the community, and where learning continued right through to old age, and children would be rubbing shoulders with 70- and 80-year-olds," smiles Culpin.

Anglian Learning has four of these: Bottisham Village College, Sawston Village College, Bassingbourn Village College and



Secondary school pupils at The Netherhall School in Cambridge

### "It's important to indicate we're not afraid of the chairs"

Linton Village College.

This means the educational offer in some of the trust's schools is notably different to others, with adults joining Sawston Village College for singing on Fridays, for example.

There is no precisely prescribed curriculum imposed from the board downwards, explains Kerrie Jones, head of governance support, compliance and risk. There is a curriculum "blueprint" created by the trust board, but it is based on values rather than exact requirements.

"For example, a school in Anglian Learning wouldn't become focused mainly on STEM subjects and not offer the arts properly, because as a trust, we're arts focused," she explains. "But how they deliver the arts is up to them."

At the moment, for instance, one school is "embarking on quite an extensive rollout of digital learning through the introduction of iPads," says Culpin. But another school is experimenting with Rosenshine's principles of instruction, so the introduction of iPads "would be a distraction".

"Imposing that experimentation with iPads across the trust could potentially de-professionalise those schools," continues Culpin. "We want people to have that sense of agency."

To avoid confusion, the lines around roles and responsibilities are clearly laid out in the trust's local governing bodies handbook, which Culpin wrote from scratch himself.

This handbook states the LGBs are responsible for monitoring the educational standards and outcomes of their schools, explains Jones (something many academy trustees have removed from their local 'committees').

"The board is also looking closely at education outcomes," she adds. For instance, the headteacher is line-managed by the chief executive, not the LGB chair.

But "it is the LGB which is responsible for holding the head to account for those educational standards".

The LGBs may also challenge new initiatives they don't think work.

One example Jones cites is that the central board wanted to roll out a new risk management software across all schools, but it wasn't very popular. "We got some interesting comments from chairs, such as 'why are you doing this?', which was justified," explains Culpin. "We took that on the chin. It's a consultative forum."

This kind of constructive dissent is also enabled by the chairs of the primary schools and secondary schools meeting without

# Feature: The Anglian Learning academy trust

trustees present, continues Claire Lawton, the trust's chair.

"It's so they can share and talk. It's important to indicate that we're not afraid of them." This approach is also useful in that it "gives people the space to have a moan".

According to a 2021 survey by the NGA, 71 per cent of MAT trustee respondents did not have any other role in the trust – so they exclusively sat as MAT trustees. But 14 per cent sat on a local tier of governance (for instance, chief executive Dan Moynihan at Harris Federation is listed on academy governing bodies), and 12 per cent of trustees were also MAT members.

Meanwhile, parent governors are useful for the same reason (two are elected on to each LGB), continues Lawton. "They are a nightmare, but they're a necessary nightmare. The system won't work without people who don't agree and have a vested interest."

Choosing parents only for their professional skills, such as in law, HR and finance, should also be avoided, she adds.

"One thing I think has happened in schools generally is that the bulk of non-professional parents are being excluded from being governors. Schools need to think about how you empower people who are not traditionally empowered, rather than embedding the system further as it is."

The board tries to hand as much agency as it can to LGBs, while maintaining cohesion and oversight through the handbook and curriculum blueprints.

Nevertheless, financial monitoring and staffing responsibilities have been moved to the trustee board, explains Jones. "The school and its LGB help to set its local budget, but it is the board that really scrutinises the accounts. HR and staff management also really sits with the board."

Clarity around these roles is also backed up by new governors' induction training, designed by the board.

On the question of governor training, I point out the NGA wants the government to make induction training mandatory for trustees and governors, given how important the roles are.

But Jones warns: "If you make too much training compulsory, you're going to scare people off. It's hard enough at the moment



Claire Lawton, chair, and Jon Culpin, chief executive

to get governors."

Mandatory induction training is popular among governors and trustees. The NGA's latest survey shows that 95 per cent of respondents agreed that high-quality induction training should be mandatory for new governors and trustees. But at the same time, almost two-thirds of respondents reported a challenge in recruiting to the governing board, up from 50 per cent in 2015.

Making the matter worse, Jones adds, is that governance professionals report being "very poorly paid". (In 2020, the NGA found clerks were being paid on average £10.50 an hour, and has called for an increase in pay.)

However, where people aren't up to scratch, Culpin is clear the trust will step in to remove them and parachute in its own people (as Drinkall did at AET).

"With one of our schools we took over in the pandemic, the governing body had effectively failed," explains Culpin. They replaced the entire governing body with an interim executive board.

At another school, the trustees "don't feel they are making progress," continues Culpin. "So we've appointed our own chair of governors."

But the plan is always to "eventually stand back" and "transition back to the governing body".



It shows how delicate the balance of autonomy and intervention is within academy trusts – particularly growing ones, where a feeling of losing control and needing to impose uniformity must increase exponentially.

That continues at trust board-level too, where Culpin is both a trustee and chief executive. Jones and Lawton are clear this has the added benefit of Culpin "working closely with all of the board, rather than only with the chair", strengthening the team.

But in January last year, an entire academy board quit in protest when a headteacher refused to step off the board. The NGA's chief executive Emma Knights warned the set-up is an "in-built conflict of interest". Again, it shows how delicate the balance of power can be – and with many schools set to change their governance, a way to strike the right balance will be more important than ever.



# Opinion

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## SUFIAN SADIQ

Director of the teaching school, Chiltern Learning Trust, and member of the advisory group, 'Racial Equality in the Teacher Workforce'

### Diversifying our workforce can't be just a numbers game

**There are many more reasons to diversify the teaching workforce than filling the profession's perennial shortages, writes Sufian Sadiq, and we should put those first**

Teacher recruitment and retention has been in an ongoing crisis for a number of years. Yet what is striking about NFER's latest research is that there is a pool of potential talent that could help fill recruitment gaps, and that is not being tapped. The report into racial equality in the teacher workforce shows that there is significant interest in teaching from black and ethnic minority candidates – but that this is not translating into more teachers from these communities standing in front of classes.

But it isn't, and can't be, all about the pragmatism of filling teacher shortages. It seems to me that addressing the racial disparities that exist within teaching is important on a number of fronts.

First, every child deserves to have a qualified teacher leading their learning. Recruitment and retention rates are worryingly low. The National Education Union's State of Education: The Profession survey warns that 44 per cent of teachers

say they plan to leave the profession. For these reasons alone, we surely should be reaching out to all those who are passionate about doing the job and being proactive about finding routes for them to train.

It's heartening that so many black and ethnic minority people want to teach – but why aren't they making it into the classroom? We must

**“Schools with an all-white workforce risk doing their pupils a disservice**

understand and challenge that if our solutions are to be sustained and sustainable.

Second, we have a moral imperative to give children role models with whom they can identify. Seeing themselves in the teachers who guide them, they can only gain confidence and an all-important sense of identity and self-worth. This will help drive aspiration and achievement and break down stereotypes among all students.

Third, greater racial representation helps more than aspiration: it enriches our children's education. In his article 'Cultural Capital as Whiteness', Derron Wallace makes a powerful



argument about the important cultural capital all our children experience when they meet, mix and learn from people from a range of ethnicities and backgrounds. Wallace celebrates the multicultural capital, ethnic capital, transnational capital and linguistic capital that

people of colour bring.

This must not be undervalued. And indeed, it is a kind of cultural capital many white parents often seek out for their children, to introduce them to the kind of richer experience of the world that will support their life in the future.

This is an acknowledgement that experiencing this diversity will benefit these children when they're older, especially when entering the world of work. So schools with an all-white workforce risk doing their pupils a disservice in not providing a multicultural environment in which they can learn.

And finally, as someone from a minoritised community, I believe it is important to focus on racial

equity, rather than equality. This is different to a purely numbers game about overall representation in teaching and leadership. It means first and foremost increasing the racial literacy of both white and educators of colour, so that the experiences of black and ethnic minority teachers can be more equitable.

The positive number of applicants from ethnic minority communities shows that the issues and challenges around diversity in teaching are systemic. They are not down to a lack of interest or any other factor that we can shift on to those from under-represented groups themselves. The report highlights to me that the onus is on organisations at all points in the career pipeline to take responsibility and act now.

But it's clear that if we approach the challenge purely as a pragmatic numbers game to fill gaps in the workforce, our initiatives will quickly fail. It is a recruitment and retention crisis we face, and we can't afford to fix the first at the expense of the second, with all the potential for hurt that represents for the under-represented communities we set out to bring into our schools.

# Opinion

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**THERESA KERR**

Partner (Education), Winckworth Sherwood LLP

## How to manage covert recording of staff by pupils and parents

**Covert recordings of school staff are becoming commonplace and can be problematic, writes Theresa Kerr, but some simple steps can act as a deterrent and safeguard relationships**

If you have ever been in the position where you realise that a conversation with a parent or pupil has been recorded without your permission, you are not alone. New research published this week by Impero suggests as many of 15 per cent of teachers have had this happen to them. In our experience as legal advisors to schools, it is becoming increasingly common for parents and pupils alike to covertly record meetings and telephone conversations with teachers, senior leaders and school governors.

Parents who decide to record conversations will usually do so in the context of a complaint, perhaps because they are hoping to obtain some evidence which they think will support their position. In other cases, conversations seem to be covertly recorded when the relationship with the school has broken down and the parent loses trust in school staff.

Such actions inevitably have a detrimental impact on the relationship between schools and

families as school staff need to have the space to deal with sensitive and confidential issues without the fear that those conversations will be shared with third parties (including on social media), or taken out of context.

But what's the legal position?

For data protection purposes, such recordings are likely to fall within

recording is shared with third parties without the other person's consent, depending on what they do with it.

In some circumstances, there could also be an action for breach of privacy or confidentiality. But in reality, this could be quite difficult for a school to prove. In any case, most schools are understandably reluctant to threaten parents or pupils with legal action.

However, even if a legal remedy is not appropriate, there are some practical steps that schools can take to try to manage these situations.

First, you should remind staff and governors that sometimes parents and pupils record conversations. The idea is not necessarily to make them more guarded; this is unlikely to help relations with families where there are ongoing complaints. Instead, this should act as a general reminder to remain professional and courteous

complainants should obtain the informed consent of all parties before recording conversations or meetings, and that the school reserves the right to refuse permission for a complainant to use a recording that has been obtained covertly in the complaints process.

Helpfully, this position is supported by the Department for Education's best practice guidance for dealing with complaints, though we recommend that each case is considered on its merits if there are compelling reasons to allow a covert recording to be used.

In relation to pupils, school behaviour policies should also make clear that recording staff (or indeed other pupils) without permission is against the school rules, and make provision for a reasonable and proportionate sanction.

Teachers might also be able to address the issue of recording other people without consent in an age-appropriate way in PSHE lessons.

If a member of staff has any concerns about whether a conversation is likely to be recorded, the issue should be addressed at the beginning of the meeting or telephone call. It may not always be practical in a busy school environment, but it's good practice for another member of staff to attend and take notes.

If a recording obtained without consent is posted on social media, the school should contact the provider and ask for the content to be removed.

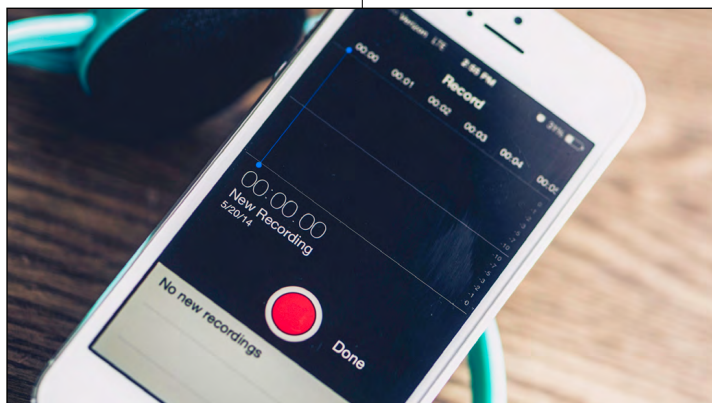
Unfortunately, there is no quick fix to stop someone recording school staff without their permission. However, the above steps should help schools to prepare for and navigate the issue in the increasingly likely case that staff find themselves in this situation.

**“Making staff more guarded is unlikely to help relations**

the “household exception”, which exempts processing “by an individual in the course of a purely personal or household activity” (therefore the rules are different if a school wishes to record a conversation). However, the legal position might change if the

in all communications (which, of course, most staff are anyway).

Schools should also check what, if anything, the complaints policy says about covert recordings. Our template complaints policy includes wording that states that





# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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**A data review into religious education paints a mixed picture, writes Sabah Ahmed, yet its curriculum is a crucial part of human experience**

Up to 500 secondary schools in England are reporting no timetabled RE for 14-16 year olds. That's the statistic that worried me most amid last week's data review into the subject by the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE).

And for some who do teach RE, more needs to be done. An Ofsted research review recently identified "insufficient curriculum time to teach an ambitious curriculum" and a "lack of scholarly approach" as key barriers to high-quality provision.

Since becoming an imam three years ago, I've used social media as a way to explore and explain my faith with a younger audience. One thing I've learned is that there's still a great deal of curiosity among them about the beliefs of others, particularly with regards to what religion looks like in lived experience.

During Ramadan, I found myself answering questions on everything from the practicalities of fasting to the spiritual experience behind the practice. As much as I enjoy this aspect of my work, I feel it must also be the responsibility of schools to teach young people about the role that religion and belief still have to play in modern society.

Over the past 50 years, the cultural and religious landscape of Britain has changed dramatically. The nature of belief is increasingly diverse and pluralistic. Perspectives on God and the nature of reality may be made up of multiple religious and non-religious beliefs.

Consider, too, that 84 per cent of the world's population identifies with



SABAH AHMEDI

Imam, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

## We must fill the gaping hole in the RE curriculum

an organised religion. This means that by no longer teaching a full RE curriculum, we do a great disservice to young people painting a picture of a world where religion is no longer relevant.

In order for young people to succeed in life, we need to prepare them to

and non-religious worldviews during that time is key. That's what the Commission on Religious Education proposed in 2018, putting forward a fresh vision for the subject by recommending the subject be taught through the lens of worldviews that is, ways of understanding,

“Too many are cut off from a full and purposeful education

understand a multitude of different worldviews and backgrounds as well as their own and the influences that have shaped them.

How can schools do this? Including sufficient RE on the timetable is a start, and teaching a diversity of religious

experiencing and responding to the world around them.

Religious or not, everyone has a worldview. Throughout our lives, we question its meaning, the role of a higher power and the nature of reality and this shapes our responses to



others. Young people need to explore their own, and be able to encounter others with similar and different worldviews in order to navigate the global work and social places they inhabit.

Teaching about the diversity of different religious and non-religious beliefs through the lens of a worldview promotes greater faith and interfaith understanding. It also provides young people with a wealth of vital knowledge to draw upon for their self-development, their understanding of the past and present and the way they want to shape the future.

The public appears supportive: in a recent survey, 71 per cent agreed that RE should reflect the diversity of beliefs in the UK today. And there is growing support in Westminster too; after a recent parliamentary roundtable on the future of the subject, Sir Peter Bottomley MP called for a national plan for the subject, arguing that not teaching RE in line with the worldviews approach would leave a "gaping hole in the school curriculum".

I strongly believe he is right. We must invest more time and resources in religious education, and this must be led by what we know works in providing high-quality teaching and learning. A worldview approach is the best way to ensure young people acquire knowledge of the lived experience of religion and belief, allowing them to take their place on the global stage, increase inter-faith understanding and deepen their self-knowledge and personal and spiritual development.

As things stand, too many young people are being cut off from the benefits of a full and purposeful education. And that really is a gaping hole in our curriculum.

# Opinion

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**Concerns about accountability are holding back what could be a powerful counter-measure to league tables, writes Adrian Bethune**

The pandemic's impact on the mental health of communities has sharpened our sector's focus on wellbeing, and it seems to have brought about a significant opinion shift among parents, too. But while there is a growing desire for wellbeing to be measured, we still have valid questions to answer about what that might mean for schools and their staff.

In a recent YouGov survey commissioned by the Youth Sport Trust and the Well Schools movement, 62 per cent of parents listed wellbeing as a serious consideration when choosing a secondary school for their child. That was the top answer, beating location (61 per cent) and exam results (58 per cent). In addition, 76 per cent said they want schools to measure wellbeing.

Those are significant results. Yet less than half of schools currently have tools in place to deliver on that demand. It's obvious there remain reservations about measuring wellbeing, but there are ways to overcome those fears and to see it as the solution.

## Measure what you treasure

The best (and shortest) reason to measure wellbeing comes from the author *Can We Be Happier?*, Professor Richard Layard, who set up the London School of Economics' research centre for wellbeing: "If you treasure it, measure it." Measuring wellbeing underlines its importance – and as a result, the wellbeing of pupils and teachers gains greater attention.

It also gives parents the information they need and want about their child's happiness at school. And if there are children struggling and schools

## ADRIAN BETHUNE

Vice chair, Well Schools, and primary school teacher



## Measuring wellbeing should not be feared but embraced

don't know who they are, measuring wellbeing can help identify those who need extra support.

But doing so doesn't have to mean extra workload. When I first started measuring wellbeing in school, I found it really stressful. I'm not a statistician,

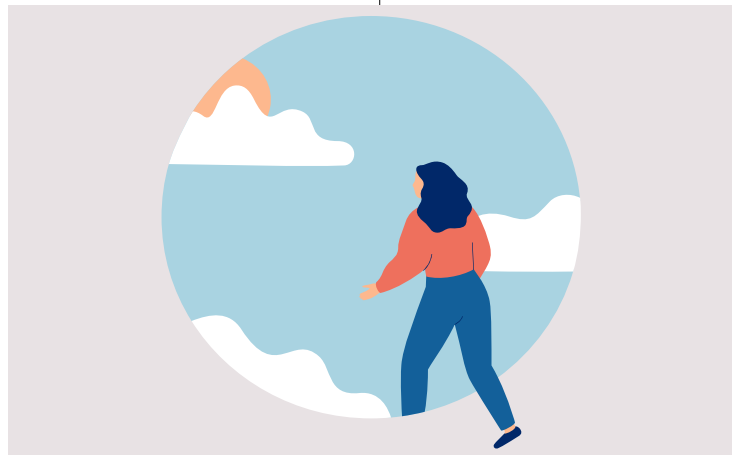
for leadership teams and boards of trustees alike.

That already takes it well beyond 'data for data's sake', but the key to unlocking its potential is to listen to what the results tell you and act on them. Our pupils were least happy

“Unlike exam results, wellbeing isn't a zero-sum game

nor a spreadsheet expert, and making sense of all the data was a nightmare. Now, there are affordable, fit-for-purpose tools that do the work for you, removing stress from the process and providing valuable information

with the school's facilities, so we invested in our playground. They now feel listened to and have better equipment – a wellbeing double-win. We have also created a staff wellbeing team who take ownership of the



actions that come from the survey, as well as focus groups.

## A league of your own

We're all aware of the downside of league tables, and some may fear adding wellbeing to the list. But it doesn't have to be that way. The #BeeWell project, backed by the University of Manchester, is using the same metrics across all schools in the region, and wants to see the project rolled out across the country. That's what happens in the Netherlands and South Australia already, and it's a helpful counterbalance to accountability for exam results.

If you ask children, staff and parents the same questions, you get comparable data that you can learn from together. So I would expect schools to publish the data as we do, because transparency about such an important aspect of school life matters. But it's not a competition. Unlike exam results, wellbeing isn't a zero-sum game. One school's gain is not another's loss!

In any case, schools are already held accountable by Ofsted for staff and pupil wellbeing. So why not have the best data available for inspectors? And why let their report be the only information your community receives on the matter, once every few years?

Many schools do amazing things to enhance the quality of their staff's and pupils' lives. Their achievements ought to be celebrated. Others have toxic cultures that should be challenged. So, while it's natural to have reservations about new technologies, we can't let old ways hold us back.

In fact, measuring wellbeing may be the thing that finally cracks our perennial workload and retention problems.



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## FESTIVAL KEYNOTES ANNOUNCED SO FAR



### **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

*Friday 8th July | 12:15*



### **ADVENTURES IN SOCIAL MOBILITY** **Hashi Mohamed**

Barrister, broadcaster,  
author

*Friday 8th July | 11:15*



### **SAFEGUARDING IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS** **Nazir Afzal OBE**

Former Chief Crown  
Prosecutor for NW England

*Friday 8th July | 14:15*



### **BOTH NOT HALF: FOSTERING BELONGING IN A DIVIDED WORLD** **Jassa Ahluwalia**

Actor, Writer & Filmmaker

*Friday 8th July | 15:30*

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## Reviews

TV  
REVIEW

## Britain's Strictest Headmistress

Producer: ITV

Broadcast date: May 22, 2022

Reviewer: Adam Boxer, head of science, The Totteridge Academy, and director of education, Carousel Learning

I first discovered Michaela Community School over six years ago. I trained to teach in an era of group work, skills-based curriculums and discovery-based learning, and I was a true believer.

Over time, I came to doubt these ideas, and the iconoclastic blogs, books and tweets of Michaela's teachers about knowledge, explicit instruction, retrieval practice and smarter approaches to workload played a huge part in changing me as a practitioner.

By the time I visited Michaela a few years later, I saw my expectations meeting reality: genuinely brilliant teaching, a rigorous and uncompromising curriculum, students desperate to impress and expressing themselves with eloquence and poise. I later paid for my entire department to attend a Michaela CPD conference and we came away full of ideas and inspiration.

So it's safe to say I'm a fan, and yet I confess that I went into this documentary expecting to hate it. I've found some of the public statements that "Britain's strictest headmistress" has made recently needlessly combative, inflammatory and often utterly pointless. Birbalsingh appears intent on contributing to a culture war that benefits nobody but outrage-mongering newspaper editors, and I feared some of that rhetoric might seep into the documentary.

On the other hand, if it was going to hark back to those early Michaela years and present innovative and applicable ideas about education, I was ready to love it.

For better or worse, it was neither.

Birbalsingh was typically blunt about her summation of the education system, but she didn't stray too far into nonsense about decolonisation, silliness about maths being too hard for girls or government flag-waving about what a wonderful place Rwanda is. So, not a lot to hate. But there was nothing about teaching, curriculum or workload either. So I found myself stranded between two poles of excitement and, sadly, quite uninterested.

There were times when I felt the stirrings of righteous fury, but my indignation never graduated past lukewarm. Yes, I find some of the micromanagement around behaviour distasteful. Yes, I find the constant harking back to the 1950s hilariously naïve. Yes, I find the relentless focus on individual responsibility for success and the sidelining of such petty concerns as money, racism and sexism blinkered. And I don't agree with hard binaries like those presented – between authority and chaos, between "racism everywhere" and individual agency, between "being polite" and being "really rude", even between going to Michaela and attending a school in Africa. They are silly and damaging; but emotionally, that's as far as it went. I'd heard it all before.

Maybe it's just me, but I simply don't find Michaela that controversial any more. There are lots of schools with strong approaches to behaviour. Lots that employ explicit instruction and knowledge-rich curriculums. Perhaps not as well as Michaela, but they are at least rowing in the same direction.

Birbalsingh is clearly driven by a sense of mission. She wants to improve her students' lot, but she also wants to "convince the world". Eight years ago, this



documentary would have excited me, challenged me and made me question my philosophies and pedagogies. Now, it just feels a little dated.

The fact is that many schools look to Michaela and say "that's the bar". But reaching that bar is damn hard, and what they need now is not platitudes and lazy binaries but the nuts and bolts of how to do what Michaela did. That's where the real interest lies and where real progress can be made.

The true test of Birbalsingh's legacy will be the impact she has on others. Unlike other highly effective headteachers, she's put herself in the public arena specifically to achieve this. That's her choice, and I don't fault her for it. But if that early period of intellectual foment and creative generation has ceded to hackneyed tropes, she will most definitely fail in the endeavour.

In the meantime, this film neither excites nor angers. It leaves one not with a bang, but with a whimper. Let's hope that's not the fate of the school's legacy.



# Reviews



**Penny Rabiger takes over our 'blogs of the week' slot once every half-term to point to the best of the education podcasts**

@Penny\_Ten

## Inside Education

@Insideed

This is a podcast that describes itself as giving an Irish perspective on education for all who value teaching. Since last week was "international coaching week", I thought I would focus on some of the good and the great in the education and coaching space, and there's nowhere better to start than the episode entitled, 'Coaching for principals with Viv Grant'.

Here, Grant discusses her work through Integrity Coaching with host Sean Delaney. They talk about identifying our stories as school leaders; why school development and human growth and development go hand in hand; why supporting coaching for principals is a good investment for a school; how coaching differs from mentoring; and more. Thought-provoking and affirming stuff.

## Education on Fire

@taylormapps

By complete contrast, it's worth listening to this episode on 'Tough Conversations' with David Wood. Wood has apparently built the "world's largest coaching business" and has overcome all kinds of adversity in his



own life. He talks about being 30 per cent braver through what seems to be a coaching methodology of disciplining one's mind, and which might be drawn from sporting practices of conquering one's body. (Quite a different approach to WomenEd's "ten per cent braver", with which I am more familiar.)

I came to this episode a little apprehensively, knowing how coaching can be approached as a tough-guy, consumerist business connected to self-betterment as a competitive pursuit. In schools, coaching is also sometimes co-opted and misappropriated as a way to crack the whip and increase surveillance of teachers to boost "productivity" and "results". Suffice to say, I found myself wincing throughout, mainly from the lack of self-awareness on show in terms of one's embodied self (race, gender, class, sexuality, disability) and how these interact with how you experience the world and how the world experiences you.

But have a listen, see what you think!

## Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud

@stevebarkley

This podcast explores a whole host of topics, including those related to coaching, and the episode I have chosen is called 'Compassionate Coaching'. The host chats to educators, Kathy Perret and Kenny McKee, who are specialists in a branch of the profession called instructional coaching. In contrast to other coaching models, instructional coaches see themselves as

the coaches of coaching, changing school cultures to be human-centred and to activate learning through compassion and self-knowledge.

Here, Steve Barkley's guests cover the elephant in the room, i.e. that some schools have built what they refer to as coaching programmes that are really something else entirely. One of the recurring criticisms of professional learning is that teachers feel it is one-size-fits-all, when they know the power of metacognition and personal connection for their students. For Perret and McKee, there's really no excuse for it. Constructing goals with teachers is crucial, as is building professional conversations and learning communities across classrooms, districts, regions and globally.

## Being Luminary

@Angela\_Browne

In the spirit of saving the best for last, this podcast is a must-listen, and the episode I have chosen is compelling, compassionate, challenging and cheerful in equal measures. It features two women in conversation who I respect immensely and who are doing powerful work in education, coaching and social justice.

To my mind, the whole point of coaching is not to relentlessly edge us closer to performative goals but to reach into the power of our own narratives, experiences, emerging and iterative understandings of the way the world works, and our place in it as people who can release our own and others' potential for the betterment of the world.

In this episode, host Angela Browne talks to Claire Stewart-Hall, founder of Equitable Coaching. Claire served as a leader in schools in the UK for 20 years in urban areas of economic disadvantage and poverty, and has experience of supporting creativity, positivity and self-organising systems to enable positive cultures to grow. Here, she talks of her own narratives and her work in anti-racist spaces as a researcher, coach and activist.

A powerful listen that'll keep you going until the next international coaching week.

# Research



Manchester Institute of Education will review a research development each half term.  
Contact @EducationUoM if you have a topic you'd like them to explore

## How can we make school transition into an opportunity?

**Dr Elizabeth Gregory, senior tutor,  
University of Manchester**

**A**cademic transitions occur at regular intervals throughout an individual's educational career and represent changes that are often presented as disruptive. The challenges of these changes have been well documented: the move from primary education to secondary at age 11, for example, encompasses a number of significant factors linked to the new environment, including (very often) a much larger building, more teachers, the need to move from classroom to classroom, new rules and different academic and behavioural expectations.

These challenges have been compounded in the past two years by the pandemic, with the majority of students missing substantial amounts of time in the classroom with their teachers and peers. Students who moved into year 7 in the academic year 2021-22, for example, would not have had a "normal" school year since year 4; for learners who transitioned to year 12 in college or sixth-form, year 9 was their last uninterrupted year.

As the transition process involves both academic and social changes, these gaps in schooling represent significant challenges for how well students are prepared for a change of environment. Two years of cancelled examinations only add to these limited opportunities for in-person social interactions.

However, case study research conducted pre-pandemic in a college of further education revealed that while transition can be a time of challenge and anxiety, it can also bring exciting new opportunities.

Interviews were conducted with 16- and 17-year-olds who had recently progressed from studying GCSEs at school to following an A-level or BTEC programme in college,



with participants identifying a number of academic and social benefits that moving to a new educational environment brought. These included a new sense of maturity, often linked to feeling more in control of managing their own workload and having different, more respectful relationships with teachers, as well as the chance to leave behind the "cliques" of high school and make new friendship groups more in keeping with their current sense of self.

Participants expressed an enthusiasm for different teaching methods, with a greater focus on independent, self-directed study and an ability to explore their chosen subject(s) in greater depth.

We should be mindful of doing all we can to preserve these opportunities at a time when government and media focus has largely been directed towards the imperative to "catch up". While content has undeniably been missed or restricted in many areas of the curriculum, this focus produces a deficit model that can only compound the existing challenges of academic transition.

So what can we do to ensure that such periods continue to offer the chance for positivity and growth? One option is to promote and facilitate student communities of practice, allowing learners to develop the social and academic skills that are so crucial

to a successful adaptation to the new environment.

A community of practice exists when a group of people with a shared goal or interest come together to learn how to do it better through their interactions, and while the idea has been around for more than 30 years, the possibilities afforded by combining face-to-face teaching with technology mean that we can now bring learners together in a variety of shared spaces.

Some software packages, for example, allow students to post discussion items and answer each other's questions while the teacher monitors and intervenes as much or as little as necessary. Similarly, building communities of peer-to-peer feedback can arm students with a deeper understanding of the outcomes and standards expected from a piece of work, as well as creating opportunities for meaningful and productive social interactions.

Essentially, student communities of practice allow participants to take more responsibility for their own learning while building valuable relationships with peers, all in a safe and supported environment.

So while there are no quick fixes in beginning to address the effects of the pandemic on schooling, this is one way we can help our learners bridge the gap to the next stage of their education.





Week in

# Westminster

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

## MONDAY

Academies minister Baroness Barran could barely contain her anger when she saw her beloved schools bill criticised.

Responding to a tweet from deputy head Jonathan Mountstevens which described the bill as a "long way from the original spirit of the academies and free schools movement and odd for a party of small government", Barran simply posted an emoji with steam coming from its nostrils.

The tweet was very promptly deleted, suggesting it was either posted by accident or was meant to be a private message. Maybe the minister wanted to flag up the tweet with her team?!

Still, it may point to a wider sensitivity among ministers about the legislation, given the widespread criticism since its publication.

Former education ministers from both Labour and the Tories lined up to criticise the bill's overreach this week, and Week in Westminster understands the government is already considering tabling its own amendments to water down its powers when the bill gets to committee stage.

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Former academies minister Lord Nash was very supportive of the Conservative government's white paper plans for an all multi-academy trust system. As a founder of the Future Academies trust, he said in a Lords debate on the schools bill that working together brings benefits

through economies of scale, improving career development opportunities and reducing teacher workload.

Great news all round then? Er, no. Nasher was NOT happy this would mean his very cushy but outdated funding agreement – giving him and other members way more power than the government now says they should have – would be revoked.

By imposing a new, universal set of academy standards, he said the government was "effectively seeking to tear up many of the existing funding agreements, which are clear contractual arrangements, and to give themselves the power to tear up the rest of them for any breach whatever, apparently, and replace them with vague and draconian powers".

The government's "strong preference" on academy governance is for trusts to have five members, Future has four (two of whom are Nash and his wife, Lady Caroline).

Meanwhile, Future also flouts the academies financial handbook's "strong preference" that a majority of members are independent of the board of trustees.

According to the most recent accounts, Nash and his wife are also trustees (with Lord Nash chairing the board).

## TUESDAY

It is not just the government's schools reforms that are under intense scrutiny at the moment.

Witnesses were called this week to brief the education select committee on the government's SEND green

paper, which was released in late March.

It has hardly gone swimmingly so far. Ministers were forced to extend the consultation period recently following massive delays to the publication of accessible versions of the documents. You would think, given the subject matter, this would be something they would be at pains to get right...

And the government's flagship reforms were hardly given a ringing endorsement this week when witnesses were asked by MPs to rate the reforms out of 10.

Its highest score? A generous four to five...

## WEDNESDAY

Fans of legal drama Suits in the academies sector will be delighted by the DfE's latest offer – a "regulatory mock trial".

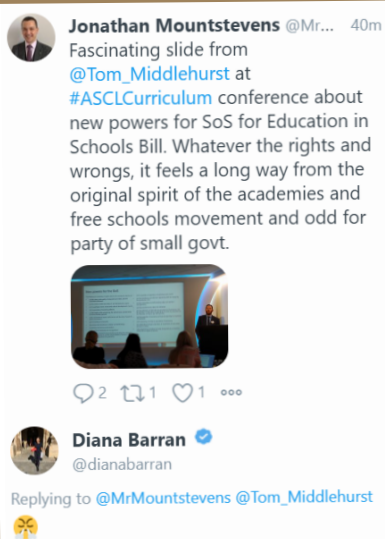
The "bespoke training seminar" is "designed to assist governors, trustees, directors and members of senior leadership teams to understand the challenges they face in implementing compliant health and safety management systems, enhance the prospects of avoiding enforcement action and improve the school's defensive capabilities where a prosecution is pursued".

Paging Harvey Specter.

## THURSDAY

The DfE is clearly struggling to manage ministers' mailboxes. With several landmark reforms on the go at the moment, it makes sense that they might find themselves in high demand.

To help ease the pressure, the DfE is seeking four "ministerial correspondence drafters". We suspect they will have their work cut out!





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In the first instance please submit your CV to Louise Birch, Head of Human Resources at [l.birch@chi.ac.uk](mailto:l.birch@chi.ac.uk) or if you would like to have an informal discussion please telephone (01243) 793503 to arrange a suitable time. You may also be interested in visiting our websites, <https://www.fbacademy.co.uk> and [www.unicat.org.uk](http://www.unicat.org.uk)

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Interview: Day 2 Tuesday 21st June 2022**



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- 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](http://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.

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