

THE MISGUIDED RECRUITMENT SCRAMBLE FOR YOUTH



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SCHOOLS CAN'T KEEP THEIR HEADS

- 1 in 10 schools have new headteacher as turnover rises by a third
- Secondary head vacancies also up 50 per cent amid burnout warning
- 'Unless these trends begin to reverse, we'll need to accept new normal'

SCHOOLS WEEK

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Our commitment to help schools find the solutions

Education is enveloped by crises.

Since returning in September, we've reported on "apocalyptic" budget pressures, woeful teacher recruitment (and it was already bad), the biggest attainment gap for a decade, a surge in staff deemed suicide risks, and impending strikes.

We will keep exposing these issues so that politicians know about the challenges you face.

But, as political help looks ever more unlikely, we want our journalism to provide even more value.

This means covering some of those big-ticket problems through the lens of potential solutions.

We will investigate and explain solutions, provide insight into how accessible they are, present the evidence (or lack of) and, importantly, look at possible limitations.

This has always been part of our journalism. Longer stories, while leading on the issues, have often suggested how to fix the problems.

But our plan now is to commit to solutions-focused stories more regularly, giving them a place alongside our usual news, investigations, analysis, explainers and opinions.

In our last edition before Christmas in 2020, we ran a series looking at the positives

schools discovered during the Covid pandemic: online lessons have meant no more lost learning on snow days; attendance at parents' evenings have risen because the option to attend online.

We will provide more of this. It could be based on an interesting policy proposal, such as the suggestion by Dame Rachel de Souza this week for schools to open spare classrooms for nurseries (page 9).

Falling numbers of primary school pupils was causing big problems. Previous *Schools Week* investigations showed how leaders were having to make cuts to balance the books.

Our coverage also could be driven by choosing a particularly pressing problem and trying to find if there's someone in the sector who believes they might have a solution that could help.

We want our journalism to be led by you, our readers. So if you think something you're doing is innovative and helps you (and other schools) to deal with those big issues (including budgets, recruitment, retention, mental health), then we want to hear from you.

Please email the editor John Dickens at john.dickens@schoolsweek.co.uk

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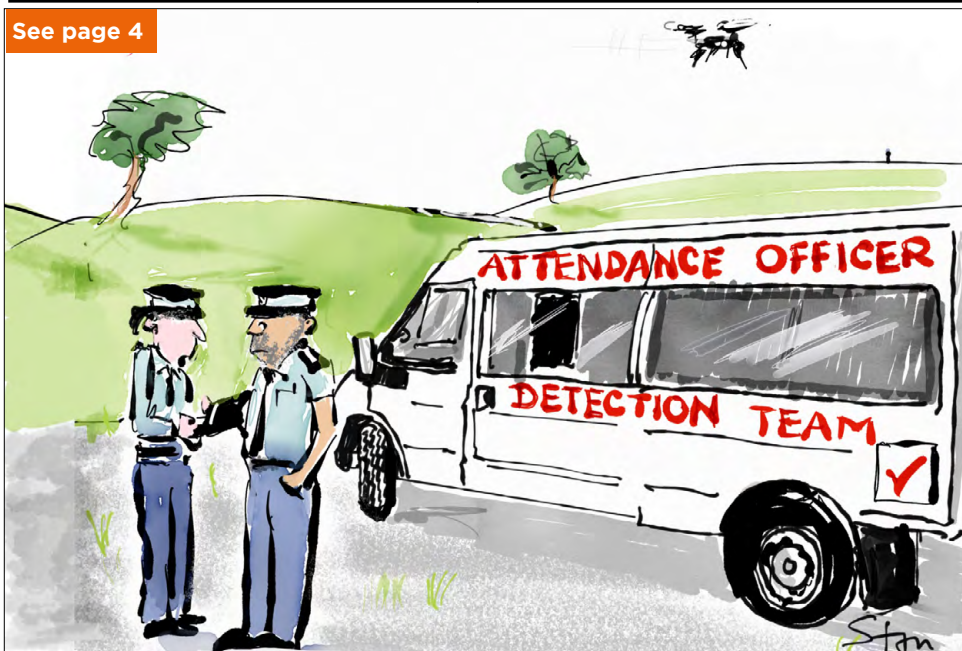
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INVESTIGATION: ATTENDANCE

Council attendance staff cuts 50 times bigger than new support

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

Councils are “unlikely to have capacity” to meet tougher school absence duties as new figures show attendance staff numbers have been “decimated” by a third in a decade.

Under reforms to crack down on school absence, town halls will have to provide a minimum attendance support offer to pupils, and their families and schools.

Last autumn, 23.5 per cent of pupils missed more than 10 per cent of sessions, up from 13.1 per cent in pre-pandemic 2019.

Dame Rachel de Souza, the children’s commissioner, has also warned of between 80,000 and 100,000 pupils dropping off school rolls.

The government has hired 13 new attendance advisers to help councils drive through its reforms. But an investigation by Schools Week has found nearly 50 times as many advisers in charge of school attendance at councils have been cut over the past 10 years.

‘Huge amount of support has disappeared’

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the ASCL school leaders’ union, said: “A huge amount of support has disappeared. The government maintains that improved attendance is a priority, while failing to provide the necessary investment to help schools achieve this aim.”

Freedom of information data from just over a third of local authorities found the number of staff monitoring and encouraging school attendance dropped from 672 in 2011 to 445 in 2021, a drop of 34 per cent.

Extrapolated to cover the whole country, this would mean a drop in staff numbers from 1,816 to 1,202.

The decreases come in the wake of austerity-driven cuts to local authority budgets since 2010, including the £600 million education support grant that was scrapped in 2015.

Councils have also reduced education staff as more schools have become academies.

But new duties will require councils to track local attendance data and devise a “strategic approach to attendance”, and regularly “bring schools together” to communicate messages. They must also hold “targeted



support meetings” about pupils at risk of poor attendance and provide “multi-disciplinary support” for families.

A Local Government Association spokesperson said: “With councils having fewer attendance staff, they’re unlikely to have the capacity to take on greater responsibilities.”

‘Meeting reforms will be huge burden’

In the London borough of Hackney, the number of full-time-equivalent staff working on school attendance fell from 18 in 2011 to 5.6 in 2021 - although 75 per cent of its schools are still local authority-maintained.

Anntoinette Bramble, the borough’s deputy mayor, said that meeting the additional responsibilities would put a huge burden on already stretched funding and capacity.

In Sheffield, the number of staff directly supporting schools on attendance fell from 55.49 to 22.46. However, the council now only maintains about 38 per cent of the area’s schools.

Most of the reduction came between 2011 and 2012, when its wider education welfare service was disbanded.

In Wigan, attendance staff numbers more than halved from 20 in 2021 to 9.4 last year.

Catherine Pealing, the council’s assistant director for education, said responsibility for attendance “doesn’t all sit with the local authority, it sits with families, the school and our early intervention services”.

“Our allocation of

attendance officers is not the sum of support to meet this new duty, but will be supported by a multi-agency response.”

Numbers in the south London Brough of Sutton have dropped from 9.96 to 2.33. A spokesperson said it was a “challenge” that the new responsibilities did not come with extra funding “but we aim to fulfil our statutory responsibilities within the financial restraints of the initiative”.

Some councils, however, have increased attendance staff numbers. In Bedford, numbers increased from three to 10.6, and in Greenwich, south London, they increased from 6.3 to 10.24.

Cheshire East’s team has grown from 10.24 to 19.21. A spokesperson said it would give the council “a strong foundation” to meet its responsibilities under the new guidance.

‘Reforms can be achieved by better use of resources’

The department said in its “burdens assessment” for the reforms earlier this year that they could be delivered through “better use of existing resource”.

It even claimed only 1,276 staff nationally would be needed to enact the changes, and that councils could save as much as £285,000 a year by 2025 from a reduction in “costly” legal interventions.

But the LGA said the analysis did not “adequately capture the additional workload”.

A DfE spokesperson said attendance was a “shared responsibility”, adding that the school sector had “changed significantly over the past 10 years and multi-academy trusts play a leading role in encouraging school attendance”.



Dame Rachel de Souza

Private school grade inflation probes, as A*s plunge by up to 50%

SAMANTHA BOOTH
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Private schools are being investigated for malpractice after “credible evidence” that some inflated teacher grades during the pandemic.

Top grades at independent schools soared when exams were called off and replaced with teacher grades (TAGs).

However, they plunged this year when exams returned – despite top grades for grammar schools, which also have more higher-attaining students, remaining much the same.

While some experts suggested the data may support arguments that independent schools inflated last year’s grades, others urged caution.

Schools Week analysis shows A*s halved in some private schools after the return of exams.

Dr Jo Saxton, Ofqual’s chief regulator, told the education select committee this week that exam boards were looking at individual private schools over malpractice.

Rob Halfon, the committee’s chair, asked whether this was evidence private schools “gamed the teacher assessed system”.

Saxton replied: “Tempting as it is to make comparisons, it was a totally different form of assessment. That said, Ofqual takes all allegations of malpractice and cheating extremely seriously.”

“We require the boards to investigate any credible evidence of malpractice and cheating. I know there are ongoing investigations.”

She said the boards run any investigation monitored by Ofqual, so she was unable to comment further.

Earlier this year, a *Sunday Times* study found that many leading private schools at least doubled their clutch of A*s at A-level in 2021.

Schools Week looked at the 20 schools with the largest increases in these top grades to see how much they changed this summer.

Figures are from their websites, as performance tables have not yet been published.

One of the largest drops was at Winchester College, from 80.2 per cent A*s in 2021 to 41.7 per cent this summer. This is below the college’s pre-pandemic 2019 rate of 42.3 per cent. The school did



not respond to a request for comment.

There was a 39 percentage point drop at Woldingham School in Surrey between 2021 and 2022. In 2021, 62.3 per cent of grades were A* compared with 23 per cent this year, which is much closer to the 15.8 per cent rate of top grades in 2019.

A spokesperson for the school said its 2021 cohort were “an exceptionally able year group. All the TAGs submitted were calculated carefully in line with the guidance provided.”

The number of A* at Putney High School in southwest London dropped from 67.7 per cent in 2021 to 33 per cent this summer.

Kevin Stannard, the director of innovation and learning at the Girls’ Day School Trust, which runs Putney, said higher grades in 2021 were “not the result of a conspiracy by schools to take advantage of the situation”.

He said grades reflected the “temporary recourse” to modular-style assessment, because schools could use evidence accumulated over a longer period and assessments could be staggered.

Barnaby Lenon, the chairman of the Independent Schools Council, said the big rises during TAGs were because private schools tended to have pupils clustered towards the top end of grade scales.

“Pupils should be proud of their efforts, having overcome the many

challenges brought about by the pandemic, and nothing should take away from their achievements.”

There is no suggestion any of these private schools are under investigation. Ofqual refused to give a figure of the number being looked at, saying it would “not be appropriate for us to comment on specific cases” of malpractice.

But it urged anyone with concerns to contact it or the exam board.

Cases of malpractice dropped off during the pandemic. Many of the usual breaches, such as taking unauthorised material into exam rooms, were not relevant.

Fewer than five penalties were issued to schools and colleges in 2021, down from 15 in 2020. For individual staff, 35 penalties were handed out, up from 25 the year before.

Penalties for schools include additional monitoring, withdrawal of centre recognition or a written warning.

On the broader issue of the difference in grades between private and state schools, Saxton said: “It’s one of the reasons I was incredibly glad we could reinstate exams – it proves exams are the fairest form of assessment.

“It’s similar to the unfortunate issue we see with regions. There were differences in results in independent schools and other school types that existed prior to the pandemic.

“They were exacerbated without exams and we’ve seen the results from 2022 are closer to those that existed prior to the pandemic.”



Robert Halfon

Vital special school rejected over plan for flats

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

A "much-needed" special school first approved five years ago in west London has been rejected for planning permission by councillors opposed to building a five-storey block of flats on the site.

The Wing's Academy was due to open in 2024, six years after ministers approved Hounslow's bid for a new free, social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) school.

Hounslow's special needs services are creaking, with Ofsted in February finding significant weaknesses in its SEND provision. "Too many" children were placed out of the borough to meet needs.

The case reveals stumbling blocks for building homes on school sites just as the government renews its bid to find school land suitable to be sold for housing.

The Wing's plans were for a 90-place 11 to 19 school as well as 124 flats – 35 per cent of them affordable – on a derelict site owned by the Department for Education.

The new school, run by Orchard Hill College Academy Trust, would serve pupils from Hounslow and Ealing.

But the planning committee rejected the proposal over noise, privacy concerns and outdoor spaces. More than 20,000 objections were received, including from the neighbouring Sikh Gurdwara temple, MPs and residents.

It is not clear when the school will now open. The site's developers said they were "disappointed" and were "exploring all avenues" before deciding on next steps.

Council spends £900,000 sending pupils elsewhere

Labour-run Hounslow currently spends nearly £900,000 a year sending 16 secondary-aged pupils to independent schools because of a lack of state places.

The council is to join the SEND safety valve programme and will be given a bailout to plug a £23.2 million deficit in school funding.

The proposed school would provide places for pupils with education, health



and care plans (EHCPs) who have social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. They currently use local alternative provision, which supports children who have been excluded.

The percentage of Hounslow pupils with EHCPs has risen from 3.5 per cent in 2018-19, to 4.1 per cent in 2020-21, which is above the national average of 3.6 per cent.

The council spends £11 million on independent and non-maintained special school provision, according to its documents.

Ruth Cunningham, from the DfE's property company LocatED, said the Wing's academy was a "showcase" of one of the "best educational environments that can be delivered in a SEN setting".

She added Hounslow's own site allocation - created in its 2015 local plan - earmarked the land for residential and education use.

'New school proposers need to engage'

Paul Robinson, a chartered town planner representing the Gurdwara, told the planning meeting last month that "no one wants to see a school thrown out" but "that's the structure of the application".

In the committee's decision notice, councillors said the "submitted noise impact assessment and subsequent technical notes fail to fully understand

and mitigate any possible noise impacts from the neighbouring Gurdwara" on the development.

The flats' windows and balconies also "would be an intrusive and unneighbourly addition resulting in a loss of privacy".

Free schools face huge planning hurdles. Unity Schools Partnership's 2017 free school in Havering is finally opening next year after taking a "long time to secure planning permission".

The school is on green belt land so needed approval from the local authority and the Greater London Authority.

Schools Week revealed last month how just one in 37 special and AP free schools pledged since 2020 had opened in a permanent home, despite a chronic crisis in available spaces.

Christine Bayliss, a free school expert and former civil servant, said proposers of new schools "need to ensure that they are engaged in the process".

A LocatED spokesperson said it could take time to secure a permanent site in cities because of council planning requirements and the need to demonstrate 'best value for the taxpayer'.

They added Wings would be an "education-led development", providing "much-needed specialist education provision within the borough".

LONG READ: FUNDING

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'The chancellor has a choice: fund schools properly or see them deteriorate'

JOHN DICKENS
@JOHNDICKENSSW

Slashing public spending was reportedly one of the options on Liz Truss's table as she scrambled to fill a £40 billion unfunded tax-cuts blackhole that sent financial markets into meltdown.

But the new prime minister pledged on Wednesday that public spending cuts would "absolutely" not happen. So where does this leave school funding?

Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng said his mini-budget of late October would drive growth to get the economy back on its feet.

But the huge tax cuts – worth about £43 billion – were announced without a plan for what would pay for them.

The pound fell, interest rates soared and pension funds tottered before the Bank of England intervened with a £65 billion cheque book.

Recent reports have centred on "trimming the fat" in public sector spending - and education will be hit if the massive savings required are to be met.

Main estimates for Department for Education funding show its budget expenditure limit was £94.8 billion in 2021-22.

Of this, £84.1 billion goes straight out the door to fund schools, colleges and universities. Another £5.6 billion is capital funding for building upkeep – which leaves just £5.1 billion (5 per cent of the whole DfE budget) for any cuts to be made without impacting education spending.

Education is one of only three areas with funding above £50 billion.

However, in a surprise move on Wednesday, Liz Truss pledged to "absolutely" not cut public spending.

"What we will make sure is that over the medium term that debt is falling. But we will do that not by cutting public spending, but by making sure we spend public money well."



Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng

Protected budgets won't solve funding woes

Taking her at her word, this means the education pot of cash will be protected in cash terms. But this is still hugely problematic.

Rampant inflation and rising costs such as energy mean that pot will continue to shrink in real terms – with schools feeling the squeeze.

Take teacher pay. The government had proposed a 3 per cent rise for experienced teachers from this September, before agreeing (after schools had set their budget for this year) to sanction 5 per cent rises.

This was a reaction to demands for a bigger pay hike to keep up with inflation, with school staff

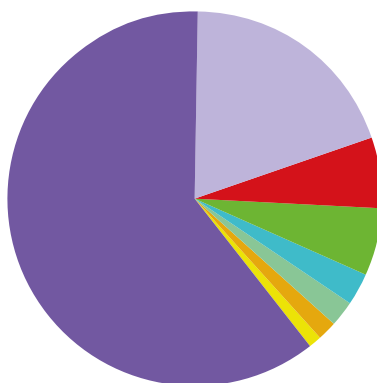
caught up in the cost-of-living crisis.

However, there was no extra cash to fund that two percentage point change. Schools had to absorb the hit from their current budgets.

Core school funding will rise to £56.8 billion in 2024-25 from £44.4 billion in 2019-20. But despite this, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) says the government will no longer meet its original promise to restore per-pupil funding levels to 2010 levels, when the Conservatives first gained power.

In fact, schools will be 3 per cent worse off in real terms by the next election than they were 15 years previously, despite the extra cash.

There is little education admin cash to cut



£57.8bn	Schools
£18.4bn	Universities
£5.8bn	FE
£5.6bn	Capital
£2.7bn	ESFA
£2.1bn	Grants direct to schools (like catch-up)
£1.5bn	Uni arms-length bodies
£1bn	Other
£94.9bn	Total DfE expenditure limit

LONG READ: FUNDING

DO YOU HAVE A STORY? CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

'Top up spending or accept quality of services will deteriorate'

A major study this week by the IFS tried to work out the real-world implications of not topping up public spending to meet inflation.

If there is no compensation to fund this year's 5 per cent pay rise and inflation-matching pay rises in 2024-25, staying within existing budgets will cost £60 billion. This could mean a cut of 220,000 public sector staff cut, equal to about 50,000 workers in education, the IFS said.

The report warned Kwarteng "must either top up those spending plans to fund these higher-than-expected pay awards or accept that the quality of public services will (further) deteriorate".

"This is one of the central fiscal choices for this autumn. Indeed, this could be among the defining decisions of the remainder of this parliament."

In the meantime, recruitment worsens.

The IFS study shows why: the difference between public and private pay is down from 7 per cent in 2011-12 to slightly below zero for 2021-22. The think tank says this is "now less favourable to the public sector than at any point in the past 30 years".

(This is based on the IFS's conditional public-private pay differential, which controls for the fact public sector workers tend to be more educated, older and more experienced).

Reserves and pensions – solutions?

So are there any solutions?

Academy trusts boosted their reserves and surpluses – despite Covid upheaval – in 2019-20, official figures released last year show.

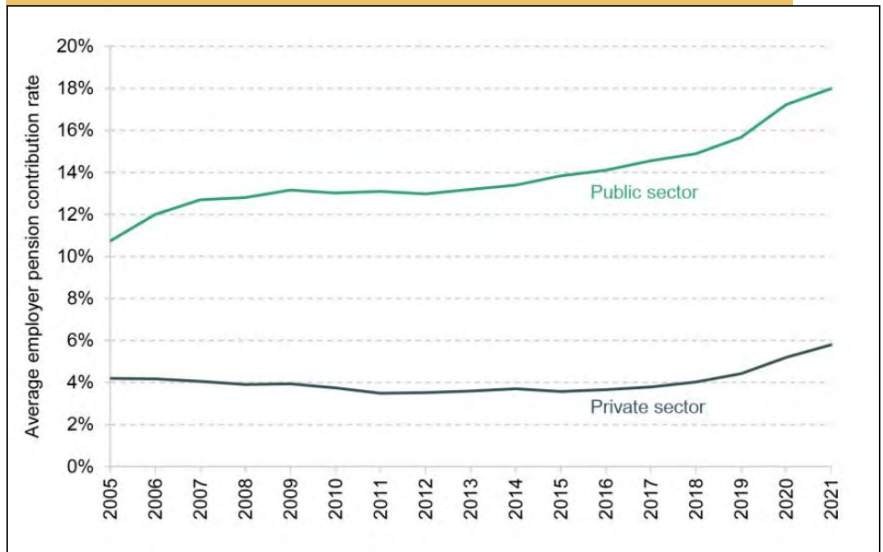
Average academy trust reserves rose by 20 per cent up to £1.15 million. Accounts from last year for some larger trusts suggest such increases held up. So is there room to soak up pressures?

Unlikely. Many trusts say their increased reserves are down as cash has had to be allocated to rebuilding projects delayed because of Covid.

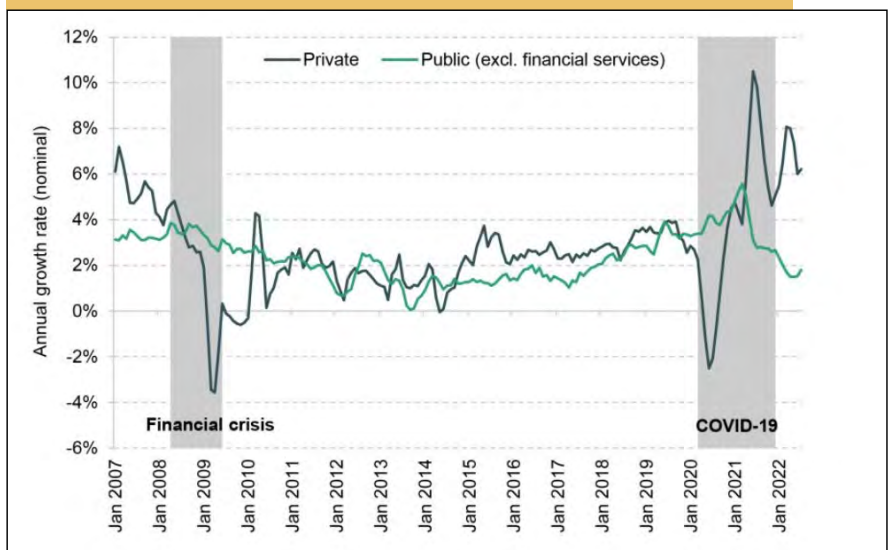
Many of those projects have either started or are going ahead, so using those reserves to cover funding pressures would mean shelving vital repair work.

Plus, the reserves in any trusts that did manage to boost their financial health during Covid are being wiped out by soaring energy bills – even with the government's six-month "guarantee"

PUBLIC SECTOR PENSIONS ARE MORE GENEROUS



PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTOR PAY GAP IS WIDENING



factored in.

A small-scale government survey suggests gas bills will more than double in some schools under the new price cap – and this was based on older energy costs that have since surged again.

Delta Academies Trust has been quoted new gas prices for next year of more than 500 per cent what they are currently paying. This would cost an additional £7.7 million on utilities a year, as the current price cap ends in April.

The IFS suggests an option could be to make public sector pensions less generous.

Whereas nearly half of public sector staff received employer pension contributions of 20

per cent in 2021, this was true of just 2 per cent of private sector employees.

Decreasing employee pension contributions alongside a decrease in pension generosity would "increase take-home pay for public sector employees with no change to the costs for their employers", the report said.

As Schools Week went to press, there were reports Truss would renege on her pledge to not increase corporation tax by six percentage points. This would mean £18 billion of cuts are no longer required, but it would still leave huge sums to be found – and school budgets at threat from either more cuts or no more investment.

SOLUTIONS: FALLING ROLLS

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Can nurseries fill primary schools' empty classrooms?

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Running on-site childcare in classrooms that may be empty as rolls fall allows primary schools to prepare pupils for reception, intervene early, and provide a "one-stop shop" for families.

But "practical issues" face leaders considering renting out since-vacated spaces, who may leave themselves short should populations spike again.

Children's commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza called this week for "underused space" in primaries to be used for early years education and childcare. The latest government projections predict the primary school population will fall by 16.6 per cent over the next five years. Some councils are already reducing school capacity and repurposing empty classrooms.

Early years provision on school sites is nothing new, and it is becoming more popular. Government figures show there were 9,500 school-based early years providers in England last year, up from 8,600 in 2018.

Schools can run their own provision funded through government childcare schemes and private fees, or rent out space to outside providers.

Leaders told *Schools Week* they favoured the former.

Schools like earlier interventions

The nursery and after-school club at Hartford Manor Primary in Cheshire was run in partnership with external providers, but is now in-house. Head Simon Kidwell said the school wanted to provide "continuity of care". The nursery now delivers early reading programmes that tie into what's taught in reception, for example.

The provision also moved into the main school building, easing transition for the 70 per cent of reception entrants who attend the nursery.

Wraparound childcare is also available from 7.30am to 6pm to benefit parents commuting into Manchester.

Running the provision has been "certainly more beneficial than just having it as a lease", and the school hopes to soon provide holiday care.

Exeter Road Community Primary School, in Exmouth, took over



control of its pre-school provision from a charity. Head Dr Paul Gosling said this was to put "some of the developmental stuff in earlier".

"It's a good thing to do. I would encourage schools to do it. But not all school spaces are appropriate. It will need capital investment."

Capital funding for schools is increasingly harder to obtain: the amount available fell by 29 per cent in real terms between 2009 and 2021.

Not a money-maker

Most of Exeter Road's nursery places are funded through the government's 15 or 30-hour free childcare offer. But low funding rates mean the "economies of it don't quite work" in poorer areas, said Gosling.

Pay in the childcare sector is also too low, leading to recruitment and retention challenges.

"I'm not sure if having extra space helps with that, because it's people that the money gets mostly spent on. It needs to be invested. [But] the best investment you can get is in the early years."

Another school leader said their school started running its own provision after the closure of a Sure Start centre left a "real gap" for younger children. But, there is "no financial benefit. Essentially the money you bring in is spent. And if we're below a certain number [of children], you lose money."

Leasing out space to a private provider would provide an income, but "the reason why we do it are the gains around the

improved support for families, the education provision".

"For us, we're a bit of a one-stop shop. That familiarity of school space, routines, but also for parents picking children up they're coming to one space. There's a whole host of potential advantages. But financial is not one."

De Souza said more school provision would provide consistency in standards and mean workforce training and development could be aligned to wider school staff.

'Evicting toddlers' not a good look

But school business leader Hilary Goldsmith said classrooms are "specifically designed for the age and physical size of the children in them".

She also warned "annexing" of classroom space would potentially have an impact on schools' ability to deal with rising numbers in future because "you can't just kick the nursery out".

School business expert Matthew Clements-Wheeler added that if birth rates rise in a locality or a new housing development increases demand, then "evicting toddlers" may lead to "adverse publicity".

Other issues include the need for dedicated toilets, working patterns of staff, arrangements for utility costs and for pick-off and drop-off. But if these can be addressed, then it's a "good use of publicly-funded buildings", Clements-Wheeler added.

But Goldsmith said it was much simpler to just "build dedicated nursery facilities".



Paul Gosling



Hilary Goldsmith

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Sixth-form staff back industrial action on pay

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The National Education Union will formally ballot members in sixth-form colleges for industrial action after 85 per cent of respondents to an indicative ballot backed strike action.

It is the first official sign of support in the sector for walkouts over pay, with school teachers and support staff also now voting on backing industrial action.

Turnout in the indicative poll of 4,100 members in 77 sixth-form colleges was 76.6 per cent – well above the 50 per cent threshold for formal ballots required under tough new laws that came into force in 2016.

The 85 per cent support for a strike is also more than double the 40 per cent required, meaning action will go ahead if the results are repeated in the formal ballot.

Overall, 97 per cent of respondents backed calls for a pay rise to exceed RPI, which was 11.7 per cent when the pay claim was submitted.

A separate indicative ballot of teachers and support staff in schools is due to close on Friday.

The union, which has just over 450,000 members, has given education secretary Kit Malthouse until noon that day to come up with a better pay and funding offer or face a formal



ballot.

The union (NEU) had to hold separate ballots as sixth-form college teachers have their pay set differently to their colleagues in schools.

However, the NEU said the pay offer from the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA) had essentially “mirrored” the pay offer for teachers, which amounted to an 8.9 per cent increase in starting salaries, but a 5 per cent rise for most teachers.

Dr Mary Bousted, the union’s joint general secretary, said: “No one wants to take strike action, but year after year of below-inflation pay increases have now had a major impact on the value of their pay. Government

needs to address what is now a serious problem for the sector.”

Graham Baird, the director of HR services at the SFCA, said leaders “fully support” increased pay calls, but would need more cash from government to “ensure teachers in sixth-form colleges receive the pay increase that they deserve”.

A DfE spokesperson said sixth-form colleges were “independent of government and set their own pay”. They would get as an extra £1.6 billion in 2024-25 compared with last year.

The NASUWT teaching union warned last week it would have “no other alternative than to ballot to support industrial action” if a better deal was not put forward.

ASCL, the school leaders’ union, consulted members about potential industrial action for the first time in its history this year.

The NAHT, the country’s other headteachers’ union, has also asked its members if they would consider industrial action.



Kit Malthouse

Trusts split on handling income centrally

Half of multi-academy trusts do not want central teams to manage all funding through “GAG pooling” – despite many seeing the benefits.

A poll of 83 chief executives and chief operating and finance officers found 50 per cent were wary of centralising general annual grant (GAG) funding “due to the negative impact this could have on schools wanting to join their trust”.

Most academy trusts top-slice a percentage of individual schools’ GAG funding to pay for central operations.

But more are now handling income centrally and allocating it to schools in proportion to their needs through their own tailored formulas.

The Kreston Academies Benchmark Report earlier this year found 14 per cent used GAG pooling, up from 0.8 per cent in 2017.

The latest poll, by MAT finance software provider IMP Software, found nearly all respondents said centralising more funding could make them more effective.

Among trusts that already use GAG pooling, almost three-quarters said their levels of centralisation were either a positive or neutral factor for those looking to join.

But other leaders’ wariness is likely to reflect some schools’ fears over what the Kreston report called “a perception that in the short term some schools will gain and others will lose out”.

In a schools bill debate earlier this year, one

peer called for more transparency over trusts’ pooling formulas. Others in the sector want clearer guidance.

MAT chiefs may be especially cautious given how many wish to expand, with the government’s white paper this year stating they should aim to have at least 10 schools or 7,500 pupils.

Among those polled, half said they were targeting growth by one or two schools over the next 18 months, one-third reported seeking between three and five new schools, and 8.5 per cent were aiming for five or more.

Schools Week is media partner for the 2022 MAT Finance Awards

NEWS: RECRUITMENT

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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DfE lifts training bursaries to boost recruitment

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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The government will increase teacher training bursaries and scholarships next year to attract new entrants as it faces a growing recruitment and retention crisis.

But the total funding on offer is still £70 million lower than it was in 2020 before bursaries were slashed.

The increase of some bursaries to £27,000 – the highest level since 2017 – will be seen as tacit admission that cutting incentives to the bone for 2021 entrants was a mistake.

It comes after analysis showed secondary subjects with the largest reduction in teacher bursaries attracted the fewest trainees in this year’s “grim” recruitment drive.

Ministers are likely to miss their secondary trainee teacher target for next year by a third, the ninth time in the past ten years that targets have been missed.

Maths, physics, chemistry and computing entrants to teacher training in 2023 will attract £27,000 bursaries, £3,000 more than this year and 2021, and £1,000 more than in pre-pandemic 2020.

Alternatively, applicants with better degrees in those subjects could get a £29,000 scholarship.

The bursary for modern foreign language teachers will increase from £15,000 to £25,000, although this is still lower than the £26,000 offered in 2020. Prospective French, German and Spanish teachers can alternatively get a £27,000



scholarship.

Geography bursaries will also increase from £15,000 to £25,000, biology will rise from £10,000 to £20,000, while design and technology will increase from £15,000 to £20,000.

English, which did not attract a bursary in 2021 or 2022, will attract a £15,000 bursary.

However, bursaries that were offered in 2020 in history, art and design, music, business studies and religious education have still not been restored, despite some of those subjects expected to under-recruit.

Jack Worth, from the National Foundation for Educational Research, said “applying rule of thumb” to next year’s recruitment numbers, he would expect English, biology, chemistry and maths to meet or exceed their targets as a result of the changes.

But physics, computing and design and technology would still be “way below targets”.

Teacher bursaries funding far below 2020 levels

The Department for Education said the package of support would cost £181 million, more than the roughly £130 million allocated in 2022 and 2021, but less than the £250 million pledged in 2020.

Jonathan Gullis, the schools minister, said: “As a former teacher, I know that investing in our teachers is investing in young people. These generous bursaries and scholarships will attract the brightest and the best into teaching.

“Shoring up the talent pipeline to teach vital subject areas such as STEM and languages will, in turn, equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to secure a bright future, and ensure that our economy remains globally competitive.”

But Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL school leaders’ union, said the increases “only scratch the surface of the crisis”.

“The underlying issue is that salary levels are not competitive enough because of government austerity policies that have eroded the real value of school teachers’ pay by a fifth over the past decade.

“The government must work with the education sector on a strategic plan that deals with these systemic issues. At present, the majority of schools and colleges in England are struggling to put teachers in front of classes.”

An Institute for Fiscal Studies report this week found tens of thousands of teachers face being cut if the government sticks to its current plan of refusing to fund higher than expected pay rises.

BURSARIES RISE, BUT MOST STILL BELOW PRE-COVID LEVELS

Subject	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change 2020-2023
Maths, physics, chemistry, computing	£26,000	£24,000	£24,000	£27,000	+£1,000
MFL	£26,000	£10,000	£15,000	£25,000	-£1,000
Geography	£15,000	£0	£15,000	£25,000	+£10,000
D&T	£15,000	£0	£15,000	£20,000	+£5,000
Biology	£26,000	£7,000	£10,000	£20,000	-£6,000
English	£12,000	£0	£0	£15,000	+£3,000
History	£9,000	£0	£0	£0	-£9,000
Art & design	£9,000	£0	£0	£0	-£9,000
Music	£9,000	£0	£0	£0	-£9,000
Business	£9,000	£0	£0	£0	-£9,000
RE	£9,000	£0	£0	£0	-£9,000
Primary (maths)	£6,000	£0	£0	£0	-£6,000

School direct and apprenticeship grants confirmed

The DfE has also confirmed that grants for trainees on school direct (salaried) routes will be £27,000 for chemistry, computing, maths and physics, £25,000 for geography and languages, £20,000 for biology and D&T and £15,000 for English.

Grants for postgraduate teaching apprentices will be £18,000 for chemistry, computing, maths and physics, £16,000 for geography and languages, £11,000 for biology and D&T and £6,000 for English.

The grants are to contribute to training and salary costs.

ANALYSIS: SCHOOL WORKFORCE

Keeping their heads: Turnover rises by a third

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Headteacher turnover has leapt by more than a third since before the pandemic, with one in ten schools welcoming a new head this September.

SchoolDash data shows there was 2,127 headteacher changes this September, when appointments peak, up from 1,584 in September 2019 – a 34 per cent rise.

Meanwhile, a separate analysis by TeachVac shows a 54 per cent rise in secondary school headteacher vacancies this September when compared to last year. In fact, two schools re-advertised for their vacant role three times in the space of five months.

Ian Hartwright, senior policy adviser at school leaders' union NAHT, said "we're seeing the resumption of a downward trend in leadership retention – that's what we'd expected but hoped might not be the case."

The new normal or pent-up demand?

Turnover rates had dropped after 2019 as schools dealt with Covid, with job moves becoming somewhat more popular in January and April instead. SchoolDash data shows there were just 1,208 headteacher changes in September 2020 and 1,434 last year.

TeachVac chairman, John Howson, said "a lot of people hung on through Covid, therefore there was probably a backlog of people who might have got a promotion or moved to another part of the country."

Timo Hannay, SchoolDash's managing director, said a small amount of turnover can be a good thing, but sustained high levels can create "serious disruption".

He said rises were unlikely to be "simply due to pent-up demand" of headteachers who delayed job moves during Covid uncertainty.

"We are already well over a year down the road and all the indicators are still pointing to increased turnover. Unless these trends begin to reverse in the coming months, at some point we will need to accept them as a new normal," he added.



Headteacher changes were tracked from DfE data, and covered state and private schools.

Of the 1,660 primary schools with new headteachers in September, 97 per cent were state schools – meaning 9.6 per cent of state primaries had a new head this year.

Of the 467 secondary schools with new heads this September, 76 per cent were state schools. This equates to 10 per cent of all mainstream state secondary schools in England.

High turnover risks 'enormous'

Hartwright said the risk to schools of high turnover is "enormous", as it is "leaders, working with the governing or trust board, who set school improvement plans with long-term objectives for the school".

"If you have a lot of change of leadership it disrupts that work. Like in any occupation, you need to spend time getting to understand the lay of the land and getting underneath the bonnet of it to see how things are really working."

He also warned "less experienced" staff could be drawn into leadership roles where schools are struggling to fill gaps, making leaders "less effective".

Data seems to back up that this is already happening.

The DfE's annual school workforce census already shows the proportion of 25 to 29-year-olds in leadership roles rose

by 173 per cent in the decade to 2021-22.

This is likely impacted by the changing academy landscape during those years though, with an evolving role for headteachers in multi-academy trusts.

"If there are much less experienced staff at all levels, it makes it harder to bring new staff into those roles because there's fewer mentors," said Hartwright.

"What is emerging now is something of a perfect storm, where real terms pay is depleting, there isn't enough funding for schools, [heads] are dealing with a spiralling energy costs crisis and that might explain why some are thinking 'I can't do this anymore'."

NAHT and fellow school leaders' union ASCL are consulting members over industrial action on the government's proposed five per cent pay rise for experienced teachers – 4.9 per cent below the current rate of inflation. They want pay restored to 2010 levels.

A recent ASCL survey of 2,000 school leaders found more than two-thirds said exhaustion and fatigue and unsustainable workload were causing them to consider leaving the profession.

"It is a terrible indictment of the way the government has treated the education sector, and it only has itself to blame if there is now a crisis in filling leadership positions," said general secretary Geoff Barton.

The DfE was contacted for comment.



Timo Hannay

SPEED READ: COVID

Covid 'severely widened' existing socioeconomic status among pupils

The pandemic has "severely widened existing inequalities" between poorer pupils and their better-off peers, a report on the impact of Covid has found.

The COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities (COSMO) study surveyed more than 13,000 pupils across England who were in Year 11 in 2021, and have now just entered Year 13.

The study was led by the UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, and the Sutton Trust.

1 SCHOOLS WITH POORER PUPILS HAD FEWER LIVE LESSONS

There were "substantial inequalities" between schools offering remote learning during the lockdowns. Just 65% of state school pupils had live online lessons in the first lockdown, compared to 96% of independent school pupils.

But when schools locked down for a second time last year, significant inequalities opened up within the state school sector. While 96% of grammar schools and 95% of affluent comprehensive schools managed to offer live lessons remotely, only 80% of schools with the most deprived intakes did so.

2 MANY LAPTOPS DIDN'T ARRIVE IN TIME ...

At the end of lockdown one, 61% of pupils who didn't have a suitable device at the start of the pandemic were still waiting to receive one.

But even by the end of the second period of school closures in 2021, more than half (53%) of pupils who did not have a device at the beginning of the pandemic still had not received one.



3... AND THOSE WITHOUT DID LESS SCHOOLWORK

Pupils who only had access to a mobile phone worked 10 hours a week on average in the first lockdown. Those without any devices at all worked even less – just eight hours a week on average.

But those who did have access to a laptop or tablet worked an average of 14 hours per week.

Remote learning barriers – such as lack of access to devices, quiet space in the home, or support from parents or teachers – were all more likely to be experienced by pupils from poorer households.

4 PRIVATE SCHOOL PUPILS MORE LIKELY TO HAVE TUTOR OFFER

Even with the existence of the National Tutoring Programme, private school pupils were more likely to have been offered tutoring (52% vs 41% in comprehensive schools). However, they were less likely to have taken part in tutoring than their comprehensive school peers.

This reflects that "students in private schools were less likely to feel that they needed this help", the report suggests.

5 MOST YOUNG PEOPLE GOT CATCH UP HELP

Overall, most young people (53%) have taken part in at least one type of 'catch-up' activity.

Half (50%) were offered additional online classes and 45% were offered additional in-person classes, with around 30% taking up these offers.

Schools with the highest intakes of free school meals (FSM) pupils were the most likely to have taken part in catch-up, at 61%, compared to 48% of those in the least deprived state schools.

6 MORE STATE SCHOOL PUPILS FELL BEHIND

Over a third (37%) of comprehensive school pupils said they have fallen behind their classmates due to the pandemic. That's more than double the figure for independent school students (15%).

Pupils in the most deprived state schools were the most likely to report feeling behind their classmates (45%). This compared to less than one in three (31%) pupils in the most affluent state schools.

Almost two-thirds of youngsters said they had changed their education plans since the pandemic hit – with girls, those from poorer households and comprehensive pupils, likely to change course.

Long-awaited phonics study records 'disappointing' results, but issues with trial

DONNA FERGUSON
@SCHOOLSWEEK

Children who learn to read using the country's "leading" phonics programme make one month's additional progress compared with their peers, while older pupils using a linked catch-up programme typically fall at least two months behind.

That is the "disappointing" conclusion of a long-awaited independent evaluation by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) of the Read Write Inc (RWI) and Fresh Start schemes used by 8,000 schools.

However, the £1 million evaluation was beset with problems. A second trial was canned because of the pandemic, with the EEF urging caution on interpreting findings.

What did the phonics study find?

The EEF found children aged 4 to 9 who participated in the RWI programme daily made, on average, an extra month's progress in reading compared with children using other phonics schemes.

Meanwhile, older children aged 9 to 13 who took part in Fresh Start (FS), a daily catch-up phonics intervention for those below their expected reading age, made two months' less progress.

In both situations, the impact of the programme was exaggerated for children eligible for free school meals.

Disadvantaged pupils made, on average, three months more progress than their peers when they participated in RWI, while older disadvantaged pupils using FS typically fell three months behind their peers.

More than 130 primary schools were recruited by Queen's University Belfast to take part in the trial, which began in 2016.

It's a failed trial

However, the EEF said the findings – particularly those just looking at disadvantaged pupils – should be "interpreted with caution".

Many pupils were not included in the final analysis because of factors such as absence, and other data was



missing. In the FS trial, more than a third of schools offered the intervention did not deliver the programme at all.

A spokesperson for Ruth Miskin Training, which offers the schemes, said the trial did not meet EEF's "high-quality standards... and are not a true reflection" of the schemes' impact.

The EEF report rated the RWI finding as having "low to moderate" security, with a "moderate" security for its FS conclusion.

Professor Stephen Gorard, the director of the Durham University Evidence Centre for Education, rated "trustworthiness" as one out of five.

"I would say it's a failed trial. I think the amount of missing data means we can't really draw any conclusions."

Schools want 'trustworthy' evidence

Schools are looking for interventions "that have trustworthy evidence and a big bang. This has neither," he said. "It doesn't mean the underlying interventions aren't any good. It's just that we can't and we shouldn't do anything on the basis of this trial."

The average costs of RWI for one school was about £18,960, or £186 annually for each pupil when averaged over three years, the report found.

But the EEF said the relative cost-effectiveness for one month's progress was £126,400 per school per year, or £3,718 annually for each pupil.

"If this figure is accurate, then this programme is very, very expensive, with consequences for the use of public funding of schools," said Professor Dominic Wyse, who recently co-authored a landmark study on the teaching of

phonics and reading.

Fellow academic Alice Bradbury, professor of sociology and education at University College London, added an extra month's progress for RWI pupils was "disappointing", given its popularity.

But the Ruth Miskin spokesperson said schools that taught the programme with "fidelity" achieved impressive results. Twenty of the 34 English hubs used the programme and Ofsted reading deep dives "praise the quality of teaching in schools that teach our programme".

Professor John Jerrim, from the UCL Institute of Education, said another evaluation was needed "quite quickly".

Second Read Write Inc trial canned

The findings are likely to call into question the EEF's decision to delay publishing the trial's results until the completion of a second report that started in 2019 to evaluate RWI's delivery through the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund.

No findings for that trial will be published after it was "significantly disrupted" by the pandemic. Instead, a "lessons learned" report has been produced.

Professor Becky Francis, the chief executive of the EEF, said "robust evidence" suggested that high-quality, structured phonics teaching could boost literacy development when they were "implemented carefully and as part of a wider literacy offering".

"We need more research around the impact that phonics can have on older pupils. Building the evidence base further will help us to better understand the impact that phonics approaches have on this age group."



Dominic Wyse



Professor Becky Francis

NEWS IN BRIEF

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Transgender charity's resources removed

The Department for Education has removed the transgender rights charity Mermaids from its mental health and wellbeing resources for schools.

It follows the Charity Commission launching a regulatory compliance investigation after "concerns had been raised" about the charity's "approach to safeguarding young people".

The Telegraph reported the charity was "handing out potentially harmful breast binders to girls as young as 13 behind their parents' backs".

The Times also reported this month that a Mermaids trustee resigned after reports he had spoken at a conference hosted by an organisation promoting services to paedophiles.

The DfE said it has also removed the charity's helpline as a precautionary measure.

In a statement, Mermaids said it was closing the line to give staff "respite" from



"unacceptable abuse".

Mermaids said its services "that have benefited thousands of people will continue" and that it was "in the midst of a targeted, cynical attack".

The opening of a compliance case is the watchdog's first step in examining potential wrongdoing, not a finding of wrongdoing,

[Full story here](#)

'Matchmaker' trusts to help struggling schools

Seven matchmaker academy trusts will help to hook up struggling schools with leading chief executives as part of the government's new improvement drive.

The Regional Development Partners will share just over £650,000 to "broker effective matches" between system leaders and schools and trusts eligible for support.

The scheme has been rolled out as part of the government's plan to deliver on its schools white paper. Single schools that receive a 'requires improvement' (RI) judgment from Ofsted this academic year will be eligible for support.

Multi-academy trusts with an "overall decline" in Ofsted judgments among its schools, or where at least half of schools have an RI rating, will also be eligible for help.

They will receive 10 days of support and advice from a trust chief executive of a "strong" MAT or a national leader of education.

SEVEN IMPROVEMENT MATCHMAKERS

- Flying High Trust**, East Midlands
- Great Heights Academy Trust**, North West, South Yorkshire and Humber
- Aspire Academy Trust**, South West
- St John Vianney Catholic Primary School** (part of Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust), the North
- Meridian Trust**, East of England
- Thornden School** (part of HISP MAT, southeast London)
- John Taylor MAT**, West Midlands

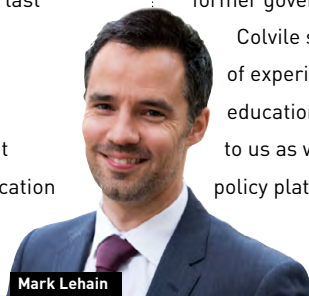
[Full story here](#)

DfE adviser moves to right-wing think tank

Mark Lehain, a former Department for Education special adviser, is the new head of education at the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) think tank.

Lehain, a former head of the New Schools Network and the founder of Bedford Free School, was appointed to the DfE last October by Nadhim Zahawi.

He was replaced last month by Rory Gribbell, a former Downing Street education adviser, after Kit Malthouse's appointment as education secretary.



Mark Lehain

The CPS was founded in 1974 by Margaret Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph, and still holds an influential role in Conservative policymaking.

Its director, Robert Colvile, co-wrote the party's 2019 manifesto with Rachel Wolf, also a former government education adviser.

Colvile said Lehain brought a "wealth of experience. Mark's knowledge of the educational landscape will be a huge asset to us as we continue to develop the CPS policy platform in this area."

[Full story here](#)

£20 million boosts hubs' funding for 2023-24

The 34 school-based English hubs have been given another £20 million to keep them running during the 2023-24 financial year.

The cash comes on top of £4.8 million for literacy measures as part of the government's accelerator fund programme.

Launched in 2018, the hubs are tasked with supporting local schools with the teaching of phonics, early language and reading in

reception and year 1.

The Department for Education said the extra funding would enable more schools to embed "high-quality phonics teaching" and to access literacy specialists, helping to build children's confidence and their ability to read and write.

The funding comes after this year's key stage 1 tests showed the standard of literacy and maths has fallen sharply in England since

2019, with the country's most disadvantaged and vulnerable children falling the furthest behind.

The government is working towards a target of 90 per cent of children reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by the time they leave primary school. This year, 59 per cent met that standard, the lowest level since 2016.

Examiners face MPs over ‘shambolic’ summer for vocational students

Exam bosses were grilled by education committee MPs this week about delays to BTEC and Cambridge Technical (CTEC) results that affected thousands of students this summer. Here’s what we found ...

1. Scale of delays five times bigger than usual

Pearson and OCR were accused of failing to be fully transparent about the scale of missing grades.

Robert Halfon, the committee chair, described the process and communication as “shambolic”, leaving vocational students “yet again feeling like second-class citizens”.

In total, 7,000 level 2 BTEC results, 3,300 level 3 BTECs and 3,200 CTECs were delayed.

A Pearson spokesperson said in August this number was “typical for this stage in the awarding process and tracks against what we saw in pre-pandemic exam years”.

But Jill Duffy, the chief executive of exam board OCR, said the scale this year was “probably four or five times what we would see in a normal year”.

Both Pearson and OCR apologised for the added stress and anxiety the delays caused.

2. Covid adaptations main cause

Exam boards were allowed to include adaptations that took the impact of the pandemic into account, similar to GCSEs and A-levels.

Duffy said the unit-based qualifications “rely on schools and colleges claiming for a unit”.

But having a range of adaptations added to the already complex nature of their vocational qualifications led to more issues.

“What all this meant was schools and colleges needed to tell us about all of this, tell us about these units, and then the qualification grade is automatically produced around results day,” Duffy said.

She and Mike Howells, the president for workforce skills at Pearson UK, which offers BTECs, said they only became aware of the issues on August 17, the day before results day.



Jill Duffy, OCR chief executive

3. No students missed out on university

Both Howells and Duffy said they were not aware of any student missing a university place because of a delay to their results.

However, Howells said that Pearson did assist a couple of BTEC learners through clearing; one had their university place delayed by six months because of the issues.

4. Chief regulator ‘shocked to the core’

Dr Jo Saxton, who became Ofqual chief regulator in September last year, told the committee the delays “absolutely shocked me to the core”.

“On my watch I will do everything in my power to make sure that students are protected from similar stress again.”

She told MPs she had commissioned the “widest scale review of its kind”, including an “unprecedented call to both the sector and students to ask for a wider evidence picture”.

This would help Ofqual “to make recommendations to make changes”. Publication of the review is expected before the end of this year.

5. OCR and Pearson conducting own reviews

Duffy said OCR would conduct its own review,



Dr Jo Saxton

expected to conclude in November. Howells said Pearson’s review would be completed before the end of the year.

Both said they would share the findings with the committee. A Pearson spokesperson confirmed that its recommendations from the review would be made public. OCR did not respond to a request for comment.

Howells said three findings had emerged: making sure communication to schools and colleges was more effective, too much flexibility on submitting data late, and producing grades on results day when qualifications could be awarded at any point in the year.

Duffy said OCR was also looking to improve data-sharing with schools to ensure they could track students’ progress throughout the year and pick up issues earlier.

She suggested handing out CTEC results to schools and colleges a week early under embargo as a “safety net” to allow institutions to check there were no issues.

The View From Next Gen

Ian Tufts is Chief Technology Officer at ParentPay Group and as part of his role, he oversees the work around SIMS Next Gen.

With children and teachers having to quickly readjust to school life following the summer holidays, the autumn term is never quiet. Understanding pupil progress, especially at Primary level, is particularly important in these first few weeks as teachers get to know their new classes. Indeed, the progress of Primary School pupils is exactly what our 'Assessment Team' has been focusing on over the past few months.

Initially the team took a deep dive into the challenges that schools, teachers and headteachers are facing when it comes to tracking pupil progress. This identified that in the post-pandemic context, where children missed significant development opportunities, teachers need to have an even fuller understanding of how pupils are progressing against both national markers and their peers.

It also became clear that historically, progress tracking might have been too heavily focused on simply capturing data.

Ultimately, we all agreed that there is little reason to capture attainment and progression data simply for the sake of it.

It's essential that our solution doesn't add to a teacher's admin pile, is easy to use and, critically, offers truly actionable insights to improve outcomes.

And this is what we believe we've achieved: an intuitive progress tracker that understands that tests don't always work on young children and teachers are fundamentally best placed to know how their pupils are progressing. Speed is key, and a teacher can input the data for a whole class in just a couple of minutes.

We're going into pilot, with a small number of schools, towards the end of the month in order to get really in-depth feedback so we can make adjustments before the full, cloud-based roll-out next year.

A word on a progress tracker for secondary schools. We know that the challenges teachers and headteachers face with older children are vastly different to primary. That is why we have two dedicated teams looking at assessment solutions, one for primary and one for secondary. We'll keep you posted on the

secondary school version of the progress tracker over the coming months.

Finally, it's worth touching on the exciting research we've been conducting on absenteeism, as part of our £40 million investment into SIMS Next Gen. The report, Engaging on Absenteeism, is crammed full of Next Gen thinking that powers real-world insight from teachers, headteachers and world-class experts.

Visit us at www.ess-sims.co.uk/sims-resources and follow us on Twitter @SIMS_ESS or LinkedIn to keep up with the latest developments

Ian.



Ian Tufts

SIMS

SIMS Next Gen

Welcome to the future of school MIS

Discover more

Profile

JESS STAUFENBERG | @STAUFENBERGJ



‘Teachers on the frontline end up dealing with the issues’

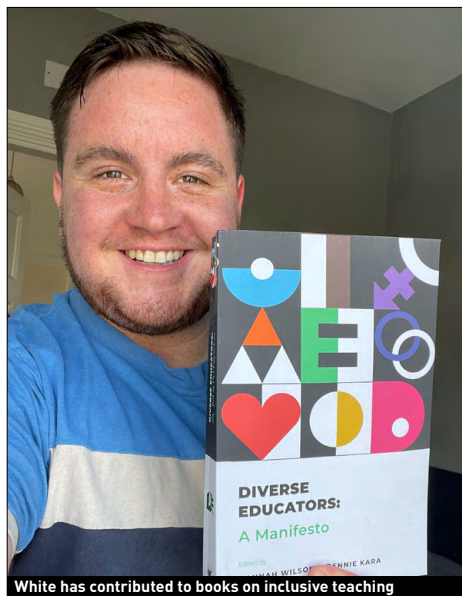
George White, inclusion lead and RE teacher at St Paul’s Catholic School, transitioned while starting a job at his childhood school. He tells Jess Staufenberg why openness about being transgender matters to him – and calls for clearer guidance from government

It was a Tuesday night and George White was shopping for a suit to wear to a school interview the next day. After years of gender dysphoria he was transitioning from a woman to a man, and this would be his first school where he could be himself. He did the interview at St Paul’s Catholic

school, an academy in Leicester, and bagged the job. Then it was back to his old school. “So, one day I was Miss White, then I was Mr White, then I was Miss White again,” he says with frank openness. “But that was fine, because I knew I was going back.” White was moving partly

because of an experience at a previous school, which he doesn’t wish to name, where two pupils had come out as transgender. “The headteacher wrote this really accepting letter,” smiles White. “But then there was a load of backlash from parents and from Catholic

Profile: George White



White has contributed to books on inclusive teaching



With his year 11 class in 2020

media. And I realised if I was going to stay, then that transition was going to be public." White had good reason to be cautious. Hate crimes against transgender people have rocketed by 56 per cent in a year (to almost 156,000 offences in 2020-21).

Meanwhile, schools like White's have been left to tackle transphobic bullying and to support transgender students with only broad laws to guide them.

For instance, the relationships, sex and health education curriculum has just two paragraphs under "LGBT": that schools "should ensure that the needs of all pupils are appropriately met", comply with the Equality Act under which gender reassignment is a protected characteristic but also ensure their teaching is "sensitive and age appropriate".

Schools are still awaiting guidance from the Department for Education on approaching issues around sex and gender which, according to then-education secretary Nadhim Zahawi in April, it is producing with the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The guidance should "allow the frontline to feel that they have the backing and confidence of the department", said Zahawi.

And just this week, the DfE removed transgender rights charity Mermaids from its mental health resources for schools after the Charity Commission launched a compliance probe over safeguarding. The charity has said it is the target of a "cynical attack".

All this means teachers such as White have developed inside a school system operating without clear guidance, even as social media has become more heated.

Transitioning while a new RE teacher wasn't

"To teach the whole person, you need to be emotionally honest"

always easy. But he speaks lightly and with great comic timing as he recounts what it's been like. "When I started, I had only been on hormones for a month and I hadn't had chest surgery," he begins. The school had reassured White he didn't need to explain himself to staff or students.

Although this was a supportive position, White finds being more transparent works better for him. "If that was me now, I'd have wanted to be more open at the time. There was some tricky behaviour [from pupils], with questions like 'are you a man or a woman?' I wasn't sure what I was able to say."

Catholic response

White is also Catholic and has always worked in Catholic schools (his current employer is the St Thomas Aquinas Catholic multi academy trust), which must follow both DfE guidance and guidance from the Catholic Church.

In a publication from the Catholic Education Service called 'Made in God's Image: Challenging homophobic and biphobic bullying in Catholic schools', transphobia isn't specifically covered. But it does say "teachers should not discuss their own sexual orientation" which doesn't seem quite in the spirit of openness White finds helpful.

"Transphobia is one of the obvious omissions from there, I think because it was released five years ago, and the Church was at a point where it

didn't know what to say. "I presume what they're trying to say is you don't have to talk about it, it's your private life. But there is that element of fear and it doesn't necessarily allow for honesty."

So, as well as waiting for government advice, Catholic schools are also waiting for "clear guidance from the Catholic Church itself", explains White. The Vatican City did release a paper called 'Male and Female, He Created Them: Towards a path of dialogue on gender theory in education' in 2019. It calls for an "environment of trust, calmness and openness" in schools.

But, it also says that "Catholic educators are called to go beyond all ideological reductionism or homologizing relativism by remaining faithful to their own gospel-based identity".

"It would be helpful to have something from the government, because at the moment there's confusion in terms of the legality of situations," says White. "Hence, teachers on the frontline end up having to deal with the issues of coming out."

But "there needs to be training too, not just a trickle-down document."

Meanwhile, his own school altered its disciplinary processes in 2020 to better support all staff and pupils around transphobia. "One of the things you need to do is be very specific about what you're talking about. If it's about discriminatory language, that needs to be clearly

Profile: George White



White led on a week of diversity and inclusion activities at school

labelled,” explains White.

First, offending students are kept behind after school for a conversation with the chaplain. If the incident happens again, the pupil will be suspended to reflect on their actions.

“A number of incidents had happened to me,” says White. “It became clear that, without explicit notions, the behaviour was very difficult to challenge.”

But White is clear that he has also been hugely supported by his Catholic colleagues, and by the Catholic social circles he is part of. He is the inclusion lead at his school, sits on the LGBT+ pastoral team at Nottingham diocese, and is a committee member at a charity providing support for LGBT Catholics, including teachers.

Openness and transparency

When he treats his pupils with openness and transparency, they are more open and reflective too, he says.

For instance, when the school was planning conversations around harmful sexual behaviours following the #MeToo and Everyone’s Invited movements, posters condemning the ‘Boys will be boys’ phrase were pinned up.

“But some of the boys were upset and took them down, asking what it meant. This upset some of the girls,” White continues. So, he talked to the pupils about his experiences when living as a woman, compared to his experiences living as a man, and opened up a discussion between the upset parties.

“They listened to each other,” he smiles.

This spirit of openness has its roots in White’s own secondary school experience – at the very school he teaches at today. Staff put in “a lot of time and effort” as he struggled in adolescence. It inspired him into teaching later.

“I had so many teachers who stuck by me. I remember one, she was asking me questions and I



With his family one-and-a-half years after coming out as trans

“Right now, there’s confusion in terms of the legality of situations”

wasn’t able to speak. She just sat on the floor with me for a long time.”

Similarly, White grew up in a family which has been accepting and supportive. He remembers switching the TV off to tell his parents and twin sister he was considering his gender identity.

“They just said, ‘ok, we still love you’, and we put the telly back on,” he laughs. “I always knew they would love me.”

White reflects on how all this influenced him as a teacher. “Catholic schools are about educating the whole person. You do that by being emotionally honest, with boundaries.

“Or to put it another way, as a child I couldn’t tell you who the Ofsted-outstanding teacher was. But I could tell you the ones who made me feel like a person. That is the mark of a good teacher.”

There is still a cloak of invisibility over transgender pupils and staff across the sector, however. Currently LGBT identities are not counted in pupil population or staff workforce data (now, just gender, ethnicity and age are recorded).

But of course not all transgender individuals will want to be recognised as such. “I know teachers



White and his twin sister Samantha as babies

who are ‘stealth’ at school,” explains White. “They like it that way.”

Training and guidance needed

Given these sensitive questions, government guidance and training on supporting transgender students and staff is needed more than ever.

But what will it say? Many educators were concerned when former attorney general and now home secretary Suella Braverman said in May that schools can ignore pupil requests for pronoun or name changes – despite lawyers warning it could breach the Equality Act.

It means we cannot assume the days of Section 28, which criminalised school staff “promoting homosexuality” until 2003, could never return, says White.

“I think there’s an element of an implicit Section 28 in Suella Braverman’s comments. People find it a very significant challenge when there’s no real guidance.”

Above all, White is calling for nuance, whether about Catholicism or transgender people. “The media often portrays one thing. But we need a sense of proportion. What we hear is so often not the case.”



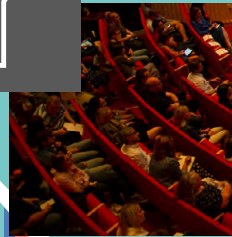
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MARTYN DAVIS

Education partner,
Spencer West law firm

Independence is just the start of the new Oak's problems

Plans to re-launch Oak National as an independent body are already running into legal challenges and could be mired in many more, writes Martyn Davis

The Government plans to re-launch Oak National Academy as a new government arm's-length body (ALB) providing free curriculum resources this autumn. But the new Oak will start with a "drastically reduced curriculum" after United Learning decided not to sign over its intellectual property. And that's just the start of its problems.

United Learning's chief executive, Sir Jon Coles, says the ALB will "put further strain on already stretched public funds and risk severely damaging teacher choice and learner outcomes". Meanwhile, the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA) is seeking a judicial review of the decision to award it £43 million.

The DfE states that "Oak [...] will ensure that high-quality lessons are available nationwide for the benefit of all children", adding that its plans are designed "to ensure that teachers are able to manage their workload and deliver a world-class curriculum".

This type of system is adopted in countries such as Hungary, some Indian states, and some

Latin American countries. And everywhere it has been tried, the result of a state-funded "publisher" has not only challenged democratic processes but led to poor learning materials. But could it be different here?

Detractors argue that Oak represents a de facto centralised curriculum that goes beyond the

national curriculum by empowering the government to specify how teaching should be sequenced and delivered. Oak's leaders meanwhile argue that, as an ALB, their curriculum design will be independent and free of ministerial interference.

In fact, its articles of association show that the DfE will retain substantial control over the ALB, and this could lead to conflict of interest claims. Ultimately, the cabinet office will officially classify Oak either as an 'executive agency' (independent and accountable to ministers) or as an 'executive non-departmental public body' (which usually get their money from departmental budgets and receive strategic direction from departments who 'sponsor' them).

If it is the latter – the most



likely conclusion based on the articles of association – that will effectively nullify the body's claim to independence. A judicial review may well be in the offing as a result, with schools' representatives arguing that the new body contravenes their right under the Education Act to offer teaching and learning that is best for their pupils.

“ Its articles of association could lead to conflict of interest claims

Articles of association aside, BESA's main argument for a judicial review right now appears to be that implementing this change to Oak amounts to a public subsidy that breaches UK law. When a public body seeks to provide financial assistance to a private entity, it needs to consider this within the confines of the Subsidy Control Act 2022. These regulations seek to allow government entities to achieve their policy objectives while limiting the potential harmful impacts of such activities on competition, and there is a strong argument to say that the plans for Oak conflict with this principle.

For support to be considered a subsidy, it must meet four criteria: it must be awarded by a public body, confer an economic

advantage, benefit one enterprise over others, and/or impact domestic or international trade. It's clear from the outset that this decision is likely to close some enterprises, reduce the size of the private sector and in effect create a nationalised monopoly (which competition authorities define legally as a firm holding over 25 per cent of the power within a market).

Even if a judicial review is unsuccessful, an Oak monopoly (with effective control over quality and price) wouldn't be in the clear. With educational institutions expected to buy the license for the products, Oak and the government will also be open to civil challenges for abuses of market power under chapter II prohibitions in the Competition Act.

Then there's all the new intellectual property that will be created in the development of its curriculum packages and will be the sole property of Oak. Several areas of intellectual property legislation could cause it problems, including copyright, trademarks and patents. How will the ALB establish ownership? And how will they enforce it?

In all, the government could find itself wrapped in legal challenges for some years, or at least until the next general election, and at a significant cost in addition to the £43 million already allocated to this project.

Opinion

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KATIE WALDEGRAVE

Co-founder and director,
Now Teach



Recruitment: Our obsession with youth is missing the talent

Changes in population and the labour market mean the government's scramble for young recruits is no longer a workable strategy, writes Katie Waldegrave

What has struck me most in the five years since Now Teach launched is that while the sector struggles with staffing and recruitment, policy orthodoxies still dictate a scramble for young graduates. It's a strategy that neglects a rich, untapped seam of eager talent and has left schools exposed.

One in ten teachers are now new starters, and nearly a quarter leave within five years. But if we spent a little more time considering who to attract to the profession as well as how to retain, we could boost quantity and quality.

Much has happened since 2017 to distort the traditional streams into ITT. Long-term demographic patterns, which were always coming our way, mean we now have fewer 22-year-olds than any time since the late 1990s just as student numbers are creating a secondary school bulge. Meanwhile, keen to improve gender ratios, employers are increasingly targeting female graduates – the historic mainstay of teaching recruitment.

Right when we need more new

teachers, the pool of potential recruits is shrinking. Competition is stiff. New graduates can choose remote working over the big city and earn private sector salaries that saw rises of 5.9 per cent in the three months to June.

per cent more offers to would-be teachers in comparison to a nine per cent national decline.

While older recruits are currently fewer in number, the increase in enthusiasm is clear. According to the government's own figures, the over-40s are the sole age group to increase their ITT footprint in classrooms this

“ This strategy neglects talent and leaves schools exposed

Opportunities

As working lives lengthen, older people are our only growing natural resource. A focussed approach to recruiting from new markets may yield better outcomes.

Five years ago, we enrolled 45 career changers with an average age of 55 and 1,500 years of collective work experience onto our initial teacher training (ITT) programme. Since then, we have helped 650 people with all sorts of backgrounds to bring their vast and varied experiences to secondary schools.

And demand is growing. Compared to before the pandemic, secondary ITT applications to mid-July this year had declined by 10 per cent. Over the same period, Now Teach's applications from prospective career changers have climbed by 49 per cent. Our latest estimates also show, year-on-year, we have made 80

year.

An 'ageless' approach could also help equalise long-standing inequalities in the education system such as gender, age, and ethnicity. Nearly one-third of Now Teach's teachers are from an ethnic minority versus one in seven nationally, and almost half are men compared to 35 per cent nationally.

On quality, older teachers offer a diversity of experience and a wealth of skills, networks and outlook which schools (and all workplaces) need. Their professional lives can enrich subjects and support career development for young people making important decisions about qualifications and training.

Challenges

But quitting one profession for another is challenging, and maintaining bursaries at a

reasonable rate is crucial for this cohort. Finance is a particular barrier for those with children and mortgages. Withdrawals citing financial reasons doubled for us year-on-year.

Older recruits must also feel confident that pay progression once they have qualified is a fair reflection of their worth, not maintained by diverting resources from students.

Most important of all, people need to see and understand that teaching is a role which is compatible with a healthy work/life balance and a supportive environment. Flexible working is important to a significant proportion of career changers, and support networks play a huge role in helping them become the real thing. Hardwiring professional peer and pastoral systems into the recruitment and retention process for all teachers would smooth out these difficulties.

Education must compete in the new working world. That means shifting the lens to capitalise on a different talent pool by ensuring teaching is attractive to people at various life stages and with different motivations, responsibilities, and finances to the average 22-year-old.

If we can accomplish this, we will be far better placed to attract and retain talent of all ages and backgrounds, with a broad range of benefits for all young people.

Opinion

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The only conclusion from the downgrading of so many infant and first schools is that Ofsted's framework is unfit to judge them, writes David Scott

Last academic year, formerly exempt outstanding schools became eligible for inspection again after a hiatus of up to 15 years. For first and infant schools, the result was devastating.

Of seven first schools and 36 infant schools in this category, all the former and 34 of the latter lost their 'outstanding' status – most downgraded to 'good', and nearly one-third to 'requires improvement'. Overall, 95 per cent were downgraded – a significantly higher proportion than other phases and almost double the 50 per cent overall reduction predicted by Amanda Spielman when the exemption was lifted.

What's more, the vast majority were not judged higher than 'good' in any section of their reports. And of the other 112 routine section 5 inspections carried out in the same period, only one infant school and no first schools were upgraded from 'good' to 'outstanding'.

In my interviews with a cross-section of headteachers, staff, governors and parents of the formerly exempt schools, the overwhelming reaction was one of demoralisation and embitterment. 'Brutal' and 'unfair' were often used to describe process and outcome. After all, these schools didn't ask to avoid inspections since 2007, much less be judged according to a framework that is no longer consistent with their vision.

A framework unfit for purpose

The framework is at the epicenter of the problem. It is clearly unfit for purpose in the lower primary age range and early years, its 'outstanding' criteria mainly unattainable due to a secondary model-dominated, subject-driven, knowledge-



DAVID SCOTT

Retired headteacher of two first schools in the north east

The new framework is failing first and infant schools

based agenda.

Subject leaders in first and infant schools are being interrogated with the same questions as secondary heads of department. The crucial difference

inspection of providers on the early years register uses a different framework, that is specific and more suited to that age range. This enables many of these settings to attain higher

“ 95 per cent have been downgraded since the exemption was lifted

is that the former are responsible for delivering the whole curriculum with limited non-contact time to develop and monitor a subject throughout the school. They succeed in most subjects, but inspectors can usually find at least one that is not perfect to justify a downgrade.

Moreover, important skills and competences that are highly valued in this phase are rarely mentioned. A further anomaly is that Ofsted's

grades than local authority school-based reception and nursery classes. This is unfair to the schools, and confusing for parents and carers.

Unrealistic expectations

The most widely shared criticism from the previously exempt schools is that inspectors appear to set out to compile evidence to justify a lower grade rather than reach a conclusion based on the evidence they gather.



Meanwhile, the judgements they reach are only as valid as their experience and their depth of knowledge of the subjects and phases they inspect. Inspecting several subjects in key stages 1 and 2 and possessing a regional and national overview of standards and quality in early years education poses a major challenge.

This shows in the reports. Some of my interviewees said inspectors were apologetic about the blandness and brevity of their work, and evidence suggests a range from well written and informative to compilations of overused stock phrases. And despite assurances before the framework was introduced, there is little evidence in the reports that Ofsted is recognising improvements in the schools it no longer deems 'outstanding'.

Morale busting

Statistics from all 155 infant and first schools inspected so far follow the same trend: the vast majority remain 'good' with little chance of moving to 'outstanding'. As a result, entire local authorities with long histories of excellence in these phases face losing their flagship schools to a new norm of mainly 'good' – a demoralising prospect as schools continue to fight the effects of the pandemic and now face an impending financial crisis.

Without reform, the 'outstanding' grade might as well be removed altogether in favour of a two-tier pass/fail system, at least where infant and first schools are concerned.

It would be preferable to keep it, but it must be made attainable for these schools. That means ensuring inspectors are better trained and more appropriately matched to the contexts they are inspecting, as well as looking again at the framework itself.

Opinion

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KATE WILLIAMS

Parent, teacher, and educational researcher

Inclusion: Time to end discriminatory hair policies

As well as asking teachers to deliver lessons, school leaders can show their commitment to Black History Month by ending Afro hair discrimination, writes Kate Williams

The theme for Black History Month 2022 is 'Time for Change: Action Not Words'. While it's great to have an opportunity to challenge historical injustice and oppression, we need to do this in the present also. And where better to start than to rethink our hair policies?

DfE guidelines about uniform already state that policies must not be discriminatory. But in response to the Sewell report, the government said in March this year that it would create new guidance for school leaders about hair policies to prevent discrimination. Meanwhile, the EHRC has promised to release in-depth guidance this month.

I could write a book on what my daughter, Ruby, has experienced. She was repeatedly sent home for her hair. Her year 11 picture was replaced by a year 7 picture of her with straightened hair in her yearbook. Her education suffered, as did her mental health. Eventually, legal action with the support of the Equalities and

Human Rights Commission saw her compensated and the school signed a legally binding commitment to change their policy.

Ruby shared her story in 2020 to ensure other children were spared the humiliation and upset she felt, and I am committed to securing the legacy of her pain. I do this as a

“ School leaders can choose to get ahead of this issue now

parent, a white ally, a teacher and researcher. To achieve this, we need the help of school leaders across the country, and we do not need to wait for new guidance, a change in the law, or for another family to experience this injustice.

Afro hair is a racial signifier. As such, it is protected by the Equality Act 2010. But the Equality Act Review updated this July urges the government to explicitly specify Afro hair as a protected characteristic because stories like Ruby's (and Jaylen's just a few weeks ago) continue to cause harm, to pupils and to schools' reputations.

School leaders can choose to get ahead of this issue now and examine their hair policies with



fresh eyes – time perhaps better spent this Black history month than the annual last-minute scramble for resources.

The Halo Code was launched two years ago. Why not join all the other schools that have signed up? Others have scrapped their hair policies altogether, such as

all. We're enabling students to embrace their unique identity and to be comfortable in their own skin."

What there is however is plenty of evidence of the effect such discrimination has on young people and their families. My own research at UCL examining parents' experiences is full of examples. One participant shared how the school's response to his son's low haircut had caused the young man to feel harassed and confused.

Teachers and school leaders were "constantly asking him about his haircut," which he thought of as completely normal. "He thought: [...] my dad looks like that, my friends look like that, Barack Obama looks like that."

One theme all participants shared was the hurt they felt that their voices weren't valued when hair policies were being developed to begin with.

So, if you missed World Afro Day in September, you've still got the rest of this month to make a stand. Not that fighting discrimination should be guided by calendar events anyway, but listening to our communities doesn't need to wait until the government publishes guidance either.

Verulam School. Its headteacher, Julie Richardson, explains that she changed the policy as soon as she was appointed in September 2021.

"It's something that I have always believed was wrong," she explains. "How can hair in braids or in its natural form be deemed 'extreme'?"

Where these punitive hair policies originated from is unclear, but it seems they persist because some school leaders believe they improve behaviour. In fact, the evidence is lacking. At Verulam School, the change has had no impact as far as behaviour for learning is concerned. "We have high expectations around uniform," Richardson adds, "but allowing students to express themselves with hair hasn't affected this at

Opinion

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JAMES HANDSCOMBE

Executive principal,
Harris Westminster Sixth Form and
Harris Clapham Sixth Form

Assemblies: surfing the ripple to keep pupils focused

After wiping out on a wave of disruption of his own making, James Handscombe reflects on how to keep assemblies meaningful – and focused

When the millennium was still in short trousers, I worked for a very charismatic and somewhat eccentric headteacher. Last week, I failed to live up to his mesmerising standard of school assembly.

My old headteacher's eccentricity was never more on show than during our annual Hats Day celebration, an Easter ceremony of his own devising. Each of us, staff and students, would construct and wear a hat and then go to a special assembly in which the students would be wound into a frenzy of millinery-related excitement that might generously be described as chaos.

Then he'd pause and continue delivering his reflective and uplifting message to a happy but rapt audience.

As I came out of my first Hats Day experience, somewhat bewildered, entirely delighted, an old hand said to me: "It's not getting them so excited that's impressive – anyone can do that – it's bringing them back afterwards."

Those words rang in my ears last week. I'd just delivered an assembly

at my new school in which I'd told a joke. It wasn't even a particularly funny joke, but it got a gratifying giggle. I paused, but the giggle became a murmur, then a whisper, then an open discussion. A ripple of disruption spread through the hall. I'd lost my audience.

It's getting them back afterwards that's impressive, yes, and I had failed to impress. One solution would be

“A ripple of disruption spread. I'd lost my audience

not to tell a joke in the first place, but it's not just flippancy that can cause the ripple. Talking about something controversial or emotionally loaded can do it too.

So, unless we're happy for assemblies to slip into bland irrelevance we have to find a way to surf that ripple, control it and use it to power our message.

Once the ripple has become a great ocean roller of noise that's crashing over you, there's not much you can do. As I did last week, you can stop talking, take a deep breath, and use your 'Teacher Voice' to demand silence before delivering a short lecture about politeness in audiences. It's effective, but it rather spoils the mood.



Better is to keep the ripple under control, to prepare beforehand for their enjoyment of your wit and wisdom and be ready to surf. If you'll forgive advice from someone who has just confessed to being wiped out by an over-sized wave, then here are

Avoid cheap gags

Go for something slightly more obscure. If only those paying attention get it, you get a lighter disturbance and incentivise your audience to do the same.

Or at least warn them first

Alternatively, tell them in advance what you're going to do and the response you're looking for. This is strongly advised if your 'joke' is not, in fact, funny. It's also a good idea if it's something serious or meaningful you want to get across.

Use your teacher tricks early

Pause at the first sign of a giggle and fix them with a steely eye before moving on to your next line. A large hall is a step up from a classroom and it pays to be a bit more conservative in what you'll allow.

An assembly is an amazing moment of connection between speaker and audience; it would be a shame to squander it by not building in humour or meaning. And so, next week, I shall be climbing back on my board and paddling out to sea with a glint in my eye and the hope of riding the next wave – all the way to shore.

my top tips.

Emphasise the theatre of the occasion

The idea is to make it more than a teacher lecturing a crowd. Staging to give you height, a formal introduction to set you apart from the humdrum, a routine that connotes silence. A bit of pomp and circumstance goes a long way.

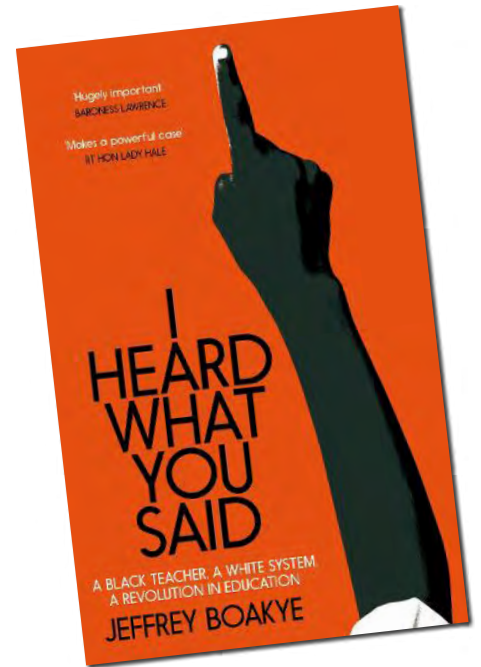
Don't give them too much to cope with at once

The ripple becomes a tsunami when it represents discomfort and uncertainty, so don't leap straight in. Warm them up with some light wordplay or something that isn't too surprising.

THE REVIEW

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I HEARD WHAT YOU SAID

Author: Jeffrey Boakye**Publisher:** Picador**Publication date:** 9 June 2022**ISBN:** 1529063744**Reviewer:** Kamraan Khan, teacher of English and head of year 10, John Hampden Grammar School

If a book is going to tackle the topic of structural racism and make assertions that it is present throughout the education system in this country, then its author must immediately be aware of the weight of responsibility he is placing on his own shoulders. When the author of the book is a black teacher with 10 years' experience of working in schools, navigating the various challenges of the curriculum, colleagues, and students, then what is in no doubt is that this series of accounts comes from a plethora of lived experiences.

The central thread that runs through Jeffrey Boakye's book, highlighted neatly by the way he derives each chapter title from snippets of overheard conversations, is that the words exchanged between colleagues or students are often spoken through the prism of what Boakye terms 'white centring'.

The term may make you stir uncomfortably, but the reasoning behind it is straightforward and self-evident. The majority of teachers in our education system are white and inevitably it is their experiences, outlooks and ideas that are likely to be the biggest influencing factor when agreeing upon that system's norms. The challenge this poses is to understand and unpick how this impacts the increasingly ethnically diverse society teachers are preparing their students for.

Having explained the term, I still sense the unease that stirs among you as it does among my colleagues. Why should you have to listen to me, a 38-year-old English teacher of Pakistani

heritage, telling you about a 40-year-old English teacher of Ghanaian heritage, to make you a better teacher?

The answer is there for all to see in every chapter title of Boakye's book. Let's pick a few: What's your real name though?, a chapter in which the author's students fail to acknowledge that a man that looks like him could possibly be named Jeffrey; Were your parents born here?, a chapter in which he is asked this question by white students (as have I, and as has my wife, a Pakistani teacher and assistant headteacher); and my personal favourite, I don't see colour.

By this point, I was deep into Boakye's book and I knew I needed to take a deep breath before I read on. It's an utterance so completely self-defeating and futile it's a wonder it ever leaves anyone's lips, and I revelled in Boakye's clinical dismantling of it.

Each chapter variously gives rise to a smirk of familiarity, shock or indignation, and the details within them are told passionately, articulately and with such a powerful turn of phrase that sometimes Boakye sucker punches the air out of you. For example, a chapter entitled Jeffrey's nice describes his feelings about the ongoing challenge of seeking the acceptance of his colleagues. "I've auditioned for white acceptance," he explains, "in order to prosper in a world that doesn't trust the colour of my skin."

Your uneasiness may stir again, but the truth is that the nature of Boakye's subject brooks no leniency and offers no easy

answers; it is precisely about staring down uncomfortable truths.

But Boakye's book is not without solace. Despite its cover design of a pointing finger, *I heard what you said* doesn't set out simply to blame or shame. Pointing out of uncomfortable truths drawn from his experience of teaching and those of some of students (first in a school in London and then one in the north) serves to provide a backdrop for his central argument.

Boakye must be forthright, because the challenge that he is posing to his readers of all backgrounds is to accept that – despite the Sewell report's conclusions – institutional racism does exist, and that each of us has a part to play in putting an end to it.

The result is an impassioned, articulate, and irresistible call to arms. And there's never been one of those that hasn't made someone stir uncomfortably.



Rating

THE CONVERSATION
LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

Sarah Gallagher
Headteacher, Snape Primary School and PGCE tutor, University of Cambridge

THE CHEMISTRY OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Communication is key in forming relationships to make schools work. Rob Coe's blog about the schools in Opportunity North East is enlightening just for confirming that. But what's more intriguing still is the notion that there needs to be an 'energy' to make that relationship work.

The EEF-funded research suggests that it wasn't as simple as pairing a national leader of education (NLE) with a leader in a 'requires improvement' school. It needed the chemistry between both parties to work too.

I must confess this reminded me of *Married at First Sight* (my daughter made me watch it!). Joking apart, that a partnership must be carefully considered for it to work for the best is an important insight in a sector where so much can be expected on the basis of a CV or title. As one HMI once said to me during an inspection, just because a leader has success in one school, it's not a given they will have the same in the next.

Author
Professor Rob Coe
Senior Associate

Professor Robert Coe, Senior Associate at the EEF, reflects on findings from a major school improvement programme in the North East.

Blog - 5 minutes - 6 October, 2022

GREEN ENERGY



This inaugural episode of the new UK Schools Sustainability Network podcast is a conversation with Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL) fellows Paul Edmond and Helen Burge.

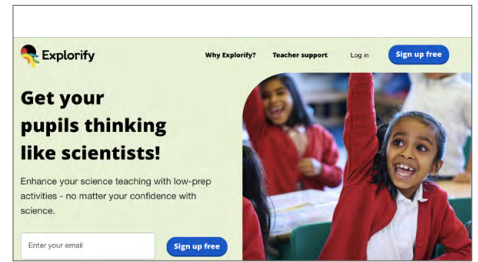
I found the discussion interesting, and not just because our primary school is in the middle of re-activating our ECO committee and trying to re-establish our environmental commitment. The timing was also pertinent because many of us are emerging from a pandemic during which we have thrown away much more than we ever have in the way of masks, paper towels, gloves, etc.

The talk about meaningful change only being embedded if you involve everybody, celebrate successes on the way, and consistently re-iterate why you're doing what you're doing is very much part of leadership in schools in general. As is (echoing the Opportunity North East project) the need to recognise people's energy, passion and experience to make headway.

ELECTRIFYING SCIENCE

Staying with sustainability, this cracking Tiny Voices podcast from Toria Bono introduced me to [Explorify](#), a free resource for primary science teachers. The site has a wealth of low-prep activities designed to be accessible no matter the teacher's subject confidence and ideas to weave sustainability into every science lesson to encourage full pupil participation.

Here, Bono talks with Explorify's Stacey Reid and Dr Becky Ellis and their focus on science being for everybody is a social justice approach that really resonated with me. Many of our children don't believe they can be a scientist, and we're working hard

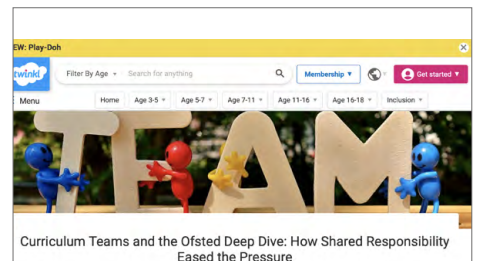


to dispel the notion that 'it's all white men in lab coats'. Three women promoting the idea that everybody can be involved in science is invigorating, and their efforts give me hope that we can tackle the perennial problem of **too few girls choosing STEM**.

SUPERPOWERED DEEP DIVES

This Twinkl blog by Hannah Mason about Ofsted's subject deep dives is an empowering read that shows teamwork really does make the dream work. A former English lead, Mason's piece should give heart to all subject leaders in schools facing inspection, as it focuses on building up subject teams rather than placing all the emphasis on one person to 'hold' the deep dive.

The idea that the school's fate is in your hands during an inspection is a frankly ridiculous amount of pressure to put on



anyone, and Mason shows that there are many more benefits than drawbacks to taking a team approach. The team she bases her blog on had representation from different year groups, expertise and (linking again to the notion of energy) people with genuine interest in the subject.

In day-to-day management, the team model spread the load of monitoring and enabled greater room for analysis as their discussions were that much more insightful. And their outcome was impressive, the report glowing.

Which all goes to show, we don't need a 'saviour' model of an amazing leader batting away pressures like some superhero. We need the teachers of today to choose to come back tomorrow, and that means being kind to ourselves and respectful of what each person brings to the table.

Click the subtitles to access the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

What we've learned about schools and their communities this week



Our commissioning editor delves into an EEF report that has reignited the reading wars and left teachers none the wiser

News of the death of phonics has been greatly exaggerated this week, sparked by **an evaluation by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)** of two programmes developed by Ruth Miskin Training, and currently in use in some 8,000 schools and 62 multi-academy trusts.

Read Write Inc. (RWI) and Fresh Start (FS) are systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) programmes, and initial sign-on alone can cost a school around £2,000, so the evaluation (at cost of £1 million) was high-stakes. But SSP endorsement by the DfE (**and former schools minister, Nick Gibb especially**) means the stakes were even higher. In many teachers' and leaders' minds, RWI is essentially synonymous with SSP. Indeed, Ruth Miskin's **promotional material cites Gibb's endorsement of SSP** as evidence for its own approach.

RWI has been going since 2002 and is aimed at "children from reception to Year 4, and children with SEND in older year groups". FS is for those in years 5 and 6 who "have slipped through their primary school's reading net", "have missed schooling" or "are new to the UK education system or whose first language is not English".

At first glance, the randomised control trial conducted with over 7,000 pupils across 131 schools isn't good news for Ruth Miskin. **The details have by now been well dissected**, but what seems to have been missed by those keen to dismiss RWI, FS – and SSP altogether, for some – is that EEF have given their evaluation a low-to-moderate (for RWI) and a moderate (for FS) security rating.

Understanding that may be a more fruitful line of inquiry, not about phonics but a faltering evidence-led profession.



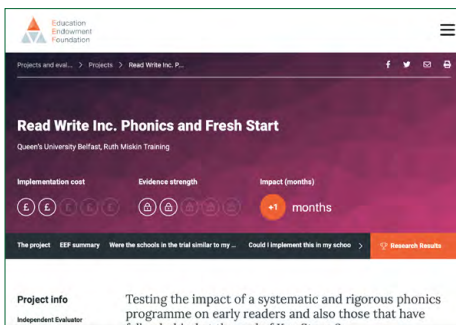
Nick Gibb

Mistrial

EEF says 20 per cent of schools in the RWI control group had already received RWI training or purchased RWI materials. Skewing results further, 15 per cent of schools in the intervention group didn't deliver the programme at all. That's enough on each side to give a very different result, but researchers can't draw that conclusion.

In the FS evaluation, more than one-third of schools in the intervention group (35 per cent) didn't deliver the programme, nearly another third (29 per cent) delivered FS only to some eligible pupils, and 12 per cent didn't provide enough data. That adds up to over three-quarters (76 per cent) of the intervention schools.

It's a wonder the EEF even published the evaluation. But how could they not?



Publish and be damned

Stoking the backlash is the fact that the trial was conducted between 2016 and 2018. Rather than publish as planned, in 2019 the evaluation was wrapped up with the **'Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund'** evaluation. But Covid delays meant that wasn't published until

last week.

It isn't the only time (**even just this month**) that the EEF's publication schedule has been called into question. Indeed, they are developing new **'nimble RCTs'** to respond to the need for speed. But publishing evidence for a pressured profession is sensitive, not least when wading into the 'reading wars'.

Too rushed, and you face the kind of **criticism levelled at Carol Dweck**. Too slow, and the results risk being of no use to a profession still led by the changing winds of political priorities. Either way, one side or another of a divided profession will attack the messenger.

Evidence-engaged

But there's a bigger problem still: calling for an evidence-led profession won't work if it isn't also evidence-engaged. Blaming Queen's University Belfast for recruitment woes (as the Ruth Miskin statement does) is short-sighted, even if correct. Why weren't schools more willing or able to sign up? Why did so many fail to account for their prior engagement with RWI/FS at the outset? And why did so many who signed on not implement the strategies? It's impossible to expect reliable evidence from an unreliable dataset.

Underpinning all of this is still **very strong evidence in favour of SSP**. And the **over-reliance on it identified by UCL** is an equally valid consideration. Sadly, school leaders and teachers find themselves once more in the middle of a tug of war they have no time to make an informed decision about. They wouldn't be wrong to disengage from the evidence, make a choice and stick to it until instructed otherwise.

Meanwhile, few are talking about how to bridge the gap between researchers and schools to make the latter a more reliable source of data. And until that happens, nothing in the evidence base is secure.

Unless, of course, it comes from somewhere that has more consistently championed teaching as a profession.



Ruth Miskin

Week in

Westminster

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



MONDAY

Minister for school standards Jonathan Gullis has reportedly been "exonerated" from an accusation of wrongdoing over a £7,200 to his grammar schools campaign.

Labour shadow schools minister Stephen Morgan had made a formal complaint to the standard's commissioner – saying Gullis, then a backbencher, twice called for the expansion of grammar schools in the Commons without declaring a financial interest.

But according to the Guido Fawkes blog, the standards commissioner, Kathryn Stone, later decided no rules were broken.

They report Morgan was actually the one given a telling off for leaking the story to the Guardian before he complained through the formal process.

"I consider this behaviour to be discourteous to me and I trust that it will not be repeated," she reportedly told Morgan.

WEDNESDAY

Exam boards Pearson and OCR got their knuckles rapped at the first education select committee this term following the delays in vocational and technical qualification results in August.

Some committee members (rightly) also asked the boards and Ofqual more broadly about the errors in exam papers and advance information.

So fellow exam board AQA got a lucky escape. It's not only the biggest board in the country, but is also responsible for most of this summer's errors. It would have been much fairer if it had faced a grilling too.

Apparently, it wasn't invited to give evidence as MPs only wanted to focus on

delays to BTEC qualifications. D'oh!

Meanwhile, at a parliamentary committee into safeguarding later in the day, Ofsted rubbished an idea to separate safeguarding from its main inspection framework and instead conduct annual audits.

The Headteachers' Roundtable put forward the idea. It's known for campaigning about how flawed it thinks the inspectorate is, so hopefully that wasn't the reason the idea was pooh-poohed.

As if energy costs aren't causing schools enough headaches, leaders now have been warned to keep an eye out for energy bill relief scams.

In a note today, the Department for Education reminded schools they do not need to do anything to be eligible for the scheme as the discount is automatic.

"Please be aware that if a school receives a message requesting bank details or other information it could be a scam, and you should report it online," the email added.

Joy!

THURSDAY

It's been a tumultuous few years at Ofqual, but things look to be settling down with the return to exams going pretty smoothly this year.

But who wouldn't want an insider's track on the day-to-day goings-on? The regulator is on the lookout for a £57,000-a-year private secretary for Dr Jo Saxton, the top boss.

The successful candidate will make sure Saxton's "time is well used on the most important matters of the day" and ensure that she is well-briefed. They have to be able to work flexibly during evenings and weekends when necessary.

Sounds like your bag?

Well, unless you're a civil servant, too bad: the applicant must be a "current civil servant". Boo!

Updated criteria was published today for applicants wanting to apply for cash under the condition improvement fund (CIF) next year (2023-24).

Bad news for schools – if you want a better shot at getting the cash, then schools can apply for the repair funding as a loan, instead of a grant.

But given the soaring interest rates caused by the Kami-Kwasi budget, this will now see schools pay up to 5.4 per cent for a 10-year loan.

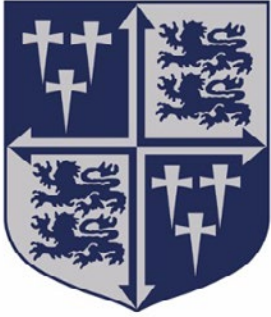
The updated guidance states for a £100k loan, this will mean £131,841 is repayable – up by more than £20,000 than last year (when interest rates were 1.5 per cent).

Meanwhile the new "priority project type" will include school projects for replacing expired oil and coal boilers with low carbon alternatives to prevent school closure.

Those applying will also have to demonstrate that schools will do work that leads to "greater environmental sustainability" either within the CIF project or elsewhere on their school estate.



Holte School



HEADTEACHER

L36 – L42 £99,681 TO £115,483

Full-time

Permanent

Required to start 17 April 2023

HOLTE SCHOOL, WHEELER STREET, LOZELLS, BIRMINGHAM B19 2EP
0121 566 4370 (Option 1)

Holte School seeks to appoint an inspirational, visionary, innovative, tenacious, highly skilled and highly effective Headteacher. This is an exciting opportunity to lead an already successful secondary school and build upon the strong reputation of the school as being at the forefront of education. The school's ethos emphasises high quality teaching to achieve excellence and enable pupils to maximise their full potential.

The new Headteacher will be an experienced senior leader with strong academic qualities, vision and ambition for the further development of the school. They will be highly skilled with the resilience and determination to deliver an outstanding curriculum and pastoral education, have excellent communication skills, hold high the values and ethos of the school, and a commitment to wellbeing, diversity and inclusion.

Previously categorised as an "Outstanding" school, Holte School is currently rated as "Requires Improvement" since its September 2019 Ofsted inspection. We are looking for an exceptional individual who has the vision to restore the school to its former "Outstanding" status. It is a PFI school and occupies buildings on a shared site with a primary and special school. A key priority for the school is to maximise its learning environment, particularly for Sixth Form learners. The Governing Body is currently exploring opportunities for academisation.

Holte School has a strong track record of working with and supporting other schools, including links with the adjoining Lozells Junior & Infant School & Nursery and is co-sponsor of Blue Coat C of E Academy in Walsall.

Due to the retirement of the current highly successful Headteacher there is an opportunity for a strong, ambitious and exceptional candidate to continue to drive the school forward, to meet the challenges it faces and to continue its development.

Holding high expectations and aspirations for our pupils the successful candidate will:

- be an experienced senior leader with a proven track record of managing and implementing change

- be able to inspire and motivate others
- have extensive experience of working in a multi-cultural environment
- have high standards and expectations of self and of others and be able to lead by example
- be aspirational, ambitious and committed to excellence in teaching and learning
- demonstrate a clear strategic vision and proven ability to generate support and commitment from all stakeholders
- have an understanding and commitment to strong financial management and a firm grasp of the concept of value for money
- be an excellent communicator able to work successfully with both internal stakeholders and external agencies

We offer:

- enthusiastic and ambitious pupils who are keen to learn
- a supportive community and Local Governing Body
- a talented staff team that welcome new challenges and are committed to supporting and developing colleagues and pupils
- opportunities to work in collaboration with partner schools where available
- quality continuous professional development for headteachers
- an opportunity to work with a coach/mentor

Potential candidates are encouraged to visit the school. Requests for visits should be made prior to 7 November to **Miss Monyque Collins, HR Manager** on **0121 566 4370/4371**.

Closing date: Monday 7 November 2022, 10am

Interviews for shortlisted candidates will take place on **Wednesday 23 and Thursday 24 November 2022**; candidates may be required to attend both days. CVs and applications from Recruitment Agencies will not be accepted.

Please download an application pack or alternatively email **CSURecruitment@birmingham.gov.uk** quoting reference **ES2303**.



CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

Leadership Non-teaching £67,364 - £78,025

37 Hours per week – full time to meet the needs of the role

Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust is an established Multi-Academy Trust of primary and secondary academies across the West Midlands.

Our reputation is built on our core values of innovation, collaboration and inspiring individuals within our care.

We want every single person that comes through the doors of one of our academies to leave having grown as an individual, in terms of their skill set and their respect for others.

We believe that every person who passes through our doors deserves the very best that we can offer. Everyone who works with and for the Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust does so because they believe in children and want their futures to be happy and successful.

As part of the central support team the postholder will provide strategic and operational financial management and reporting to the Trust and to be the finance director for the trading subsidiary.

To be the strategic lead for the effective management, reporting and recording of the Trusts and its subsidiary companies' finances to include budget planning, monitoring, system controls, contingency planning, asset management and reporting to ensure effective and informed decision making.

Applicants will:

- Have experience of financial management and accounting in a senior role, experience within the education sector would be an advantage.
- Be able to demonstrate extensive experience of managing a successful team.
- Have the ability to generate financial models and concepts and translate them into tangible strategies and approaches for all relevant stakeholders.
- Have excellent knowledge and understanding of budget planning, controls and management.
- Hold an accounting qualification e.g., ICAEW, ACCA, CIMA, CIPFA or equivalent qualification

We Offer:

- Access to an extensive employee assistance programme
- Access to salary sacrifice schemes
- Membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme
- Supportive friendly colleagues
- A technology rich environment

We pride ourselves on being an employer of choice where all staff can thrive. We believe that supporting our staff both personally and professionally allows them to give their very best to our students. Our aim is to foster a working culture that recognises and reflects the importance of good mental health and wellbeing and provides effective support when colleagues need it.

Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects its entire staff to share this commitment. All post-holders will be required to have an Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), including a Children's Barred List check for post carrying out a regulated activity.

For further details and to apply:

[Careers - Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust \(shirelandcat.net\)](http://shirelandcat.net)

For an informal conversation please contact our Human Resources Director on: **0121 565 8811**

Closing date: Friday 28 October 2022

**Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust
Waterloo Road
Smethwick
B66 4ND**





KERNOW LEARNING MULTI ACADEMY TRUST IS SEEKING TO APPOINT

2 School Improvement Leads (L12 – L16) to help drive curriculum development and excellent teaching across our Trust. The successful candidates will work within our Education & Standards team to help secure highly positive outcomes for every pupil

Closing date: 9am on Wednesday 19th October

A Data and School Systems Lead £35,853 to £43,892 pa pro rata to lead on data analysis and system development to trend-spot and identify areas of priority for school improvement. We have invested in a new high-quality Trust-wide MIS and we now need someone with the skills, passion, knowledge and experience to work with our schools to embed system use and harness data to inform our school improvement.

Closing date: 9am on 21st October

www.kernowlearning.co.uk
hr@kernowlearning.co.uk



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[Click here](#) to contact our team



Ark Alexandra Academy

Executive Principal

Start date: April 2023 or sooner if possible

Salary: Highly competitive with relocation package available if required

Closing date: Monday 31st October, 9am (please notify us if you intend to apply and need more time)

We are looking for an inspiring Executive Principal with passion and rigour to lead Ark Alexandra through its next phase of development. You will be a committed leader with a clear vision and the ability to embed high aspirations and exemplary teaching.

Our school is entering a new stage of growth and we're looking for an Executive Principal to lead the school to further success. You will provide strategic leadership across the school working closely with the Principal on a daily basis. You will have the full support of the Regional Director and the network to ensure that Ark Alexandra makes a lasting contribution to its community.

We are a large secondary school, with 6th form, in Hastings, East Sussex. A popular school, Ark Alexandra is growing from a 10 to 12 form entry, working across a split site, which brings with it unique opportunities for development. At its most recent



Ofsted inspection in September 2021, Leadership & Management, Behaviour & Attitudes, Personal Development and Sixth Form were all judged to be Good. The school works closely with three Ark primary schools, all highly successful both in terms of academic outcomes for pupils as well as creating confident, kind children ready for the next stage of their education.

We welcome applications from experienced Principals who are ambitious, but who wish to remain in a busy school environment, or experienced Executive Principals who gain most satisfaction from engaging with staff, parents and pupils.

For more information and for a confidential conversation, please contact our Head of Talent, Lexy di Marco at Alexia.Dimarco@arkonline.org.

Governance and Policy Lead

Salary Range: Grade 10, Point 36 - Point 42 (£40,578 - £46,662)

Hours: 37 hours per week, 52 weeks contract with annual leave entitlement (no of days dependant on length of service) This role involves evening and flexible working. We will consider job share roles or term-time requirements

Location: Central Trust Office and all academies

Responsible to: Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Responsible for: Governance Professional

The Directors of Exceed Learning Partnership are looking to appoint an enthusiastic, forward thinking and dynamic individual to join our trust in the new post of Governance and Policy Lead. The successful candidate will be responsible for the Governance Professional and work with the Board of Directors, Local Governing Boards, Executive Leadership Team, Central Team and the academies senior leadership teams to design, implement and support the highest quality governance across the Trust.

The role will ensure that all layers of Exceeds governance arrangements operate as a coherent whole. This strategic position is responsible for ensuring that the Trust and all the academies are compliant with regulatory requirements, whilst consolidating local arrangements that provide robust challenge and support for academies.

The post holder will be the lead in the Trust for ensuring high standards of governance including the smooth and efficient administration of the Directors Board and its Committees, as well as advising the Chair of the board on governance process and practice.

The post holder will oversee compliance with regulatory and legislative requirements, ensure the Board's decisions are acted upon and at all times they are in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, and continue to provide public benefit.

At academy level, the post holder will be proactive and creative in identifying where governance is working well but also where interventions may be required. They will build strong relationships with Principals, Chairs and National Leaders of Governance, ensuring governance at each Academy is fully 'Ofsted-ready'. As the Trust's Governance and Policy Lead, the post holder will design and rollout a professional governor-training programme, and lead on governor recruitment and retention, with a licence to be innovative in attracting high calibre volunteer.

The post holder will need to provide leadership as well as operational management; they will be innovative and creative in developing

system-leading governance across the trust, whilst also ensuring statutory and regulatory requirements continue to be met. In addition to this, they will be an expert on the theory and approach to governance with the ability to implement and safeguard high standards of challenge and support;

The ideal candidate will have:

- A record of outstanding and inspirational strategic leadership
- A strong background in Governance and Policy development
- The drive and commitment to improvement

The Governance and Policy Lead will work closely with:

- CEO and Deputy CEO
- Governance Professional
- Trust Central Team
- Academy Principals and Leaders
- Directors and Local Governing Bodies
- Local Authority, Department for Education and other educational partners

The Trust will offer:

- A dynamic, driven and supportive team of colleagues across the Trust
- A comprehensive programme of professional learning opportunities
- A commitment to providing the very best possible opportunities for the pupils and people within our Trust.

Prior to applying:

If you are unclear about any aspect of the application process or you would like any additional information about Exceed Learning Partnership or the role, then please contact:

Mr A Hibbitt: coo@exceedlearningpartnership.com

Application is by application form and must be sent: bfso@exceedlearningpartnership.com



Exceed Learning Partnership

• EVERY CHILD • EVERY CHANCE • EVERY DAY •

**Closing Date for Applications:
Wednesday 2nd November (Midday)**