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Poor pupils lose school meal vouchers after poverty surge

- Cash-strapped councils scrap holiday meal vouchers
- Nearly a quarter of all pupils now on free school meals
- Lack of cash leaves choice between pensioners or kids

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

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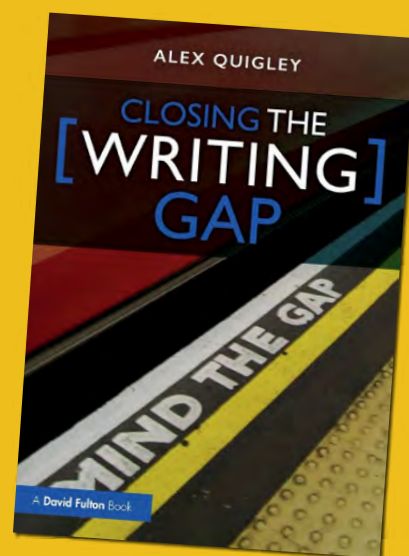
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NEWS

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Holiday meal support disappears as poverty numbers surge

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Hard-up families face a “postcode lottery” in free school meal support during holidays after one in five councils has scrapped voucher schemes started during the pandemic.

A Schools Week investigation found changes to government cost of living grants and rising numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals have forced town halls to rethink their support.

Of 50 councils that responded to our enquiries, nine have stopped providing weekly vouchers entirely. A further five have reduced the amount on offer over the summer.

It comes as new figures show a rise of a third in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals, now totalling almost 1.9 million.

James Turner, chief executive of the Sutton Trust, said: “Over the pandemic, children and young people have faced enormous challenges – both in terms of wellbeing and attainment – so it is more vital than ever that this support is available.”

He said the emerging “postcode lottery in school holiday FSM vouchers is a concern”.

‘Vouchers no longer sustainable’

York council scrapped weekly vouchers, saying the annual £750,000 cost is “not affordable without further government funding”. Families can apply for help through a different scheme.

Birmingham has also ended its £1.25 million-a-week voucher scheme, with council leader Ian Ward telling local media it was “not sustainable” without more cash. Funding will instead be spent on “hardship grants” for free school meal households and holiday clubs.

A national free school meal voucher scheme was launched in spring 2020 following the closure of schools to most pupils.

Although ministers initially refused to extend the scheme over holiday periods, they eventually reneged following a high-profile campaign led by footballer Marcus Rashford.

Direct funding for holiday meal vouchers was stopped in late 2020, with vouchers having cost £384 million since the scheme began.

Since then, councils have received other government funding – such as the £170 million Covid winter support grant and the subsequent £921 million



household support fund. But these are to fund wider support for communities, not just free school meals for children.

Choice of helping pensioners or kids

Approached about the problems faced by some councils, the government pointed to its holiday activities and food programme and household support funding.

But the HAF programme only covers four weeks of the summer holiday. And support is only available to those who sign up.

The household support scheme also became more restrictive in April, with a third of funding ringfenced for vulnerable pensioners.

Hampshire council got £7.1 million for the April to September period. But providing free school meals alone would cost £5.3 million.

“Even allocating two-thirds to families with children would not cover the cost of the vouchers during this period and doing so would leave little to nothing for households who are pensioners or who did not have children,” a spokesperson said.

Some replacement schemes by councils are close to or more generous than the previous weekly schemes, worth £90 over a six-week summer break.

Cornwall council will now provide single payments equivalent to £80 per child. Lincolnshire council will issue “one-off grants” of £95.

But other schemes are less generous.

Peterborough council said it had to reduce the value of vouchers to £45 for the summer because of the changes to government

grants.

Windsor and Maidenhead provided £20 vouchers for each eligible child in the May half term. But vouchers in the summer will be a “minimum” value of £55.

450k more pupils now on free meals

Some councils also said rising free school meal rates were affecting affordability.

New government census figures show 22.5 per cent of pupils in England are now eligible for free school meals, though eligibility is as high as 29.1 per cent in some regions.

The Department for Education said the 9 per cent increase in eligibility between January 2021 and 2022 was “in line with those increases seen prior to the pandemic”, following a much larger 21 per cent increase between 2020 and 2021.

Taken together, the two increases since January 2020 mean over 450,000 more pupils are now eligible for free school meals, a rise of 32 per cent over two years.

Some councils, like Nottingham, are still finalising summer plans.

The council said the latest funding was “not sufficient to fully fund the whole of the summer holiday period in the same way as has previously been done”.

Coventry council is also exploring its options, but councillor Kindy Sandhu said: “With the cost of living crisis hitting our most vulnerable residents, now is the time for government to support our families who are most in need.”

Ealing councillor Bassam Mahfouz said: “We demand that government commit to funding FSM so families can afford to put food on the table.”



Marcus Rashford

SPEED READ

Vacancies rise and retention worsens as Covid effect wears off

Thousands more teachers are leaving the profession as the pandemic's effect wears off, new figures suggest, with vacancies at their highest level in more than a decade.

Official census data on the school workforce, collected last November and published yesterday, also shows more newly qualified teachers leaving within a year.

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of teaching union NEU, said figures indicated "serious and deep-rooted teacher recruitment and retention problems remain".

1 TEACHER DEPARTURES UP 12.4%

The number of teachers leaving last year jumped by 12.4 per cent, with 4,000 more departures in 2020-21 than in the previous year. Some 36,262 staff (8.1 per cent of all teachers) left the state-funded sector.

However, this is still lower than the 9.4 per cent in 2018-19 before the pandemic, with Covid boosting both recruitment and retention.

To make matters worse, only 11 per cent of those leaving were retiring, whereas one-third of those leaving in 2010-11 were retirees.

Workforce expert Jack Worth noted more primary teachers were leaving than secondary for the first time ever. Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic minority background teachers were also more likely to leave than white peers.

2...AND UPTICK AGAIN IN NEW TEACHERS LEAVING

Among newly qualified teachers, the number who left within one year rose from 11.7 per cent in 2020, to 12.5 per cent last year.

Again, this is still below the pre-pandemic levels (it was 14.6 per cent in 2019). Meanwhile, both the two-year and five-year retention rates improved year-on-year.

But Worth notes: "These leaving decisions were taken just after the spring 2021 school closures and before the wider labour market really took off and recovered strongly when restrictions were lifted. So no big surprise that numbers aren't higher, but they may be next year."

The DfE itself has also predicted a Covid-delayed exodus.

3 TEACHER VACANCIES HIGHEST SINCE AT LEAST 2010

One signal that the exodus may have begun is in total teacher vacancies, which have jumped 42 per cent in a year to 1,600. It followed small declines over the previous two years.

It means vacancies are now at the highest level since recent records began in 2010-11.

Classroom teacher vacancies hit 1,368 last November, up 45.5 per cent on 2020 and almost four times higher than the 355 vacancies in 2010-11.

Vacancies for "all leadership" posts hit 196, also a record high

4 PAY GROWTH FOR TEACHERS OUTSTRIPS THAT OF HEADS

The average classroom teacher's salary of £38,982 was only 1.4 per cent higher last November than a year earlier. While heads' average pay was £74,095, it marked only a 0.8 per cent rise.

"The government plans more real-terms cuts to teacher pay, adding to the cuts of around one-fifth since 2010," said NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney.

Men continue to generally out-earn women, with secondary heads earning £3,698 more. Significant exceptions include primary classroom teachers, where women earn £655 more on average.

But the DfE says average pay levels should not be used to indicate pay awards, partly as factors like better-paid older staff retiring, and being replaced by less well-paid new teachers, could drag down average pay.

5 SECONDARY CLASS SIZES SWELL BY TWO PUPILS

The average secondary school teacher taught 16.7 pupils, similar to last year but up from 14.8 in 2010-11. Officials noted rising secondary pupil numbers since 2016.

Primary pupil numbers per teacher remain similar at 20.4 in 2010-11 and 20.6 in 2021-22, though Courtney noted this came in spite of primary pupil numbers falling.

"This adds to the already critical problems caused by excessive workload," he said.

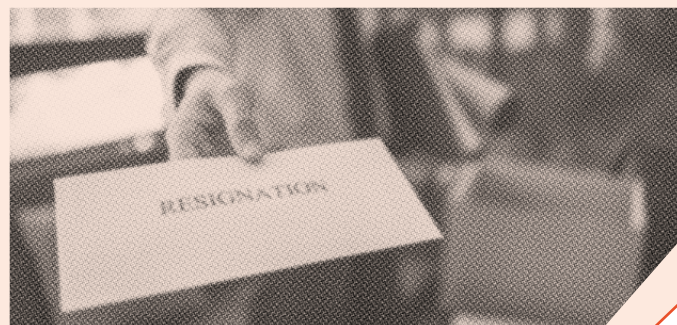
6 ETHNIC DIVERSITY INCREASES, SLOWLY

The ethnic diversity of the teaching workforce continued to increase last year, with 14.9 per cent of staff identifying as ethnic minorities, up from 11.2 per cent in 2010-11.

But diversity remains significantly below the national average, with 21.5 per cent of working-age people in England identifying as ethnic minorities.

"White British" teachers remain more likely to lead, making up 15.3 per cent of leaders compared to 8.1 per cent of "Asian or Asian British" teachers.

A recent National Foundation for Educational Research study found ethnic minority candidates are also less likely to be accepted on to teacher training despite "clear and obvious interest" in the profession.



NEWS

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'Serious risk of imminent failure': Third of schools need 'immediate' repairs

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

Almost one-third of school buildings include materials either at the end of their shelf life or that pose a "serious risk of imminent failure", official figures reveal.

Data shows more than 7,100 schools were given the worst possible rating for at least one aspect of their buildings during the Department for Education's last full condition data collection (CDC).

Surveyors rated the "construction type" of parts of buildings on an A-D scale, such as slate for a pitched roof.

D is the worst, meaning "life expired and/or serious risk of imminent failure", and that "immediate" repairs or replacement are needed – whereas other issues can be left for years.

It comes after the Observer reported last month that civil servants had warned Downing Street some sites were a "risk to life", and demanded £13 billion for repairs.

"Conservative ministers are ignoring warnings from their own officials that some buildings are unsafe," said Liberal Democrat education spokesperson Munira Wilson.

She obtained the figures after a parliamentary question last month. In response, schools minister Robin Walker said the department did not "know of" any potentially fatal risks at open schools.

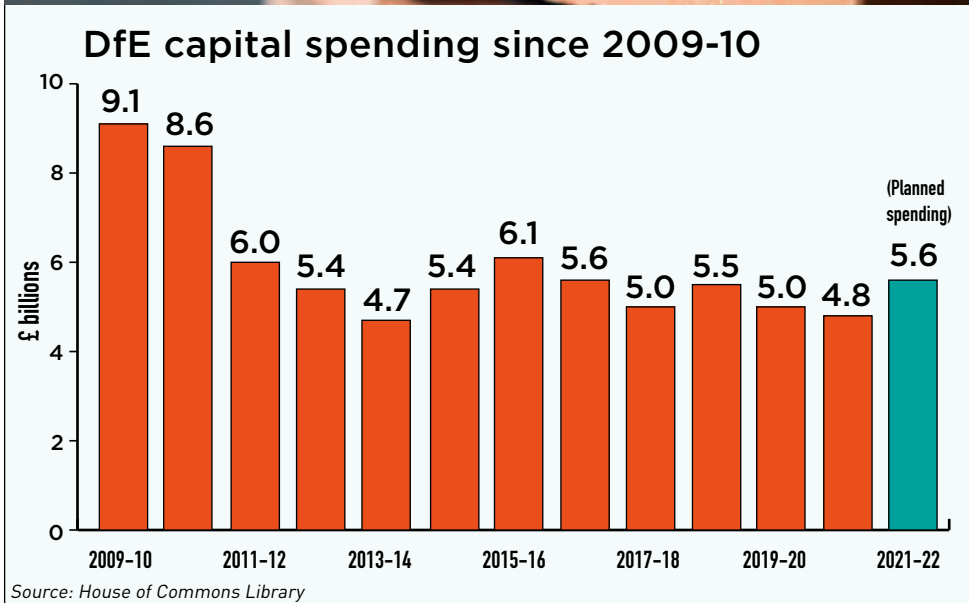
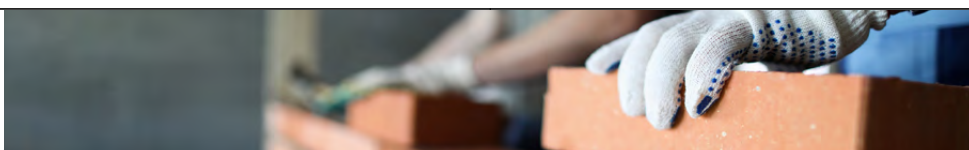
But the figures show 32 per cent of schools visited for condition checks between 2017 and 2019 were given a D rating for the "construction type" of at least one aspect of the building.

Every single council – bar City of London and the Isles of Scilly, the two smallest – had at least four schools requiring urgent work.

Some 127 had at least 20 schools in need, and 15 had more than 100 schools. Lancashire, Kent, Hertfordshire, Derbyshire and Birmingham had the greatest number of schools affected, though this appears likely to reflect their size as some of the largest authorities.

Wilson noted 16 schools were affected in education secretary Nadhim Zahawi's own constituency of Stratford-upon-Avon.

The DfE stressed it did not mean that one-third of school buildings were flawed, and that "construction type" could cover light fittings, decorations or doors.



But the Guardian previously revealed that one in six schools had major areas – such as electrics, roofs or ceilings – requiring immediate action.

The government is coming under increasing pressure to up its spend on school maintenance.

Some six per cent of the school estate dates back to before the year 1900. But capital spend this year is down 29 per cent in real terms on 2009-10.

Last month Evolution Academy Trust announced plans to permanently relocate Angel Road Junior School in Norwich, built in the 1800s. School documents state this followed three partial ceiling collapses since February 2020, when material fell into halls and a classroom. It also suffers from damp, "unsatisfactory" windows and a canteen "beyond life expectancy". The trust says it can "no longer guarantee the safety of pupils, staff and visitors".

Meanwhile a Merseyside MP demanded government renovation cash for Lydiat Primary School last month, saying the head's office had collapsed and roofs were leaking. Safety concerns even forced it to temporarily close in 2019.

Evolution and the primary both declined to comment.

Emma Knights, chief executive of the National Governance Association, said it was a "big deal" that managing and improving premises had jumped into governors' top five strategic priorities

in a member poll last year.

Four in ten governors raised it, second only to pupil mental well-being and ahead of behaviour, recruitment and SEND support.

Even some new buildings face significant problems.

"This £32 million school is 11 years old, and we've not had a year without a significant building failing," said Glyn Potts, head of Newman RC College in Chadderton, Greater Manchester.

Ceiling panels were recently removed in several classrooms and hallways to stop them collapsing. "They were so frequently sodden in water they'd fall on children or staff. They turn to mush and there's no strong risk of harm, but there is of embarrassment."

He called for a government "fact-finding mission" about the state of schools like his, built and maintained through private finance initiative (PFI) deals in recent decades.

A DfE spokesperson said safety was "paramount", with £13 billion spent on condition improvement since 2015. A school rebuilding programme will transform 500 schools over the next decade, prioritising safety issues, she added.

The DfE did not say how many issues found in the CDC had since been rectified. Walker said the latest CDC was under way, with more details promised later this year.

NEWS

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Zahawi says government 'can do better' as thousands of Ukraine refugees not in school

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

A “sizeable number” of Ukrainian children who have arrived in England are still not in school, the government has admitted.

But schools and councils have been praised for their “herculean efforts” in offering almost 10,000 places for children so far, around 87 per cent of those who have applied.

The government said it would “use the data to make sure all school-age children from Ukraine are getting a good education”.

For the first time, the Department for Education has published data on the number of children arriving from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong who have applied for and been offered school places.

The government estimates that out of 11,400 applications from Ukrainian children, 9,900 school places have been offered. However, this is based on responses from 77 per cent of councils, with the data adjusted for non-responses.

The DfE said 6,300 of the places offered to Ukrainian pupils were in primary schools, while 3,500 were in secondary schools.

However, the DfE admitted a “sizeable number” of Ukrainian children who have arrived in this country have not yet applied for or been offered school places.

Thousands of Ukrainian pupils still without school places

More than 60,000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in England since Russia's invasion, with around one in three understood to be under the age of 18. However, this figure is for the whole of the UK and also includes under-fives.

The education secretary Nadhim Zahawi previously pledged to “welcome 100,000 Ukrainian children into schools across the country”.

The DfE said there were “several reasons why a family with school-age children may not have made an application immediately”.

For example, they may only have recently arrived or may be doing remote learning of the Ukrainian curriculum. Some children may also have applied for further education.

The department also pointed out that in Ukraine,



compulsory schooling starts at seven, “so some families may be unaware that compulsory school age starts at five in the UK”.

The Ukrainian school year also ends on June 1, so “some families may be unaware the UK school year has not yet ended”.

For children waiting for an offer, local authorities and schools “will be working on the process of finding a suitable place within 15 school days”. But these will be at different stages in the process “depending on the date of new arrivals”.

The DfE estimated that 300 Ukrainian children were still waiting for an offer 15 days after their application.

Zahawi pledges ‘herculean’ effort

Zahawi said yesterday he “cannot praise enough the herculean effort made by schools and local authorities to support Ukrainian families fleeing from their home country, and I would urge them to keep going.”

“This data is encouraging, but more importantly it shows us how we can do better for these children and ensure that all children arriving here have access to a good education.”

The ten council areas with the highest number of offers contributed to over a

'I woke up from some missiles hitting the city and explosions'



Schools offer refuge to Ukrainian families fleeing war

Three page special pages 12-14

quarter of the total places offered.

In areas with higher concentrations, the DfE said it was maintaining an “open dialogue, to ensure that it can understand better the pressures in those local authorities and support them to resolve any issues they may be facing”.

In areas with lower concentration, the DfE said it would “monitor whether local authorities need to scale up operations so they can quickly offer school places in-year”.

“The government wants parents with children arriving from Ukraine to be able to apply for a school place and have their children start school as soon as possible, rather than waiting until the start of the new academic year in September,” the DfE added.

Meanwhile, of 5,500 applications made by Afghan children, 5,400 offers have been made, while 8,500 applications by children from Hong Kong has so far resulted in 8,000 offers. Again, these figures are adjusted for non-responses.



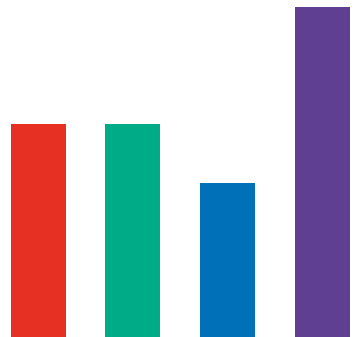
Nadhim Zahawi

A smiling male teacher with glasses, wearing a light blue shirt and a patterned tie, is shown in a classroom setting. He is looking towards the left, and his hands are visible as if he is gesturing or writing. In the background, there are colorful letters 'D' and 'M' on the wall.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

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Former RSC is new DfE academies tsar

Former regional schools commissioner John Edwards will lead the Department for Education's powerful new "regions group", overseeing government schools policy.

Edwards, currently interim chief executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency, announced yesterday he had been appointed as the first director-general for the regions group, which will replace the current system of RSCs.

A former director of education in Manchester, Edwards was RSC for the East Midlands and the Humber from 2017 to 2020. He became the ESFA's interim chief last July following the resignation of Eileen Milner.

Warwick Sharp, the ESFA's current director of academies and maintained schools, will step up as interim CEO from next Monday. David Withey will take up the role permanently in August.

The appointment comes after Dominic



Herrington, the current national schools commissioner, revealed he was moving to a job at the Ministry of Justice, suggesting he either did not put himself forward or was unsuccessful in applying for the director-general role.

In his new post, Edwards will oversee nine regional directors, who will replace the current eight RSCs. The DfE recently confirmed the creation of a specific London region, to bring its operations in line with

other departments and agencies.

The new regions group will provide "integrated delivery for schools and local authorities, including children's social care and special educational needs and disabilities".

Edwards said he was "delighted and humbled" and was "looking forward to working with all colleagues and partners, nationally and regionally. Been a privilege to be interim CEO of the ESFA – huge thanks to all the brilliant colleagues I've worked with."

Withey, the next permanent ESFA chief, will move to the job from Australia where he is currently chief operating officer and deputy secretary at the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education.

[Full story here](#)

£150k CEO wanted for new NIoT

The National Institute of Teaching is searching for a £150,000-a-year chief executive to "leverage the untapped potential in the system" and boost outcomes for pupils.

The national teacher training organisation was finally announced last month. It will be run by four leading academy trusts: Harris, Outwood Grange, Oasis and Star.

A job advert for its first permanent chief executive reveals it expects to have a network of 10,000 schools – with other trusts also partners.

The flagship programme, handed £121 million government funding, wants someone who is "well connected into the education system and have a proven track record in order for us to lead an authentic school-led organisation".

It adds the role is a "wonderful, and potentially once-in-a-lifetime,



opportunity to build organisational culture from the ground up, through the recruitment and development of expert talent, and the design of systems and structures which

result in highly positive societal and educational outcomes for children".

Melanie Renowden, executive director at Star Academies, is currently acting as founding chief executive.

Alongside training new teachers, the NIoT will deliver the early career framework, national professional qualifications and national leader of education training.

However, the rollout of some training has been delayed until next year after a legal spat between the government and rival bidders Ambition Institute caused delays.

[Full story here](#)

'Pupil swap' to deliver tutor targets

The government is asking schools to consider extending tutoring sessions beyond one hour or providing multiple courses per week to complete "as many [tutoring] packages as possible before the end of August".

School leaders were also advised in a Department for Education email to consider splitting the 15-hour tutoring packages between two pupils to ensure courses are delivered.

It comes as ministers scramble to reach the distant target to deliver two million tutoring courses under the struggling National Tutoring Programme this year.

Latest figures show that just under 1.2 million tutoring courses have been started since September – leaving the government 40 per cent off its promise.

However, the suggestion schools do not need to deliver 15 hours of tutoring for each pupil seems to go against the evidence on tuition.

A study that found tutoring boosted outcomes in maths was based on pupils completing 12 hours of tuition, spaced out as weekly, hour-long sessions.

But the email to schools says leaders may consider "allowing pupil swapping to increase the benefit of support to those pupils who need it the most".

This means schools can "divide the 15-hour package between two pupils depending on need, with one pupil receiving ten hours and the second pupil receiving five hours".

The DfE also reiterated that schools could run tuition through the summer.

[Full story here](#)

NEWS

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Harris pops to Dunelm for new (vice) chair

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

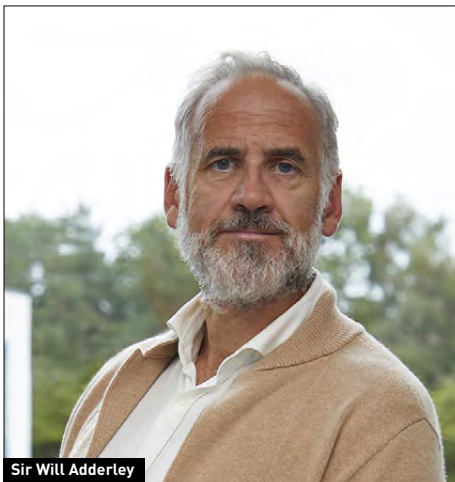
A director of furniture retailer Dunelm has become a trustee of an academy chain set up by a former Carpetright boss.

Sir Will Adderley, son of Dunelm founder Sir Bill Adderley, has been named as the new vice-chair of the Harris Federation's board. Harris runs 51 schools in London and Essex.

The academy trust was set up in 2007 by Lord Harris of Peckham, a Conservative peer and donor who served as chair of Carpetright until 2014.

According to the firm's website, Adderley is currently vice-chair of Dunelm. Last year he announced plans to sell a 7.4 per cent stake in the retailer, though the firm said at the time he was "fully committed" to his role.

Sources suggested this was linked to Lord Harris's succession planning, with Adderley touted as a potential successor.



Sir Will Adderley

But a Harris spokesperson said it was "categorically untrue" that its founder was planning to retire.

Lord Harris, his wife Lady Pauline Harris and son Peter Harris are currently the three controlling members of the academy trust. Lord Harris also serves as a trustee and the chain's chair.

A Harris Federation spokesperson said: "We are delighted that Sir Will Adderley has

joined our board as vice-chair, replacing Ros Wilton, our previous vice chair, who gave ten years of outstanding service."

As well as being one of England's largest academy trusts, Harris has the highest-paid chief executive of any academy chain in the country.

Sir Dan Moynihan earned £455,000 in 2020-21. Accounts state that three other unnamed staff at the trust earned over £210,000, including one person on £300,000-£310,000.

Schools Week revealed in 2017 that government records showed former academies minister Lord Nash met with representatives of Dunelm to "discuss potential academy sponsorship".

However, Dunelm said at the time it was "unable to confirm" whether the meeting had even taken place.

The company said it was also "also unable to confirm whether we are or are not looking into sponsoring academies", though the DfE said at the time there were "no plans for Dunelm to sponsor any academies".

JAMES CARR | @JAMESCARR_93

Government promises new schools and sixth forms

The government has pledged to create up to 14,000 school places in up to 75 new free schools, including new special schools, alternative provision and "elite" sixth forms.

In the next wave of free school applications, the Department for Education said it would approve up to 60 special and AP free schools to open from September 2025, creating around 4,500 places.

Another 15 mainstream schools – including "a number" of "high-quality" standalone sixth forms – will be targeted in the government's 55 education investment areas.

It follows a pledge by the government to open "elite" sixth forms in left-behind areas. Ministers want to emulate the success of existing institutions like

Harris Westminster Sixth Form and Sir Isaac Newton Sixth Form Free School in Norwich.

Star Academies and Eton College recently announced plans to bid to open three academic sixth form free schools in Dudley, Middlesbrough and Oldham.

The DfE said the sixth forms would be "designed to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds fulfil their potential".

Councils will be able to bid for new special schools, while AP free schools will be prioritised in areas where no existing AP is rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.

Expressions of interest are being sought for new mainstream schools in areas where there's a "clear demographic need for additional places".

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NEWS

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AQA geography GCSE 'inaccessible' to colour-blind candidate

JAMES CARR

@JAMESCARR_93

The country's largest exam board has been criticised for creating an "avoidable problem" with a GCSE question "inaccessible" to colour-blind pupils, even though the board had engaged in talks to improve accessibility.

AQA's geography paper last month featured a question that included a coloured map and key to explain details required to answer the question.

But teachers and campaigners warn such practice places pupils with a colour vision deficiency (CVD) at a disadvantage.

One in 12 boys and one in 200 girls are believed to have CVD. It affects on average one child in every UK classroom.

Exam boards have access arrangements in place for CVD pupils, but campaigners warn the majority are undiagnosed so do not apply for support.

Kathryn Albany-Ward, founder of Colour Blind Awareness (CBA), said: "All exam papers should be designed to be accessible to colour-blind children as a matter of course".

The charity estimates around 11,700 geography pupils sitting GCSE and A-levels this year could be colour-blind.

Watchdog discuss concerns with AQA

Dr Ben King, a geography teacher at Churston Ferrers Grammar School in Brixham, criticised AQA's "very poor colour choices".

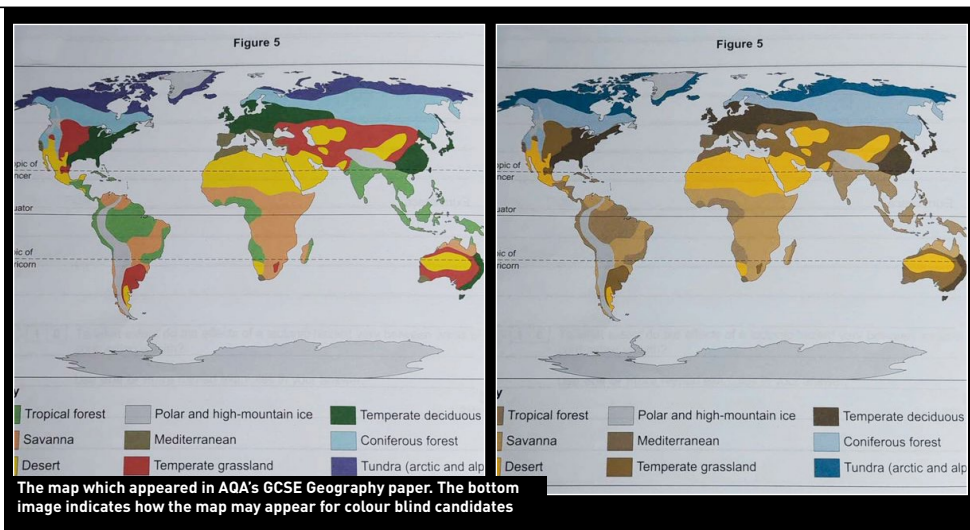
While the question only accounted for a small number of marks, this "could make the difference between grade boundaries" and leave pupils "feeling lost" for the remainder of the exam, he said.

Lucy Doyle, a geography lead based in the north-west, tweeted that the question had "been an issue for a student of mine".

Ofqual, the exams regulator, told *Schools Week* it had discussed concerns regarding the question with AQA. However, it would not reveal the nature of the discussion.

In 2017, *Schools Week* reported that exam papers produced by Edexcel, AQA and OCR featured questions which relied on colours to explain details.

Ofqual stated at the time that boards were required to "minimise bias in assessment". But its stance was not made explicit until fresh guidance was published last month.



New rules to crackdown on use of colour

Ofqual now says exams "should only require learners to distinguish between colours where this is central to the measurement of the assessment construct", such as differentiating the colours of electrical wires.

Instead, patterns, shading or hatching should be used to distinguish between sections of an image. Boards have been given six months to review their approach.

AQA said staff with colour blindness check papers for accessibility and it offers access arrangements such as a colour namer or coloured overlays for CVD pupils.

It added the papers were produced long before Ofqual's latest guidance, but it will apply the new rules to future papers.

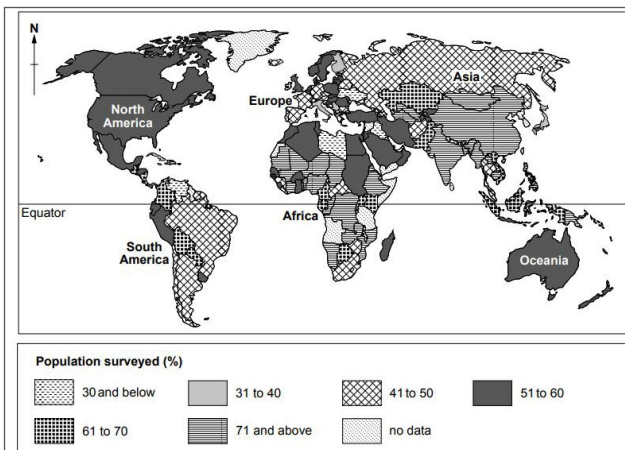
Any pupil who feels unfairly disadvantaged by their visual impairment is advised to speak to a teacher who can contact AQA on their behalf, the board added.

But Albany-Ward said the charity has raised the issue with all exam boards since 2018 via Ofqual's Access Consultation Forum. CBA estimates there are around 450,000 colour-blind pupils in UK schools.

Offer of help not taken up

Fellow exam board OCR said the majority of its papers are printed in black and white, but its geography paper contains sections with colour.

"Tailored exam material" was provided for pupils with CVD for the first time this summer, OCR said.



An example from Eduqas on a potential solution for exam boards when using maps in their papers

Pearson said it has worked to make its "standard question papers accessible to everyone regardless of their accessibility needs".

In May last year, CBA and exam board WJEC Eduqas guidance on producing accessible assessments for CVD pupils highlighted potential monochrome solutions, and said all its papers this year, including geography, follow this approach.

A spokesperson for Ordnance Survey, which has provided map extracts for exam boards for decades, said it has spoken to boards about producing extracts tailored to red-green and blue-yellow CVD, as well as a monochrome alternatives.

However, a spokesperson said, "No exam board has ever asked us to provide extracts for CVD candidates."

Steve Brace, head of education at the Royal Geographical Society, called on all exam boards to address the "avoidable problem".

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Birbalsingh promises social mobility rethink

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLS WEEK

Katharine Birbalsingh has pledged to help people “taking smaller steps” up the social mobility ladder, rather than the “Dick Whittington” minority.

In her inaugural speech as the Social Mobility Commission chair, the Michaela School headteacher signalled a move away from focusing on the “big leap upward mobility, from bottom to top in one generation”. She called this the “Dick Whittington model”.

Instead, she vowed to focus on those taking “small steps up the ladder – from the bottom and from the middle rung”.

“If a child of parents who were long-term unemployed, or who never worked, gets a job in their local area, isn’t that a success worth celebrating?” she told an event hosted by think tank Policy Exchange.

“Would we really want to say that it doesn’t count as mobility, simply because they’re not an



Katharine Birbalsingh

accountant or lawyer? I mean, do we all want to be lawyers? I certainly don’t want to be a lawyer.”

She criticised focusing on a “one size fits all model for social mobility, which tends to consider higher education expansion as the key means of improving opportunity”.

Birbalsingh vowed to explore the opportunities for those “who will not access the elite pathway – who this model often leaves behind”.

She will look at helping youngsters not going to university but who “still need a route to high skills and good occupational opportunities”.

She also highlighted youngsters at the “very

bottom – particularly those with low levels of basic literacy and numeracy”, as well as looking at local opportunities and outcomes.

Birbalsingh also promised a need for “clearer definition and measurements of social mobility”, saying she will publish the “best scientific measures of actual social mobility outcomes, looking at the same person’s starting and ending point”.

“We will also be revisiting the conditions that help or hinder social mobility and tracking outcomes in early adulthood.

“The aim is to present a more nuanced picture, from which we can be more focused in our analysis and understanding of what works well and what does not.”

She said the social mobility picture is “more encouraging than people have come to expect. There are some significant improvements and – very often – a narrowing of gaps between disadvantaged groups and everyone else.”

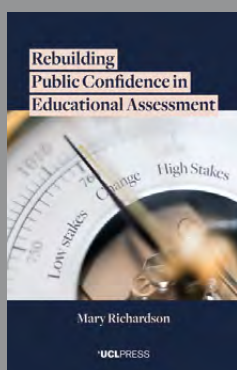
Education will be one of her three focus areas, including more about how to “help families and parents”.

See cartoon on page 18

UCLPRESS

Rebuilding Public Confidence in Educational Assessment

Mary Richardson



Essential reading for anyone with an interest in educational assessment, and free to download, *Rebuilding Public Confidence in Educational Assessment* by Mary Richardson (UCL IOE) uses examples from international settings to explore the nature of confidence and trust in assessment discourses.

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A new special school in Gloucestershire: seeking an inclusive and aspirational MAT

Gloucestershire County Council has launched a free school presumption competition (under Section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) in order to identify a suitable academy trust to run a new 60 place special school for children aged 4-11 years with Moderate and Additional Learning Difficulties to open in September 2023.

We are seeking applications from trusts with a proven track record in securing good outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and who can work closely with the local community in establishing this new school, to operate from an existing school building which is bursting with potential.

The full specification document is available on the Gloucestershire County Council website and the closing date for applications is **12pm on Monday 27 June 2022**.

[View Specification](#)

Interested trusts are invited to contact Nathan Roe, Gloucestershire County Council's Education Planning Manager for further details ahead of applications being submitted.

nathan.roe@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Tel: 01452 427262

NEWS

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Trust vows to let Holland Park keep hefty reserves

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

England's largest academy trust, United Learning, has promised Holland Park School it will not touch its hefty financial reserves when it joins, amid a fierce backlash over the transfer.

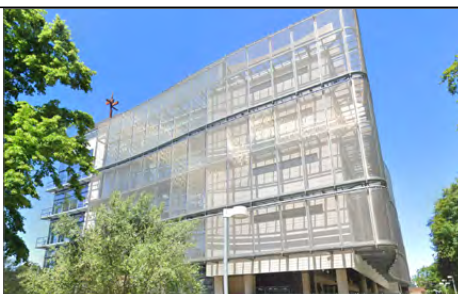
The board of the standalone school, recently at the centre of a bullying and discrimination scandal, requested government sign-off for the transfer this week.

It came hours after teachers' union NEU revealed it was backing parents' High Court bid to block the move, claiming the west London secondary's consultation was flawed.

Most of those consulted about the move did not support the United Learning transfer, according to a letter seen by *Schools Week*.

The board's letter to parents said Holland Park would retain its "distinctive identity". United Learning will allow it to keep its reserves, uniform and two elected parent governors.

Such commitments are understood to be relatively normal at United Learning, but can vary



school by school.

Most trusts do not pool income or reserves as it is a "sensitive issue", but it is increasingly common, according to Kreston's latest academy benchmarking report.

Holland Park's accounts from last summer show it ended the year £1.03 million in surplus, with "substantial" reserves of £3.26 million.

It is the 20th largest pot of any single-academy trust nationwide, almost five times higher than the average SAT.

But Holland Park currently faces strict government spending controls. Regulators claim it failed to ensure "regularity and propriety" and ordered it to rein in executive pay.

Four staff earned £120,000 or more last year,

including now-departed head Colin Hall on £280,000-a-year.

A spokesperson said it had addressed most financial issues and would "shortly" address executive pay.

A new head is also starting in September, Steve Parsons, while trust member Vic Daniel will soon replace Jane Farrell as chair.

Holland Park plans new middle leadership posts too to improve pastoral care after a damning independent report last month. It found "overt" sexism, Islamophobia, racism, students publicly humiliated, and even Ofsted being misled.

But the past week has seen not only a three-day walkout by staff, but also campaigners seeking a judicial review.

They claim case law shows consultation must happen at a formative stage, and consider alternatives. They argue consultation was flawed, happening only after decisions to join a MAT and choose United Learning as a preferred partner were made.

One employee said teachers felt "ignored" over the plans, even after striking.

A trust spokesperson said consultation had been "comprehensive" however, with "numerous opportunities for stakeholders to be involved".

TOM BELGER | @TOM_BELGER

Scrutiny forces Castle Trust to backtrack on payouts

An academy trust with one school has reversed plans to hand senior leaders payouts totalling £309,000 when it shuts down, after facing government scrutiny.

Schools Week reported last year that the Castle Trust had set aside "restructuring costs" including £150,000 remuneration for its chief executive, Karen White, despite failing to approve a balanced budget.

It received a financial notice to improve after recording a £1.1 million deficit, which forced regulators into two urgent bailouts.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency said it had "failed to demonstrate value for money" or downsize quickly enough.

It faces closure after the government scrapped its free school plans and rebrokered "inadequate" Delce Academy in Kent, with trustees then agreeing to give up its last school, Greenway Academy in West Sussex.

Now the trust's latest accounts reveal the

restructuring pot "is no longer required" – as the individuals concerned have resigned or retired.

The trust declined to specify which staff had been in line for restructuring payments and quit, and whether any were still serving their notice when accounts were filed.

White remains an employee, though she has been absent for an "extended period".

The timing of the U-turn suggests the ESFA intervention was a factor. But accounts state the trigger was staff's own decisions to resign.

ESFA had threatened to terminate academy funding agreements, but Castle had already agreed to relinquish Greenway.

Regulators also threatened referral to the Charity Commission or Insolvency Service for further rule breaches. New accounts show there were additional failures over internal scrutiny, and accounts filed late.



The government did not respond when asked if referrals were made.

Matthew Clements-Wheeler, leadership consultant at Keystone Knowledge, said the case was an "example of why the government wants additional powers".

Such levers "lend power" to officials' discussions with trusts, he said. "Historically there's not been much they could do."

Meanwhile Greenway Academy's transfer to GLF Schools, approved last February, is yet to happen.

The trust is currently being run by Lee Miller, a leader previously parachuted by government into failing trust Bright Tribe. It also has an interim executive head from GLF Schools.

A spokesperson for Castle said restructuring was now "completed". Greenway will transfer in September, and it will work closely with government until winding up.

KEY FINDINGS

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The new 'hard' national funding formula: the key developments

Another consultation has been launched on moving schools on to a "hard" national funding formula. Here's what you need to know.

1. Money to go direct to schools by 2027

The government currently hands out schools cash to councils based on a national formula. But councils then hand the cash to individual schools based on their own local formula.

A "hard" NFF would see the DfE allocations go straight to schools, without any local adjustment.

The new consultation does not set a "definitive final end date" at which the direct NFF would be implemented, as it would be "important to continue to be guided by the impact of the initial transition".

However, ministers hope to have made the transition "by the 2027-28 funding year. We hope that we may be able to move to the direct NFF sooner than this – but not later."

2. 'Menu of options' for high-needs transfers

At the moment, councils can transfer funding between their schools and high-needs budgets, though transfers of more than 0.5 per cent, or those without the backing of local schools forums, have to be approved by the education secretary.

But the government wants a more "consistent" approach, and plans to introduce a "menu of options" for how mainstream budgets could be adjusted following transfers to high needs.

This could include a percentage reduction in solely the basic entitlement factor (rather than also additional needs factors, meaning schools with more SEND pupils would benefit), or include the cash being transferred from allocations solely for primary or secondary schools.

Although councils would still request a certain amount to transfer in their applications, the education secretary would be allowed to "modify that amount in agreeing to a transfer of funds".

3. Restrictions on use of growth funding

Councils receive around £250 million a year in growth and falling rolls funding, which is used to support schools that are facing demographic changes in the number of pupils they have.

There is large variation. For example, Camden Council in London spent over £2 million on growth funding in 2022-23, despite only receiving £330,000, while 17 areas used no growth funding at all.

The DfE is proposing two options. The first, which it prefers, would see councils retain some flexibility but with restrictions on how the funding can be used. This could include things like a minimum expectation on when growth funding is awarded.

The second option would be a nationally standardised system, with councils having no say at all.

The government is also consulting on whether to remove the rule that only 'good' or 'outstanding' schools can receive falling roll funding, and on expanding the use of the funding to support councils to "repurpose and remove" spare classroom space.

4. 'Popular growth' funding extended to maintained schools

Academies can also currently receive funding if they are expecting pupil numbers to grow significantly due to their increasing popularity,

rather than because of demographic changes.

The DfE is proposing to keep this scheme, but is also consulting on whether the funding should be available to maintained schools, too.

5. New formula for 'split sites' funding

One factor in the current funding system is for "split sites", which awards funding for extra costs associated with a school operating across a number of separate sites.

Currently around 450 schools split £28 million in funding every year, but the DfE said there was a "great deal of variation" in the criteria used by councils.

The DfE is proposing a national formula for split sites funding, with a basic eligibility criteria that attracts a lump-sum payment, and a distance eligibility criteria for another payment. To meet the latter, schools' sites would need to be at least 500 metres apart.

This would lead to a reduction for schools that currently receive "generous" funding. But the DfE said it would protect schools from losing money through its minimum funding guarantee.

6. 'Significant' reduction in exceptional circumstances cash

Schools also currently receive around £20 million in extra funding for "exceptional circumstances" relating to their premises.

Again, the DfE pointed to variations in funding – which ranged between £2,958 and £600,000, and between one per cent and 30.5 per cent of schools' budgets.

The DfE said it wanted to "significantly reduce" the number of schools getting such cash.

The exceptional circumstances threshold would be raised from the current one per cent of a school's budget up to 2.5 per cent. Trusts and councils would have to reapply under a new national process to show they meet the new criteria.

The consultation also proposes that some costs currently covered, like lump sums for amalgamating schools, be covered in other factors of the funding formula, while some will be defunded entirely, such as funding for listed buildings.

**So what happens next?**

Although the full, hard formula may not come into effect until 2027-28, some changes proposed in the consultation could come sooner.

For example, changes to split sites funding and growth funding could come into effect in 2024-25.

There will also be other consultations, for example, on the options for reforms to how schools with private finance initiative (PFI) contracts receive extra cash.

A consultation will also be held on how the NFF works alongside high needs funding.

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- **Being open sets a great example to everyone around you.** This might encourage them to talk through their own experiences, and create a more supportive environment where talking over challenges is completely normal.
- **Ignoring or bottling up your own challenges is exhausting.** It may also lead to other kinds of coping behaviours, like comfort eating or drinking too much. Facing our challenges may help us to carry things more lightly, and lead to improved resilience in our daily lives.
- **Emotions aren't necessarily 'good' or 'bad'. They carry messages that help us understand our lives and experiences.** By spending time examining them, we might find new perspectives or ways of approaching challenging situations.
- **When we open up it can release feel good brain chemicals like oxytocin and serotonin.** Put simply, talking (and being listened to) can make you feel better, more connected to people, and help improve relationships.



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- Feeling listened to and supported in a safe, confidential, and non-judgmental forum gives you the freedom to fully express yourself, and explore any challenges you might be facing.
- Knowing that other leaders are experiencing the same concerns and feelings can be comforting, and may help you feel less alone.
- You don't have to talk about 'work' problems, it's a safe space to explore all aspects of life, and not feel guilty about it.

Headteacher Austin who took part said:

"You'll be better at prioritising, at devolving your leadership, better at communicating what you want and need from others if you take the time to do this."

Please visit our [School Leaders webpage](#) to find out more and apply.

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Be vigilant about 'despicable' virus exams email, schools warned

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

Schools are being warned about a "despicable" cyber attack where scammers pose as a parent of a child who is in hospital and cannot make their exam, in order to potentially gain "sensitive details".

The email sent to exams officers says: "I am Jamie's mum and I was told to contact you in regards to his examinations, I just want to make you are aware [sic] that he's had a bad fall down the stairs.

"I took him to hospital right away and the bone has fractured. They told him to rest but I don't think he's going to be able to make it to him [sic] exams."

The person says a medical report from the hospital is attached for the exams officer to "check over". However, opening the attachment installs a virus on the recipient's computer.

When asked about the attack, a spokesperson for the National Cyber Security Centre said: "We know scammers exploit topical issues to trick people into sharing sensitive details or clicking on malicious content.

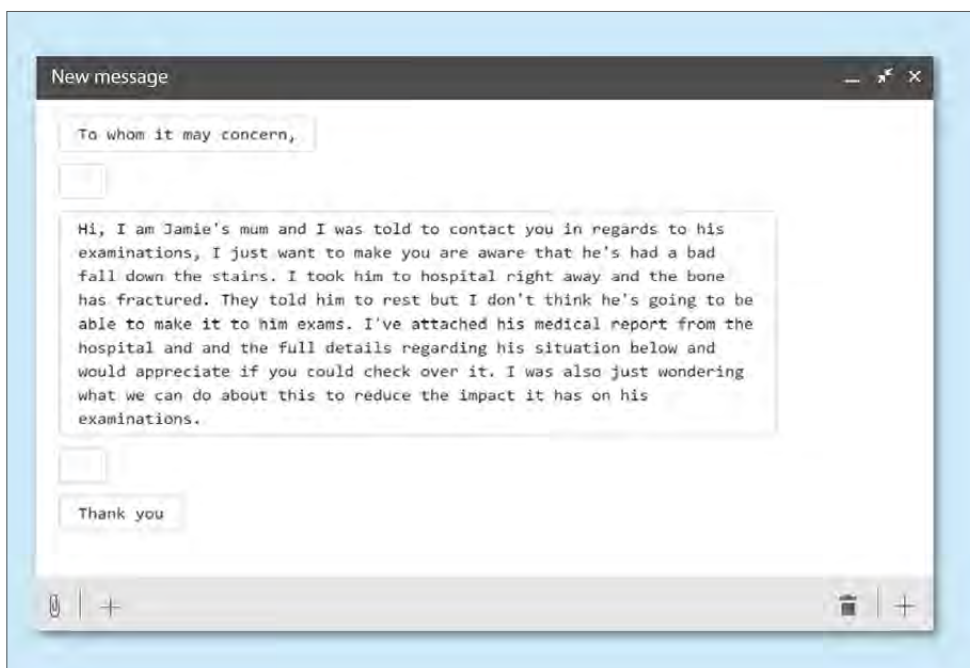
"Any attempt to scam school staff is despicable and if individuals spot suspicious messages they should forward them to us at report@phishing.gov.uk".

The Joint Council for Qualifications warned exams officers about the email earlier this week. The body said a "small number" had received the "suspicious email containing a virus", but did not know exactly how many had been affected.

JCQ said in an email to officers: "This is a gentle reminder asking you to remain vigilant about potential cyber-attacks.

"If you receive this or any other email you are unsure about, do not open it or click on any links. Contact your IT department for support."

A spokesperson for JCQ, which represents exam boards, said potential cyber security risks is something schools and colleges "take seriously throughout the year".



The NCSC, which is a part of government intelligence agency GCHQ, issued multiple alerts last year after an increase in ransomware attacks against schools and colleges.

It warned: "It is important senior leaders understand the nature of the threat and the potential for ransomware to cause considerable damage to their institutions in terms of lost data and access to critical services."

Schools had lost financial records, students' coursework and Covid-19 testing data during more than 70 cyber attacks on the sector during the pandemic.

A more recent trend was for cyber criminals to threaten to release sensitive data stolen from a school's network during the attack, with "many high-profile cases where the cyber criminals have followed through with their threats... often via 'name and shame' websites on the darknet."

Cyber attackers demanded \$8 million (£5.8 million) in ransom from the Harris Federation before leaking school data on to the darknet. In the sector's most high-profile case, the trust was hit with a bill of over £500,000 in repairs of equipment and staff overtime because of the attack.



The government last year trialed a new cyber security tool that schools and colleges can use for free to measure the robustness of their online security measures.

The rise in cases has sparked an "education drive" from national crime agencies. The NCSC, for instance, wants schools to sign up to its Early Warning cyber incident notification service, which was launched last year.

Tom Middlehurst, curriculum, assessment and inspection specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "It is sadly a feature of the digital age that malicious emails containing viruses are sent to school and college staff, as they are to many other organisations."

The NCSC has also published a free cyber security training package for school staff and advice on common signs to look for in scam messages.

NEWS

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Give us same Ofsted inspectors, say 'stuck' school heads

FREDDIE WHITTAKER & JAMES CARR
@SCHOOLSWEEK

'Stuck' schools should receive repeat inspections from the same Ofsted inspectors to help build supportive relationships and negate inconsistencies, leaders have said.

A new report from the Education Policy Institute and UCL Institute of Education, published this week, found that schools persistently rated less than 'good' by Ofsted faced a "cycle of challenging circumstances" and limited improvement.

EPI and the IoE analysed the characteristics of schools rated less than 'good' over a minimum of three inspections between 2005 and 2018, comparing them to other schools and looking at the impact of changes to governance and leadership.

The report found that inspections of case study schools "were arguably too frequent, variable and inconsistent". However, "many headteachers, teachers and governors" of all types of school valued the "role of Ofsted and other support received to improve".

During an online seminar launching the report, headteachers of previously 'stuck' schools suggested the constantly changing teams of inspectors contributed to inconsistencies.

Karen Fagg, headteacher at Park Primary School in Doncaster, said she would "welcome the opportunity to maintain a relationship" with the same inspectors. "It would have been much more productive to not have to continually explain your situation to inspection team after inspection team," she said.

This is because it takes "an unnecessary amount of time" to get inspection teams up to speed, and new teams sometimes arrived with "preconceived ideas of what they would see".

Until 2018, the school had been rated less than 'good' for the 14 years it had been open. It is currently rated as 'good'.

Tom Middlehurst, inspection specialist at the ASCL school leaders' union, backed the idea. While there were "workforce implications" for the watchdog, the small number of 'stuck' schools meant these were



"not insurmountable at all", he said.

"I think the idea of an inspector who remains independent but who understands the context of the school [means] section 8 monitoring inspections in particular can focus on improvements since the last inspection without having to go through the context."

The report identified 580 stuck schools.

An Ofsted spokesperson said: "We endeavour to provide continuity on inspection where this is possible. Our inspectors receive a high quality standard of training to carry out their inspection functions effectively, and will use their expertise and experience to make effective judgements on all schools that they inspect, in line with the education inspection framework."

Academisation no 'silver bullet'

Meanwhile, the report found that joining a multi-academy trust showed only "small positive effects for secondary schools" when it came to their ability to secure a better grade at their next inspection.

But there was "no positive feedback effects of joining a MAT for primary schools", and there were even risks of greater pupil movement and teacher turnover.

The findings cast doubts over one of the key pillars of the government's white paper – to convert or move

schools with a double 'requires-improvement' grading into strong trusts.

Researchers warned the findings "show, yet again, that academisation is not a silver bullet to deliver school improvement".

Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said it "demolishes the government's claim that joining a MAT will improve schools' outcomes. Ministers must recognise that a change of a school's governance is not the magic solution they claim it to be."

However, the study found that at secondary level, joining a MAT "slightly" reduced teacher turnover.

Hard climb back to the top

Researchers found that 'stuck' schools face greater instability, higher rates of poverty and more challenging locations.

After an initial negative Ofsted grade, the intake of a school "tends to become more disadvantaged and teacher turnover increases, both of which contribute to the difficulty in reversing the negative Ofsted judgment".

Geoff Barton, ASCL's general secretary, added: "Unfortunately, we have a system in which negative Ofsted ratings stigmatise schools, ruin careers and damage professional reputations."



Tom Middlehurst



Dr Mary Bousted

EDITORIAL

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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What's the cost-of-living crisis plan?

The rise in the number of children eligible for free school meals announced this week might not have come as a surprise, but that doesn't make the data any less shocking.

Almost 1.9 million children in England now qualify for the support, up a whopping 32 per cent in just two years. It's a disastrous indictment of life in modern Britain and our failure to contain the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

But as many have pointed out, these figures barely scratch the surface of poverty in our country. It is estimated that 30 per cent of children are living in poverty. So why do only 22.5 per cent qualify for free school meals?

And this does not account for those who are eligible but who do not take up the support. The government must bring forward auto-enrolment at the earliest opportunity.

There is also dwindling support available during school holidays, just when the cost-of-living crisis really bites. The government needs a plan, urgently.

Kudos to Birbalsingh

Social mobility commission chair Katherine Birbalsingh is always going to be marmite. Some may feel a lot of her comments are deliberately designed to provoke controversy.

But she deserves credit for the big picture theme of her inaugural speech this week: It's not all about Oxbridge.

She said the current social mobility focus on those making the "big leap" from the bottom to the top mobility rung in one go has left others behind.

As Birbalsingh said: "There is nothing wrong with this view of social mobility, but it is not enough.

"We want to promote a broader view of social mobility, for a wider range of people, who want to improve their lives, sometimes in smaller steps."

It doesn't mean poor people shouldn't have the ambition, or get the help from policy makers, to get a place at Oxbridge. Of course not.

It just means that small steps up the ladder should be celebrated, too. And it's hard to argue with that.

SCHOOLS WEEK



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How do we tackle the teacher shortage problem?



By Karl Edwards, Director of School Partnerships at Teach First

Teacher recruitment concerns

It's a challenging time for teacher recruitment. In March, the [NFER warned](#) that teacher recruitment targets won't be met this year across a range of secondary subjects.

For most schools this isn't news. So, what more can be done to support teacher recruitment and retention?

At Teach First, we're fighting to make our education system work for every child. We exist to support schools, like yours, training thousands of brilliant teachers, developing great leaders and helping pupils thrive. Here's how we're working alongside schools to tackle the teacher recruitment challenge.

National subject flexibility

Schools across the country are in desperate need of new teachers – especially in more isolated areas. This year, we're recruiting high-calibre trainee teachers across our subjects and phases, placing them nationwide in the schools where they're needed most. These trainees are passionate about providing an excellent education for every pupil. Our [teacher Training Programme](#) (rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted) is founded on the latest research, designed to equip and empower trainees to teach effectively and inclusively from day one.

Consistent supply of primary and early years teachers

Despite recruitment challenges in secondary school subjects interest remains high from prospective early years and primary teachers. We've got [availability for trainees](#) across most of the country, ready to start this September.

Expanding the talent search

We're recruiting from a wider range of backgrounds, including career changers and those who come from disadvantaged communities. People who otherwise may not have considered teaching are being inspired to bring their unique skills and experience into schools. Of our 2020 cohort, 31% were experienced professionals, 47% were the first in their family to go to university, and 28%



attended schools in low-income areas.

We all want to do better to increase diversity in the teaching workforce and ensure we aren't missing out on talented teachers from underrepresented backgrounds - so schools truly reflect the communities they serve. We've embedded diversity throughout our recruitment strategy and we're constantly reviewing where we can best champion diversity when recruiting and retaining teachers.

Retention through motivation and resilience

After three years our trainees are twice as likely to be teaching in low-income areas as those from other training routes. They go through a rigorous selection process and are academically capable. But, more than that, they're passionate about our mission.

As Head of Curriculum and Virtual Learning for Elliot Foundation Academies Trust in London, Johanne Clifton explains:

"These trainees aren't just ambitious. They have an aspiration to do the best for our children. And they put that at the heart of everything they do. They've made an active decision to take on Teach First's Training Programme. To me that shows they've got that commitment to make a real difference in their career and to improving those children's life chances."

Reducing trainee workload

Resilience is key, but so is teacher wellbeing. We've changed the learning on our programme to reduce trainee workloads - with less formal learning to juggle alongside in-school work commitments, helping prevent burnout.

Matching the right schools with the right people

No two schools are the same. Neither are our trainees. Your school context, the difficulties your pupils face and the gaps in your team are all factors we consider when recruiting trainees. We'll work in partnership to match your school with the strengths and subject expertise you need in a trainee.

Career-long support for teachers and leaders

Support for [early career teachers](#) extends beyond our Training Programme. They'll have access to our range of [leadership programmes](#), making them around seven times more likely to progress to senior leadership positions earlier in their career than those from other routes. Nearly one hundred of our former trainees are now headteachers, and over 2,250 are in middle or senior leadership. They'll also benefit from the support of a wide variety of specialist networks. Perhaps that's why over 60% of all trainees who trained to teach with us since 2003 are still teaching.

Teach First is committed to finding and training the best possible teachers and giving them the support they need to thrive. Work with us, and together we can make sure all pupils get the education they deserve.

Don't just take our word for it: 94% of headteachers are satisfied with their school's partnership with Teach First.

Find out why at www.teachfirst.org.uk/schools

Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ

'Special needs schools are often viewed as something we'll sort out later'

Susan Douglas, part-time chief executive at The Eden Academy Trust, tells Jess Staufenberg what visiting 63 countries with the British Council brings to her own special educational needs academies

One of the best lessons Susan Douglas has ever seen was in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. It was a lesson on rhythm, being delivered by a single teacher to 100 students.

"You know when a teacher just has the room? The children were hanging on to her every movement," begins Douglas, chief executive at The Eden Academy Trust.

"She had no resources, no instruments. She had nothing but her presence. They were completely engaged."

Unusually for a CEO, Douglas is part-time, working three days a week at her trust

overseeing six special needs schools across London, Northumberland and Cumbria.

The other two days she is a senior schools adviser to the British Council, and has visited no fewer than 63 countries. She tells me about some of the most extraordinary things she has seen in other systems.

Singapore excelled around continuous professional development, she says. Teachers there can choose one of three career tracks: headteacher, subject specialist or master teacher. Being a subject specialist is so highly respected in Singapore that "at the highest rank, you can earn as much

as a head", says Douglas. It's a completely different approach to England, where "we remove our best teachers from the classroom to go up the career ladder".

Another school that stuck was a highly inclusive one in South Africa. The headteacher had deliberately recruited the entire staff body to reflect the very diverse pupil cohort of the school: across ethnicity, gender and special educational needs. There was also no separate special educational needs "unit" in the mainstream school and, instead, a commitment to all students learning together, with extra

Profile: Susan Douglas



Douglas with the Kenyan British Council team



Douglas with a student in Ethiopia

support where needed.

Finally, at a school in Brazil, Douglas saw great practice around community-school ties. For example, pupils had gone out into the local area and found water pollution was a serious problem, so organised community events, campaigns and speeches with local families to improve the water purity. "Really intentional community engagement was completely embedded in the curriculum there," says Douglas.

It's all possible through the British Council programme she leads, called Connecting Classrooms, and the joint British Council and Department for Education programme with Singapore called Building Educational Bridges. She has taken 120 UK headteachers away and brought staff back too.

But it's not about poaching ideas, Douglas explains. It's about reconsidering your own system.

"Every year when we go to Singapore, UK teachers will often say they can't wait to go out there. But at the end, they often say the most important bit was actually trying to explain our system to them.

"Seeing your own system through someone else's eyes is very powerful...

"I think that in schools, things very quickly



Douglas speaking at the G7 in Japan

"Seeing your own system through someone else's eyes is very powerful"

become historical, because we've always done it that way."

Clearly driving Douglas is the pursuit of high expectations in the most ambitious sense. It was something she absorbed from home – her father, a financial adviser, and her mother, a nurse, would write questions on a blackboard in the kitchen for her and her sister to work out. As a child, Douglas announced she would "be a headteacher by the age of 30". She beat her goal, landing her first headship aged just 28.

"My headteacher came in one day and said, 'I'm just popping out for a minute,'" Douglas explains. "But she never came back." So the young Douglas was unexpectedly in charge.

In some ways, she had a very clear idea of the kind of headteacher she didn't want to be. For instance, while in her mid-20s she rang to excuse herself from work because her father had died and was unsympathetically told: "But it's parents' evening".

However, in other ways, she was unsure. "So I thought, what I'll do is I'll follow all the rules. The school's bound to get better, and it did. It went from being a not particularly good school, to being quite a good school.

But that's as far as I could take it, really."

Then in 2005 the British Council offered Douglas a study tour placement to Thailand.

"It was life changing. So, I came back and we started to do some much more creative things. We lost that 'we'll follow all the rules' approach!" The school landed Ofsted's top grade.

So for two decades now, Douglas has always held two jobs (from 2007 she also worked for the National College for Teaching and Leadership).

So how does she fit her job into three days – and could more small trusts follow suit?

"My team know they can ring me any day if needed," explains Douglas – but otherwise her strong top team, including a chief operations officer, director of central services and schools, and director of academy development, hold the fort. She says she doesn't know why it's not more common in small trusts, adding, "Flexibility is more important than ever since the pandemic".

Her varied experiences have made Douglas an ambitious and creative leader, it seems. But her high expectations are not often matched by the government, she says.

Profile: Susan Douglas



Douglas getting her CBE with her husband Peter

Instead, the SEND sector is too often treated as an 'add-on'.

This 'afterthought' attitude explains why she was the only leader of a SEND academy trust on the DfE's Covid-recovery group, out of 12 members, she says.

"The fact we have a schools white paper that will probably get through in the life of this parliament, focused on the majority of children, and then we have a SEND green paper, which was already delayed... Will it get kicked into the long grass? My worry is that often, it's 'something we'll sort out later'."

There are some good structural proposals in the SEND green paper, Douglas continues, such as the promise to set up a new national system of funding (in her trust, the biggest difference in top-up funding for a pupil with similar needs across two local authorities is a staggering £8,488 per year).

But it seems some of the biggest challenges she faces are not addressed.

"I'm desperate for teachers, but also teaching assistants. And therapists are like gold dust," says Douglas. "So I don't understand why, when the government is setting up incentives for certain shortage subjects in secondary, special school teachers aren't one of those."

It's undeniable logic: the special needs schools sector has up to double the number of teacher vacancies as the mainstream sector, government data shows.

But the problems in the green paper go even deeper, she continues.

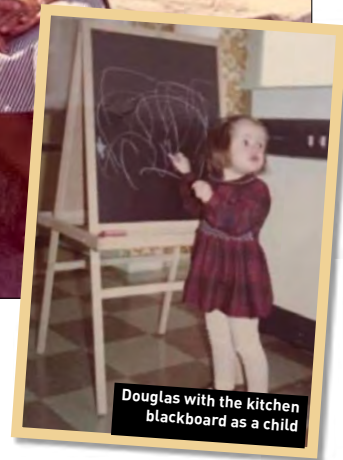
"Society still adopts a medical model of



Douglas with her family as a child



Douglas dressed up for Victorian Day



Douglas with the kitchen blackboard as a child

"I think that in schools, things very quickly become historical"

children with special educational needs: what's wrong with them, and how can we make sure they will fit with the rest."

It's this underlying principle that means low expectations of SEND pupils persists, says Douglas.

Again, other countries have shown the way. She recalls visiting Ontario, in Canada, in 2017, where mainstream teachers were encouraged to study a SEND qualification, resulting in better pay.

"It was about incentivising teachers to see themselves as teachers of SEND. The principle there is one of high expectations

around expert teaching."

By contrast, Douglas says a teacher in her trust with a first-class degree was advised by their Russell Group university that going into special education might be a "waste".

It's clear Douglas is very grateful for her three-days-a-week CEO role. (The cost saving has partially contributed towards the trust being able to pay for central therapy and services for its families, including employing 28 therapists.)

But the other major benefit is "being able to bring back all the learning I do in my other job into the trust," says Douglas. There's also a danger with special schools of "becoming isolated", which all her external work mitigates.

This internationalist, innovative approach seems to be the opposite of the "medical model" of SEND that she criticises.

"It's so important that people look outwards, whether it's Birmingham, Northern Ireland, or Kenya," says Douglas firmly. "We are so busy in education, it's too easy to look inwards."

To those truly dedicated to high expectations of all pupils, a visit to The Eden Academy Trust might be a good place to start.



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Opinion

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ESTHER
MAXWELL

Legal director and employment
and education specialist,
Shakespeare Martineau

Transgender rights: what does the law say?

The attorney general's simplistic take on a complex issue could lead schools into legal difficulties, writes Esther Maxwell

The matter of transgender rights in schools is a tricky maze to navigate, and Attorney General Suella Braverman's recent comments that schools should not "pander to transgender pupils" have stoked this already controversial area. But what does the law actually say?

Broadly speaking, the law around transgender rights can be found in the Equality Act 2010, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has also issued some non-statutory guidance (not specifically aimed at schools), but received some backlash from organisations such as Stonewall.

Unfortunately, as yet there is no specific guidance from the Department for Education, though it is apparently forthcoming.

Regardless, Braverman's comments take a simplistic view of the legislation and the obligations schools have towards transgender pupils. She says that, because under-18s cannot get a gender recognition certificate or legally change sex,

the matter is clear. "A male child who says in a school that they are a trans girl [...] is legally still a boy or a male. And [...] schools have a right to treat them as such under the law." Schools, she argues, don't have to accommodate a change of name, pronoun or uniform.

But school leaders, lawyers advising them and staff at the chalkface of

"The legal position is actually far from simple"

dealing with these issues know the legal position is actually far from simple.

Crucially, it is important to note that sex and gender have distinct meanings. The UK government actually defines sex as referring to the biological aspects of an individual as determined by their anatomy, which is produced by their chromosomes, hormones and their interactions and as generally male or female assigned at birth.

Gender, on the other hand, is defined as a social construction relating to behaviours and attributes based on labels of masculinity and femininity. Also, individuals may identify anywhere on a spectrum between these poles.



A pupil is considered transgender if their gender identity or expression differs in some way from the sex assigned at birth. Under the Equality Act, gender reassignment is defined as an individual who is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by

a host of legal obligations apply to schools.

Chief among them is that schools should not discriminate against pupils who are transgender – whether that discrimination is direct or indirect – and should be mindful that other protected characteristics may also potentially come into play. In short, pupils should not be treated less favourably or experience a detriment as a result of being transgender.

However, schools may also have to grapple with a 'clash of rights' situation, where the rights of a transgender pupil are pitched against an individual's personal beliefs that sex is immutable. High-profile examples are JK Rowling and Maya Forstater, the latter having recently won an appeal at the employment appeal tribunal that her views on gender constitute a protected philosophical belief under the Equality Act.

Schools with teachers (or pupils) who hold this belief will have to pitch this against a transgender pupil's right to be known as his or her chosen sex.

So it is far from straightforward, but one thing is for sure: schools that take the attorney general's advice and take a "firmer line on gender dysphoria" do so at their peril.

Opinion

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JOANNE
BARTLEY

Campaign support officer,
Comprehensive Future

Okay, Mr Zahawi. Let's put the popularity of grammars to the test

Proposals to change selective school rules for MATS show supporters of grammars like the secretary of state don't believe they're as popular as they say, writes Joanne Bartley

An overlooked detail of the schools bill is a change to grammar school ballot legislation, bringing academy grammars in line with local authority schools. The long-forgotten ballot rules offer a complicated means for campaigners to end selective admissions, involving first a petition and then a vote among eligible parents. As it stands, a MAT could take on a grammar school and seek to end selective admissions without any ballot.

It appears Nadhim Zahawi hopes to protect grammar schools from the sort of awful MAT that wants to do that. Instead, he seems to prefer the idea of MATs operating mostly inclusive schools, but also a few that use the II-plus to select only those pupils who are guaranteed to get great results.

In 2004, an education select committee review of the grammar school ballot process determined it was unworkable "and should be immediately withdrawn". So

of course, nearly 20 years later, the rules are being revisited with absolutely no changes planned whatsoever.

The only ballot that ever went ahead, in Ripon in 2000, allowed 25 per cent of the votes to be cast by parents in fee-paying prep schools, the majority of which were miles from the town. We know parents

"A long queue for school places doesn't equate to popularity"

pay for private primaries because they offer II-plus test preparation; so is it right to empower feeder schools whose business model requires selective education to continue? The well-funded pro-grammar campaign in Ripon involved professional lobbyists and a slick promotional video.

The ballot rules require campaigners to ask parents to fill out a form with a child's name, date of birth and school. It's natural for parents to refuse to give such personal information to a stranger with a clipboard. Ballots do allow parents with pre-school age children to get involved, but only if they post their child's birth certificate and a utility bill to the

Electoral Reform Society. Want a say? That's £2.85 for recorded delivery.

To trigger a ballot, 20 per cent of eligible parents must vote for one. Eligible parents are those of all secondary-age pupils in a fully selective local authority area.

But for areas not designated as selective, eligible parents are only those with children at feeder schools which had at least five pupils go to said grammar school in the last three years.

Meanwhile, schools and local authorities are forbidden from any involvement in a ballot. So there's no organised debate, no school letters with information; no one is even told how comprehensive education would be implemented.

In Kent, where I live, there are some odd nuances to selective education that would cause



confuse a natural use of these schools with popularity. What parent wouldn't be proud of their child being labelled 'smart'? What parent wouldn't put their child down for top GCSE grades if they could guarantee them? And what parent wouldn't feel pressure to ensure their child was in a school where they could mix with equally able peers?

These incentives may result in a long queue for school places, but that doesn't equate to popularity in any positive sense of the word. And it is meaningless in terms of quality education.

But there's a simple way to find out whether grammar schools are really as popular as Mr Zahawi and others believe them to be: make the route to phasing them out easier.

I've met several people who'd hoped to start a grammar school ballot. In each case, they started out full of optimism. But when they learned how the system worked (or rather that it didn't, and couldn't), they gave up their plans.

So if Mr Zahawi is sure of their popularity, and if he genuinely wants a "a school system that works for every child, parent and family", then he should reform the unfair, unworkable, grammar school ballot legislation. Because parents deserve a fighting chance of ending selection in the divided communities where grammars remain.

problems for any ballot under current rules.

Selective area parents are conditioned to think that 'smart' pupils need specialist education. A quarter of pupils is an odd definition of 'special,' but that's the way it is. They don't consider that comprehensive schools with sets are a suitable alternative.

I have wealthy friends who would only ever consider using a grammar or private school, never a comprehensive. These parents would vote for grammars with no understanding of the negative impact on others, particularly disadvantaged and SEND pupils.

Grammar supporters say selective schools are popular, but they

Opinion

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JANE HARRIS
CEO, I CAN

2030 vision: we need to talk about speech and language

The one thing that ties the green and white papers together is the absence of a strategy for our most pressing problem, writes Jane Harris

Given the unusual way the schools white paper and SEND green paper were published on consecutive days in late March, it is understandable that the sector is still trying to make sense of them. It's no less surprising that school leaders are still reeling at the news of both a 90 per cent literacy and numeracy target and a sudden shift to a virtuous national system for pupils with special educational needs.

It would perhaps be easier to take in if there was any sense of a common vision between these two documents. Or any connection at all. Ministers seem a little touchy about the idea that there isn't one. But while they have failed to highlight it, one thread does tie these otherwise disparate sets of aspirations: a failure to appreciate the importance of speech and language, and the toll the pandemic has wrought on this foundational skill.

Our research at I CAN has found that 1.5 million children are at risk of not being able to speak or understand language at an age-

appropriate level. If these children continue to struggle, they are over four times less likely to get good GCSEs in maths and English. Similarly, we know that children who are able to talk, using words or alternative communication methods, are far more likely to achieve the green paper's aspirations of a good education, good friends, good mental

health and a good social life.

The largest category of special educational need in primary schools is speech, language and communication difficulties, which cross over with many of the other categories of need (autism and

mental health among them). For example, almost half of young people referred to mental health services have difficulties with spoken language.

Yet our failure to recognise the primacy of being able to speak and understand language was encoded in our comprehensive school system from the start, a focus on the three Rs belying an assumption that the vast majority of children would be able to talk and understand instructions from their teacher. Whatever the rightness of that assumption then, it is clear that this is a misguided approach now. No phonics programme or maths meeting will take the majority of children over the line in a system where teachers are telling I CAN that the lack of speech and language skills is becoming a majority issue, rather than a minority one.

“Lack of speech and language skills is becoming a majority issue

And they are frustrated by the lack of national guidance and the lack of local capacity to provide support and specialist resources. The national leadership from the DfE is far outweighed by the scale of the problem.



At a recent parliamentary event Nadhim Zahawi spoke very highly of the Nuffield Early Language Initiative – the one programme the government has directly funded. Hallelujah! Now his enthusiasm needs to be reflected in his department's own strategies. The consultation period must result in steps that will help to actually meet the 90 per cent white paper target by breaking the negative cycle identified in the green paper of needs being identified late and therefore escalating and becoming entrenched.

What needs to be done isn't complicated. First, we need more training on speech and language for teachers at all levels. This is proportionate, given that in most classrooms at least three children will have a long-term language issue. Second, we need a standardised tool for teachers to identify children who are struggling, and national reporting to track trends.

And finally, we need more evaluation of interventions that can make a difference so schools know where to turn for extra help. We currently have only one targeted spoken language intervention evaluated by the Education Endowment Foundation.

We know there is much that schools can do themselves, without needing to refer to stretched speech and language specialists in the NHS. But they need support to find the right, effective resources.

It's a really simple choice. The 90 per cent target won't be reached without this under-served 1.5 million children. So ministers must put the training, interventions and reporting in place, or accept that their aspiration is little more than wishful thinking.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The schools white paper calls for strong local partnerships, writes Jonathan Crossley-Holland, but we can't have them without strong local accountability

A lot of the discussion about the DfE's schools white paper, Opportunity For All, has focused on the 2030 target for all schools to be part of strong multi-academy trust. But what appears to have been overlooked is that strong local partnerships will be the key to its successful implementation.

In his foreword to the white paper, Nadhim Zahawi makes clear his belief in the importance of local collaboration to past and future successful education policy implementations. And that is to be welcomed, even if his comment is politically driven. After all, the secretary of state knows that he needs the support of local authorities where MAT presence remains small, such as Hampshire, where only 13 per cent of schools are academies.

Nevertheless, the white paper is noticeably clear that strong local partnerships will be key. It recognises that meeting the 'parent pledge' to provide effective assessment and support, especially for those pupils whose needs cannot be met entirely within the gates of mainstream schools, will require close partnership working between schools, MATs, LAs and other agencies.

What is less apparent currently is the role the DfE envisages local partnerships playing in supporting school improvement, either in the lead-up to a MAT-led system or once it is delivered. The DfE clearly sees MATs working with their schools as the key engine of improvement and recognises that collaboration with other schools, LAs and agencies is crucial. Ministers also seem sensitive to the



JONATHAN
CROSSLEY-
HOLLAND

Trustee, Minerva Learning Trust
and LocalED project leader

Localism is key to the white paper - but what does that look like?

charge that a MAT system needs to be accountable to the locality. There will be a requirement to have local governing bodies for each school to reflect the identity of its local area and, acknowledging that the system is not doing well enough currently, the white paper proposes that LAs should hold

could be an opportunity to lower the stakes that create such unsustainable pressure on schools.

The OECD's director of education, Andreas Schleicher said in a 2019 interview that the English system's biggest weakness is a lack of trust in its teachers. Since then, we have

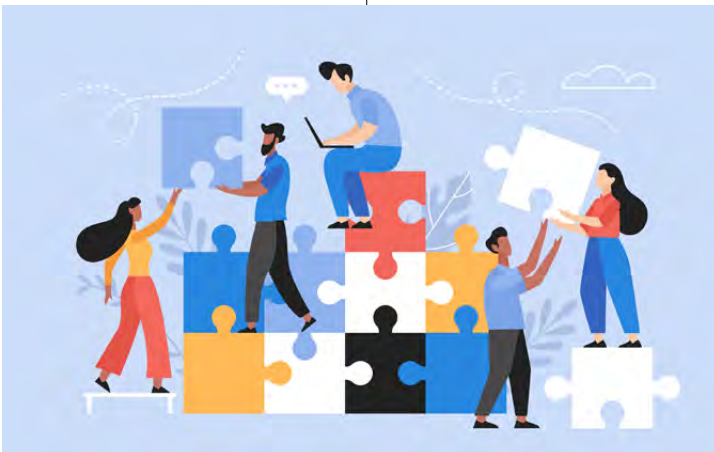
“Considering this is not a threat to Ofsted, much less to rigour

the important role of coordinating improved collaboration.

But what the DfE has not done is to take the opportunity to develop a more locally based accountability system. Considering this is not a threat to Ofsted, and much less to rigour, but it

seen the worst recruitment and retention crisis the system has known, with research repeatedly showing that workload and our current accountability system are key barriers.

In research I undertook with Dr Susan Cousin, On Developing a New



Locality Model for English Schools, all the high-performing systems we looked at internationally shared the view that local partnerships are critical for achieving excellence and equity. And many leading PISA school systems, including the ones we looked at, saw local accountability as crucial to delivering them. Moreover, our recruitment and retention woes are by no means shared by these other systems.

Which is not to say that localism is a panacea, but a focus on locality is especially important for many reasons. Place matters. Challenges and opportunities are different from area to area. Collaboration has the potential to create sustainable capacity. Actions can be taken more quickly and more cost-effectively. And the DfE is right identity matters too.

All these are good reasons why we cannot and shouldn't try to copy other systems. But we can learn from them as we set about developing an English model of locality. It's what the LocalED national project pilot I'm involved in is setting out to inform. The project, which began in April and will run for two years, will explore what kind of locality partnerships best support the inclusion of vulnerable pupils and school improvement. In addition, former Ofsted chief inspector Dame Christine Gilbert will be leading the project's work on accountability to families, communities and the public.

Twelve per cent of all LAs and school-led partnerships have already applied to take part. So while the subject is overlooked at the top, one thing is certain: for those who will be tasked with implementing the white paper's ambitions, local partnerships and accountability are already priorities.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The MAT-led system is an opportunity to usher in a new era where local governance means more than reflecting the values of a narrow group, writes Tony Robins

Much of what has already been written about maintaining local accountability in this new MAT-led system envisaged by the schools white paper tends to focus on policy and ethos. But with the number of children and young people attending schools managed by MATs set to rise sharply, there is another facet of MAT governance that requires our careful consideration.

With a further move away from local authority oversight and control, it's now increasingly urgent that we take a very close look at the constituency of governing boards. Because reflecting our communities is about more than practices and values.

Members and trustees of MATs have a fundamental and significant influence over the schools for which they have responsibility. Therefore, it's vital that we understand who they are, their backgrounds, their motivations and, crucially, whether they are themselves representative and reflective of the communities they serve.

The general profile of school and MAT governance has not evolved in step with wider society and has largely remained the preserve of the established 'professions', occupations and classes. This has often excluded those, for example, with technical careers, non-traditional roles, practitioners from the creative sectors and digital industries and others who would bring welcome fresh perspectives, challenge and ideas.

Analysis of publicly available data and information soon reveals the scale of the transformative task ahead. MATs operating in the most diverse

TOBY ROBINS

Trustee, The Consortium Trust



Opportunity for all must mean more diverse MAT governance

regions and communities often have boards that are worryingly and disproportionately unrepresentative.

That's not to say they are widely ineffective, but we should aspire and act to create a contemporary model that harnesses the talents and

the worst and most divisive outcomes would be for an assumption to emerge that one established constituency is justified in maintaining a stranglehold over the sector.

When children and young people look upwards and around them, they

“System management remains stubbornly mono-cultural”

resources that exist in every corner of every community, rather than lazily perpetuating what has gone before.

It seems perverse and unfair, within a system that should seek to encourage and enable the abilities and success of all, that the overarching management of the system itself remains stubbornly mono-cultural and exclusive. As the MAT sector continues to expand, one of

must see the possibilities for their future selves. Equally, parents should be confident that those who run their children's schools reflect and represent the intricacies, complexities and priorities within their communities. We should not assume that boards are largely invisible to children, families and communities and therefore that their complexion is



unimportant.

In my experience, parents and children are often not fully aware of how schools are run and who runs them. But to achieve greater engagement, boards should become increasingly known and their role understood in order that they themselves can become models of possibility.

Rightly, the ongoing conversation around diversity in governance focuses on ethnicity, colour and gender. To achieve truly representative boards that bring these new communities aboard, we must widen our thoughts towards social and educational background, age, career choice and financial circumstance.

Clearly, applicable skills are fundamental to the collective success of boards. But even here, the current tools used to understand this have often done little more than embed the status quo. Widely used skills audits continue to consider very narrow horizons of desirable competency. Beyond the baseline boilerplate tick-boxes, there is often no inquiry about aptitudes in critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence or social awareness.

If we are serious in our resolve to create an effective, contemporary and egalitarian model of MAT governance, we must be much more imaginative and open-minded in our approach. Boards should reach out to their school communities, identify and mentor potential trustees, be open, self-critical, real and democratise the power they hold.

Ultimately, this is a matter of nurturing the precious place that education occupies within a cohesive society. MAT boards have a hugely significant role in this. We should be determined and bold in how we take this issue forward.

Reviews

BOOK REVIEW



Closing the Writing Gap

Editor: Alex Quigley

Publisher: Routledge

Reviewer: Robbie Burns, assistant vice principal, Bede Academy (Emmanuel Schools Foundation)

A good education certainly involves more than 'the three Rs', but any less is surely a marker of a failing system. In affluent, 'educated' England, 7.1 million adults are functionally illiterate. But Alex Quigley's motivation for writing this book is not rooted in statistics. His father "left school unable to write confidently, along with all the limitations, challenges and missed opportunities" that represented, and – driven by that experience – Quigley decries our propensity for platitudes and abstract rhetoric about raising standards.

Closing the Writing Gap is a clarion call to take the three Rs seriously, and among them, to prioritise writing specifically on the grounds that it "will either unleash or circumscribe the talents of our pupils".

Beginning with a potted history of writing pedagogy, and a section on the science of writing (more on that later), Quigley then turns to two crucial nuts and bolts of the craft: grammar and syntax.

Like many teachers my age, I was not taught grammar explicitly at school; or at least, I can't remember if I was. I learned it on the job, preparing my students for their grammar tests. It was then that I realised the power of sharing with my students what Daisy Christodoulou describes as the 'meta-language' of words.

Explicitly teaching grammar means I can unpick with my students the reasons for the mistakes they make. Even so, Quigley's work in this chapter provides an exemplary argument for and approach to teaching grammar

and embedding it within the wider writing process that will prove transformative for my practice and hopefully the teaching of many others.

But what is likely to be even more revolutionary in my classroom is the following chapter on sentence construction. Referencing a swathe of research I am definitely going to go away and study, this short treatise alone makes the book worth the investment. From it, I realised that I have not been explicit enough in my teaching of syntax and how important it is in closing the gap for my weaker writers.

Yes, we all teach 'sentences' in primary education. But as a profession we must think harder about the value of teaching the nature of sentences, how to manipulate them and evaluate them in light of writing purposes and how to choose words confidently. I am utterly convinced of the need for us all to look again at our curriculums to evaluate the progression of this important aspect of writing. We have already begun.

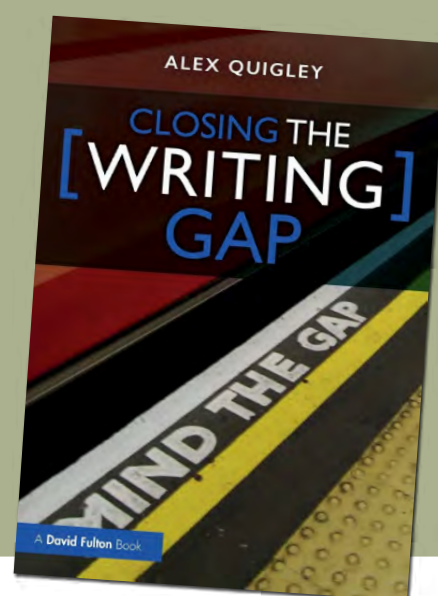
So, this is a book that covers an admirable amount of ground, and I would highly recommend it to all teachers. But while the history of writing was a worthwhile discussion, and the practical approaches for grammar and sentence-level teaching invaluable, the chapter on the science of writing left me with more questions than answers.

Before moving into the practical elements, I was keen as a leader of primary English to gain a deeper insight into the science of writing. Some might feel we teachers don't need this, but I am inclined to disagree. Not only is this understanding central to curriculum design, it helps us

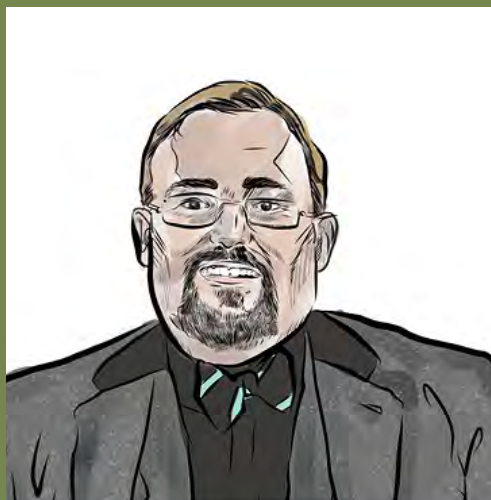
to develop precise mental models of how students learn to write. In turn, this allows us to diagnose errors and problems as they emerge with accuracy, so that we can teach responsively.

Closing the Writing Gap does offer a simple conceptual model. But for me, it was not robust enough to fully grasp the full spectrum of the development of writing. Early years, key stage 1 teachers and, equally, those who work with struggling writers at all stages of education, would have been helped by a more comprehensive model. For example, I would have loved to have read Quigley's take on Joan Sedita's 'writing rope' model, which is far more detailed (and arguably more helpful). Maybe he'll do that soon.

That said, the practical strategies, the seven steps for improving writing, Quigley's wealth of experience and his passion for seeing illiteracy become a thing of the past still ring in my ears. I hope the revolution it has started in my classroom is repeated everywhere.



Reviews



Our blog reviewer of the week is **Robin Conway**, director of research and innovation at John Mason School

@JMSREFLECT

Set The Bar High

@P_A_Kirschner and @MirjamN

This is a powerful and important piece. The issue of grade inflation is often raised and in this blog Kirschner and Neelen offer an international perspective. They show that lowered expectations of young people is not just an issue in the UK, and link it to teachers' expectations and choices about differentiation. They summarise research (Gershenson, 2020) showing that students with teachers who have higher grading standards achieve significantly higher exam results.

But of course, Kirschner and Neelen are not suggesting that this is the active variable. Rather, their argument is that it reflects the power of high expectations. "Teachers who see the potential of their students, acknowledge their potential and also believe in it... increase the chance that those children do better in school and continue their studies successfully."

Live Marking

@MissTBegum

Another thoughtful and useful post from Miss Begum, in which she shares her approach to live marking. Begum defines the concept clearly and then outlines a number of benefits to the practice, including increased student motivation and reduced

TOP BLOGS of the week

teacher workload.

However, the real power of this blog comes from the clear explanation of practicalities of using live marking, along with some key lessons she has learned along the way. Especially helpful, the piece is supported by videos of live marking in action and examples of student work. As Begum notes, "live marking [...] takes time to perfect and improve." If it's a skill you intend to develop, I can't think of a better place to start.

Professional Development: From Answers to Problems

@overpractised

In this helpful blog, Sarah Cottingham brilliantly captures the difference between offering answers and identifying and solving the underlying problems. Busy managers, mentors and even coaches can make the mistake of offering answers, Cottingham explains, overlooking the agency of the teacher and their own mental models of best practice.

Instead, her coaching approach focuses on building a shared understanding of a problem, offering hypotheses instead of solutions. This fits fantastically with research into teacher professional development and Harry Fletcher-Wood's work on building habits of success. The potential benefits in supporting teachers to make positive changes to their practice are clear. As Cottingham convincingly argues,

this "helps to build a culture of continual improvement, alleviates some of the sting, professionalises the teacher and proves a more honest approach to professional development."

Implementation Plan 2.0

@DurringResearch

If there is a connection between this week's pieces it is that each writer uses research to guide and adapt their practice. This piece from the team at Durrington Research School is no exception. The focus here is on making use of the EEF's guidance report into implementation (2019). This is a report I find very useful, refer to regularly and recommend all school leaders read, but at 48 pages there is quite a lot to digest.

What this blog sets out is a model implementation plan which could be used to prepare for changes. The links to the underlying research are clearly explained, as well as its development from an earlier version to better recognise "the special importance professional development holds within implementation." Succinct and practical as all such tools should be, this is a great idea, generously shared.

The Surprising Truth About Using Highlighting To Study

@Inner_Drive

I've long been aware of research suggesting that highlighting is not an efficient revision technique for students. Accordingly, I encourage my students to adopt other approaches. However, the research by Pone, Mayer and Mendez (2022) cited in this blog suggests I possibly shouldn't have written it off altogether.

The authors specifically looked at the advantages of "instructor-provided highlighting", and this blog offers clear suggestions on how to use this technique in the classroom to maximise impact. If your students are like mine and, in spite of encouragement to try other techniques, remain deeply fond of their highlighters, this may be a useful read. After all, as the blog argues, "highlighting is not necessarily a bad learning strategy. It is probably better thought of as a very limited one."

Research



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

What do schools need to embed sustainability?

**Nicola Walshe, executive director,
UCL Centre for Climate Change and
Sustainability Education**

Recent IPCC reports confirm that climate change is the defining issue of our time. Responding to it is an ethical imperative across all sectors, including schools. The role of education in responding to the global climate crisis has been the focus of much attention since COP26, leading to the launch in April this year of the government's strategy for sustainability and climate change for the education and children's services systems.

Research commissioned by UCL's new Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education (CCCSE), published this week, includes the first parent polling on this issue, revealing that students are more likely to talk about climate change with their parents than most other issues. The poll also demonstrates high levels of parental confidence in schools' ability to provide the best education in issues of climate change and sustainability – this is in contrast with teachers in focus groups, who recognised the importance of these issues but who did not necessarily feel confident and prepared to teach them.

This research echoes previous findings. A recent UK-wide manifesto found that teachers and young people see climate change and sustainability education as something every child and young person should learn about, from early years through to secondary school, and that all teachers should be equipped to teach. However, the current context for schools is challenging, with teachers citing a



lack of confidence, time and access to high quality-professional development as key barriers to change in relation to climate change and sustainability education.

Closing the confidence gap

There are three key areas of focus to effectively respond to this need. First, providing support so schools can incorporate climate change and sustainability education across the formal curriculum is imperative. It's vital to equip teachers of every phase and subject to respond to issues of climate change and sustainability in ways that meet the needs of their students and the disciplinary context of their school subject.

Issues of climate change and sustainability are relevant across all of a school's activities – including sites, operations and extra-curricular activities – but developing teachers' confidence and expertise through the formal curriculum is key.

Given the urgency of the climate crisis, the very clear need for schools to respond (and the parental and student expectation that they will), supporting teachers to embed climate change and sustainability

in imaginative ways now is crucial. There is no time to wait for promised curriculum reform, and expecting teachers to find additional space in their existing schemes of work is itself not a sustainable solution.

Ethical leadership

Second, it's important to recognise the vital role school leaders have in enabling schools to embed sustainability across the work and life of a school community. For example, CCCSE will work with our colleagues at UCL's Centre for Educational Leadership to find the best ways to support and shape the work of school leaders. Our work will promote and support practical, attainable ways to embed climate change and sustainability as part of the ethos of each school, by helping to share good practice and developing training and resources for school leaders.

Positive feedback loops

Third, listening and responding to the views and perspectives of young people, teachers and school leaders is crucial to successful and sustained implementation. This is a key focus for the CCCSE, and we will provide a variety of ways for different groups to contribute their perspective, and ensure that the voices of teachers and young people are represented through their participation on advisory boards and in specialist subject and phase groups.

The next phases of our work include a national-scale survey of teachers and school leaders and in-depth case studies of schools who are at different stages in their journey towards embedding climate change and sustainability education into their ethos and curriculum.

To find out more about our research, register for an online panel discussion on July 7, 2022 to explore priorities and principles for climate change and sustainability education, or visit the CCCSE's website to get involved.

Week in

Westminster

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

TUESDAY:

As if having one squillionaire Conservative Party donor businessman* on your board wasn't enough, Harris Federation has bagged another. Dunelm tycoon Sir Will Adderley has been appointed vice-chair.

While the trust rolls out the red carpet for its new home furnishing supremo, they insist it's not curtains for current chair Lord Harris, who founded the trust. Harris made his millions through selling carpets at Carpetright.

Presumably they'd insist it's not a closed shop either, with any other homeware magnates able to throw their hat – or cushion, sofa, or furniture – into the ring for future roles.

*It's not clear whether it was Adderley or his father (who has both the same first and middle names) who donated to the Conservatives.

While it marks a still-significant 90.3 per cent increase, the difference in overall funding for secondary schools' 750,000 free school meal pupils totals more than £10 million! Not quite so minor...

(Better news for primary special schools and mainstream SEND units, though, who had been told their cash would be cut from £290 per-pupil to £276. This will actually remain at £290.)

Meanwhile, the 675th consultation on implementing a national fair funding formula dropped today (see full story on page 14). While you could have a pop at ministers for taking their damn time about it (they've given themselves another five years to complete the funding reforms), you can't fault their will to engage with the sector about it!

WEDNESDAY:

Quite the story broke today, with a senior pollster claiming Nadhim Zahawi pressured his then boss at YouGov to spike a poll which favoured Jeremy Corbyn before the 2017 general election. If he didn't, Zahawi apparently said he would call for chief executive Stephan Shakespeare's resignation.

Fake news, according to the Nadz, who tweeted: "This was clearly a joke between two good friends, who had previously been business partners for several years.

"Stephan continues to be one of my closest friends and at no point since leaving YouGov in 2010 have I had any influence on the company. Suggesting

otherwise is untrue."

The DfE published research it commissioned into "future opportunities for education technology in England" today.

It found schools see the potential of tech, but think it's too expensive, don't have enough information to filter out the wheat from the chaff and are reticent to take the plunge when there's such a digital divide at household level.

But perhaps one opportunity sits a bit closer to home? Speaking at the research organisation NFER's 75th anniversary do in parliament, children's commissioner Rachel de Souza revealed her Big Ask survey crashed the department's own website on several days.

The survey got a stonking half a million responses, a level of popularity that brought the DfE's IT infrastructure crashing down.

THURSDAY:

The never-ending "no *you* use dodgy stats" war between the National Education Union and the Department for Education has... still not ended.

The DfE's 'rapid rebuttal unit' were on it today, correcting a tweet from the union's joint boss Dr Mary Bousted (she wrongly said there had been a 22.5 per cent rise in pupils claiming free school meals, when actually the rise meant 22.5 per cent of all pupils were now eligible for the support).

The department itself was rapped over its own data use on academies last month after the NEU complained to the stats watchdog.



The Department for Education admitted a "minor error" today in a press release from last week that promised to double funding for deprived kids in secondary schools, up to £290 a head.

Actually, funding *won't* be doubled. The sneaky update (two weeks after the guidance was published) confirmed the figure will actually be £276 a head.

TRAINER (HOME-BASED)



The Bell Foundation is an educational charity working to overcome exclusion through language education and is delivering its vision through four programmes, the EAL Programme, the Criminal Justice Programme, the Language for Results International Programme and the new ESOL Programme.

The Bell Foundation has a rewarding opportunity for a full-time, home-based online Trainer to work within a growing, dynamic team to develop and deliver training, resources and guidance across its programmes.

Trainer: £29,217- £33,913 per annum

Hours: 35 hours per week, Monday to Friday

You will play a key role in both the development, implementation and evaluation of training as part of the Foundation's EAL, ESOL and International Programmes. You will also provide inputs into the development and review of both the EAL and ESOL Programmes and support the Criminal Justice Programme to develop training and resources.

You will have a proven track record of running high quality EAL and ESOL teacher training to schools and experience of working in a comparable role. You will have experience of creating digital content and resources and a sound understanding of what constitutes effective and evidence-informed CPD.

With excellent digital, communication and interpersonal skills, you will be a self-starter with a can-do attitude with excellent attention to detail and an eye for quality with the ability to critically evaluate and review.

This is a home-based role with one day per month from The Bell Foundation Cambridge office.

To apply

To apply, please send a CV and covering letter to recruitment.foundation@bell-foundation.org.uk explaining how you meet the criteria set out in the Job Description. Please note, if you are shortlisted for an interview you will be required to complete an application form as part of our safer recruitment processes.

The Bell Foundation is committed to building a diverse and inclusive organisation to better represent the communities we serve. We welcome applications from all regardless of age, gender identity, disability, first language, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, race or ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, transgender status, or socio-economic background.

The Bell Foundation is committed to promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment. A DBS check will be requested in the event of a successful application.

Closing date: 17:30, Thursday 23 June 2022

Online interviews: Wednesday 6 July 2022



Early Years Educator

Salary:
£30,063.00 - £31,155.00
Pro-rata term time only

Contract: One year fixed term



The New Wave Federation consists of 3 high performing and innovative primary schools in Hackney.

We are seeking an experienced and passionate Early Years Educator to continue to deliver an outstanding early years provision. You will contribute to the planning and teaching of this age group.

The right person will be someone who is up to date with 21st century education and who is creative and resourceful. An NNEB Level 3 qualification or equivalent is essential.

Our schools are vibrant, diverse and inclusive. If you are an effective communicator, have vision, energy and believe that every child can and will succeed, we would like to meet you.

HOW TO APPLY: Application packs are available from Ms Alia Choudhry: achoudhry@newwavefederation.co.uk or 020 7254 1415.

Closing date: Friday 17th June 2022 at 12pm
Interview date: w/c Monday 27th June 2022



HEADTEACHER

Full Time, Permanent, Required for January 2023
L23 - L29 (£72,497 - £83,971)

Over 400 children require an exceptional Headteacher to lead their school from January 2023. Could you be their perfect candidate?

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

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

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

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

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I have always found Schools Week very helpful. They reach a large audience and support with many of our vacancies. I am very satisfied with their service and would recommend them highly.

The Shared Learning Trust

Click here to contact our team

