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- Officials draw up proposals to help leading trusts expand in new regions
- Big trusts back move for groups of struggling schools to transfer en-masse
- But experts slam DfE's big chain 'fixation', with calls for new MAT metrics

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Has the ministerial merry-go-round finally stopped swinging?

Nick Gibb's immovability was shattered when he was axed by Boris Johnson last year. And few of us suspected he had bouncebackability.

But his appointment – alongside fellow returner Robert Halfon and Gillian Keegan as education secretary – should be welcomed.

After a tumultuous period of 19 ministers coming and going across just 14 months (see pages 6 and 7) – with policy paralysed throughout – the new team provide much-needed experience and, most importantly, a deep understanding of the sector's challenges.

However while they will bring stability, many will rightly question their judgment, particularly Halfon and his association with the UsforThem campaign group. And how will Gibb's stoic refusal on anything skills fit with a supposed push to improve the country's vocational agenda?

While 2024's general election leaves little time to deliver any new reforms, they can hopefully be more effective in advocating for the sector.

Halfon, while education select committee chair, has been one of the leading voices on demanding action to get what he terms as the country's "ghost children" back into the classroom.

The catchy title means there's been lots of headlines about these children – those who did not return after Covid.

But who are they, and why aren't they in school? We've attempted to find some answers this week (page 9 and 10).

One finding is that the sudden shift in government policy – from national lockdowns to business-as-usual – has caused ruptures.

The pressure on schools to police and stamp out absence ramped up, but with no investment to help them deliver the support that families in really difficult circumstances said they needed.

We also visited the trailblazer North Shore Academy, in Stockton-on-Tees, to try and uncover any lessons that its intensive focus on attendance could provide for others looking to tackle the thorny issues related to attendance (page 10).

The school, led by Northern Education Trust, epitomises how the sector is getting on with finding its own solutions – in spite of the political merry-go-round.

Change looks likely, again, with an election in 2024. So the new ministerial team need to hit the ground running.

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ANALYSIS: MATS

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DfE wants to boost big MATs with school clusters

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Government officials are working on plans to package up "clusters" of schools eligible for government intervention so they can be moved en-masse into large academy trusts.

Jonathan Gullis, the former schools minister, told *Schools Week* that officials wanted to be more strategic about academy expansion and help large trusts into areas in which they did not have schools.

At present most "rebrokering" of academies or conversion of failing maintained schools is done on a case-by-case basis. The proposals are supported by the country's leading trusts, who will be integral in helping ministers deliver their pledge for all schools to be in a "strong" trust by 2030.

The focus will be on schools eligible for government intervention, including those rated 'requires improvement' twice in a row.

Government sources say the plans are still being worked on, but will need the support of the new ministerial team at the Department for Education.

'Cluster takeovers is mature commissioning'

Gullis spoke to *Schools Week* last week after he was sacked in Rishi Sunak's reshuffle. He spent 50 days in post.

He said the DfE was keen to broker "deals" with large academy trusts such as the Harris Federation and Ark Schools, and was looking at "actually putting together packages of clusters for multi-academy trusts to take over".

Lucy Heller, Ark's chief executive, said her trust had regular discussions with the DfE about growth.

"We don't have any immediate plans but are definitely open to new partnerships. As ever, our priority will be to grow in a sustainable way that serves communities where we can make the biggest difference."

Lucy Heller



Jonathan Gullis

It is not unheard of for groups of schools to be rebrokered to a new trust en-masse. This is usually done when another trust fails or is ordered to downsize, but trusts have also taken on multiple schools in the same area in other circumstances.

Outwood Grange Academies Trust recently took on two schools in the north west where it had "no footprint".

Sir Martyn Oliver, its chief executive, said: "Instead of being capacity takers, I've now got two schools that are capacity givers and will be able to develop in a region of their own."

It was "mature commissioning decision-making" that allowed trusts to build a team in a new region but also "protect the most vulnerable schools".

The future of the government's flagship schools bill, which was due to give greater intervention powers, is still up in the air.

Gullis told *Schools Week* he feared the bill would be "squeezed out" of the Parliamentary timetable.

But "certain elements", namely the academy reforms, "could probably be carved out" into separate, smaller legislation.

'Trusts need time to show improvement'

The government's new trigger for intervention covers all schools rated 'requires improvement' in two consecutive inspections, even if a school moves trust in between the inspections.

Analysis by FFT Education Datalab earlier this year found there were 1,215 so-called "double RI" schools as of December last year, although all but 155 were already in academy trusts.

This means the policy is unlikely to push many more maintained schools into MATs. But the government still faces potentially rebrokering hundreds of schools.

Cathie Paine, the chief executive of the primary trust Reach2, said clustering would be a "broadly sensible approach – but ... the devil is in the detail".

However she pointed to the "importance of allowing sufficient time for trusts to show progress with a struggling school and not to cause unnecessary further disruption to the school by switching trusts too soon in the improvement cycle".

Sir Hamid Patel, the chief executive of Star Academies, said clustering would enable "economies of scale", making clusters a "much better proposition".

Sir Hamid Patel

ANALYSIS: MATS

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Ministers' 'fixation' on larger trusts questioned

But Alice Gregson, from Forum Strategy, warned ministers against a "narrow fixation" on making large trusts larger by moving into areas beyond their schools "and when we have many medium – and smaller – sized trusts with high potential".

The government expects all trusts to have or be working towards having at least 10 schools by 2030.

As of early 2022, there were 2,539 trusts in England, made up of nearly 10,000 schools, Datalab analysis shows.

More than half were still single-academy trusts or part of a multi-academy trust with fewer than 10 schools.

But trusts are getting bigger: the average size of a MAT increased from five in 2018 to seven this year. Just over a fifth of schools are part of a MAT of 10 schools or more.

However, Gregson said just "parachuting in help from afar won't necessarily be a sustainable solution".



Paul Tarn



Calls for regional performance dashboards

Paul Tarn, the chief executive of the Delta Academies Trust, said while taking on clusters of schools was "infinitely more preferable", it needed "proper accountability" to work.

He wants a system of new regional school boards to oversee the performance of trusts' school clusters.

Performance should be judged on a dashboard system, with metrics including academic results plus the state of buildings, quality of central services, executive pay and

exclusion rates.

"It can't be the case anymore that trusts are able to jettison one school in a cluster that they are struggling with, but keep the others because they are easier. They need to come as a cluster – and, if needed, leave as a cluster."

A DfE spokesperson said it is developing an approach to "ensure the growth of trusts is strategic and joined-up and the movement of schools into strong trusts is well planned and communicated, delivering high standards and sustainable school improvement across an area".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Councils should 'trigger' rebrokering, says Coles

Councils should not run their own trusts and instead have the power to trigger the rebrokering of failing schools, says the boss of the country's largest trust.

Outlining his vision for an academy trust sector, Sir Jon Coles said local authorities should oversee "sufficiency" in their areas – with oversight and powers to ensure enough school places, access to them and provision for vulnerable pupils.

Currently, regional directors employed by the Department for Education oversee transfers of underperforming schools, triggered by 'inadequate' Ofsted judgments.

But Coles, the chief executive of United Learning, called for more "dynamism" over intervention.

"We shouldn't have a system where only abject failure leads to change, and we shouldn't have a system where it takes

many, many, many years to change," he said at a Westminster Education Forum on Wednesday.

Schools in the "lower quartile" of performance that were not improving and which the academy trust could not improve "should be taken away from us. We shouldn't have a system where only abject failure leads to change

"It's irrelevant to that community that we're a good trust doing very well, what matters to them is that their local school isn't as good as it should be."

He said councils were the "natural people" to "trigger this process". "They are the natural representatives of the community and nobody cares

as much about their local community as the local authority."

But he said trusts should be given three to four years with such schools – if there was evidence of improvement – to ensure there was an incentive for them to take on failing schools.

The schools white paper proposes giving councils more intervention levers on admissions, for instance a "backstop power" to force trusts to admit children.

But a trial to allow councils to set up "spin-off" academy trusts themselves is also due to start this year. Twenty-nine councils have applied to take part.

However Coles said councils cannot have a commissioning role while also being a provider. For "local authorities to do all these roles well they must be unconflicted", he added.



Sir Jon Coles

INVESTIGATION: POLITICS

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Revealed: The 'galling' pay-offs for education ministers on the political merry-go-round

JOHN DICKENS
@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

New analysis shows education is the most reshuffled department amid this year's political turmoil. But at what cost? John Dickens investigates ...

Nineteen politicians have held office at the Department for Education in just over a year – with those resigning or booted out in reshuffles entitled to more than £100,000 in severance pay.

Analysis by the Institute for Government shows education had more secretaries of state (four) this year than any other department. Five other departments had three.

Schools Week analysis reveals 19 ministers have held one of what was six ministerial posts, reduced to five since September last year.

Ministers are entitled to severance pay no matter how long they serve – providing they don't get another government position within three weeks.

Our study shows that 10 ministers who resigned or were sacked are due nearly £110,000 in pay-offs.

'Schools would be admonished for this'

Ed Reza Schwitzer, associate director at Public First, said: "All the talk from politicians is about civil servants being more efficient and squeezing value out of every pound of taxpayers' money.

"And yet the government is doing something they would admonish schools for. A school firing senior staff willy nilly, paying them severance, and then doing the same all over again – it would be slapped with a financial notice to improve."

The pay-outs include £36,000 to four ministers who were axed last week, three of whom only served for 50 days.

It also includes skills minister Alex Burghart who resigned on July 6 over Boris Johnson's handling of the Chris Pincher



scandal, but was appointed minister for pensions and growth just 10 week later. He was due more than £5,500 severance.

At least three education advisers were also due pay-offs – estimated to be nearly £19,000 each – taking the overall amount potentially paid out to nearly £150,000.

Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said it was "galling that people who have done the job with no outcomes and little evidence of success are getting pay-outs".

The three shortest serving education secretaries since 1941 are Michelle Donelan (1.5 days), Kit Malthouse (50 days) and James Cleverly (61 days), who all were in post this year.

Bousted said civil servants had been unable to get ministerial direction to guide policy-making, with the future of the schools bill still in limbo.

"Meanwhile chronic problems are getting worse: recruitment and retention, funding, industrial action."

THE MINISTER MERRY-GO-ROUND: IN NUMBERS

19 MPs

HAVE HELD A DFE MINISTERIAL ROLE SINCE SEPTEMBER LAST YEAR

1.5 DAYS

MICHELLE DONELAN'S TIME AS EDUCATION SECRETARY

5 EDUCATION SECRETARIES

IN UNDER FOUR MONTHS

840 DAYS

DAYS AVERAGE TIME IN OFFICE OF EDUCATION SECRETARIES APPOINTED BEFORE SEPTEMBER 2021

101 DAYS

AVERAGE TIME IN OFFICE OF EDUCATION SECRETARIES APPOINTED AFTER SEPTEMBER 2021

INVESTIGATION: POLITICS

Schwitzer said civil servants spending hours bringing new ministers up to speed every few weeks was also a “really poor use of time. And then the politician can’t get anything done before they are moved out.”

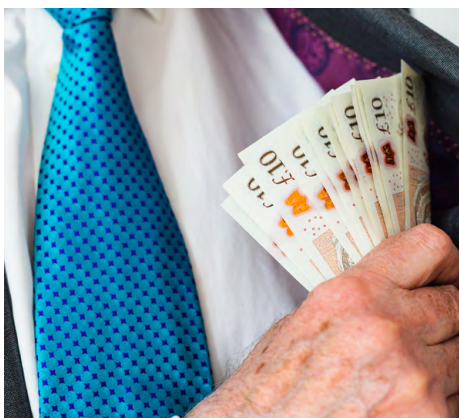
‘Payments are unjustifiable’

Analysis by Sky News shows that a total of 71 ministers and whips who were either sacked or who resigned this year were eligible to receive up to £709,000.

But ministers can reject pay-outs. Donelan said she turned down the nearly £17,000 severance she was entitled to, after saying earlier that she would have given it to charity if she couldn’t reject it.

Members of the Labour group for Stoke council are urging Jonathan Gullis, the former schools minister, to refuse the payment or at least donate to “local good causes”.

“At a time when residents in our city are



hit by the cost of living crisis – the result of the catastrophic mini-budget introduced by your government in late September – we feel such payments are unjustifiable,” the group said in a letter.

Schools Week contacted all 10 ministers due severance. Robin Walker, a former schools minister, confirmed he was entitled to £7,920, but did not say whether he was

paid.

Gullis and Kelly Tolhurst, a former schools and children’s minister, said they had not been informed of any details relating to severance pay. The others did not respond.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said he hoped short-serving ministers would turn-down pay-outs, which looked “pretty sordid at a time of a school and college funding crisis”.

But the return of experienced campaigners Nick Gibb, likely schools minister, Rob Halfon, likely skills minister, and education secretary Gillian Keegan – a former skills minister – brought hope.

“We now have in place an experienced team of ministers, who we hope will advocate strongly for the education sector ... and provide some badly needed stability,” Barton added.

Claire Coutinho has joined as a junior minister.

Severance pay outs due to ministers since September 2021

 <p>Gavin Williamson EDUCATION SECRETARY</p> <p>IN POST: 2 YEARS, 2 MONTHS</p> <p>£16,876</p>	 <p>Nick Gibb SCHOOLS MINISTER</p> <p>IN POST: 7 YEARS, 2 MONTHS</p> <p>£7,920</p>	 <p>Baroness Berridge ACADEMIES MINISTER</p> <p>IN POST: 1 YEAR, 7 MONTHS</p> <p>£17,742</p>	 <p>Robin Walker SCHOOLS MINISTER</p> <p>IN POST: 9 MONTHS, 20 DAYS</p> <p>£7,920</p>	 <p>Alex Burghart SKILLS MINISTER</p> <p>IN POST: 9 MONTHS, 19 DAYS</p> <p>£5,594</p>
 <p>Michelle Donelan EDUCATION SECRETARY</p> <p>IN POST: 2 DAYS</p> <p>£16,876*</p>	 <p>Kit Malthouse EDUCATION SECRETARY</p> <p>IN POST: 50 DAYS</p> <p>£16,876</p>	 <p>Jonathan Gullis SCHOOLS MINISTER</p> <p>IN POST: 50 DAYS</p> <p>£5,594</p>	 <p>Kelly Tolhurst SCHOOLS AND CHILDHOOD MINISTER</p> <p>IN POST: 50 DAYS</p> <p>£7,920</p>	 <p>Andrea Jenkyns SKILLS MINISTER</p> <p>IN POST: 1 MONTH, 19 DAYS</p> <p>£5,594</p>

*Donelan said she refused the pay out. Other ministers did not respond

Total due: £109,000



NEWS



School support workers get extra £2,000

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

School support staff, including teaching assistants, will get an extra £1,925 this year after unions accepted a pay offer of a 10.5 per cent hike for the lowest-paid workers and just over 4 per cent for higher earners.

It is the highest offer to the National Joint Council (NJC), the local government pay negotiating body, for a decade.

Unions have called for the rises to be implemented "as soon as possible". They will be backdated to April, which means schools face paying out a lump sum.

Members of Unison, GMB and Unite were consulted over two months, with unions on Tuesday agreeing to accept the offer from the Local Government Association (LGA).

Unison said years of below-inflation pay offers and pay freezes had resulted in local government workers losing more than 25 per cent from the value of their pay since 2010.

Schools are likely to struggle as a result of unfunded pay rises. Earlier this year the government increased its offer for senior teachers to 5 per cent without providing additional funding.

The DfE says core funding to schools rose by £4 billion this year, but rising costs have wiped out much of that. Leaders are left facing cuts to staff, increasing class sizes and axing building repairs.

A survey of 630 headteachers, published by the Association of School and College Leaders last week, revealed the "catastrophic" impact of the funding crisis on schools.

Meanwhile, *Schools Week* revealed last month that as many as half of all maintained schools

in some areas were expected to go into financial deficit this year.

Many non-teaching staff in maintained schools and council education departments will benefit from the pay increase. Employees at academy trusts, which continue to follow the National Joint Council's green book agreement, will also be covered by the deal.

School support staff include teaching assistants, learning assistants, technicians, administrative and auxiliary staff.

Mike Short, Unison's national secretary for local government, welcomed the offer, but suggested that unions could ask for a higher rise next year.

"Members voted clearly to accept this pay offer, and it will come as a welcome relief to many of our members – particularly those who are lower-paid – that it has been agreed before the holiday period," he said.

"Our immediate priority, now, is to get the money into the pay packets of workers ... to help deal with the rapidly rising cost of living and move into the next pay round.

"We know there is much more to do, as this pay settlement is still below inflation. We will be looking to submit a pay claim for 2023 as soon as practically possible.

"We will be expecting that offer to meet our members' needs and address the massive pressure they are facing due to the rate of inflation."

The one-year pay offer, which includes a 4 per cent increase to allowances, will be backdated to April 1. A one-day increase in annual leave of all employees will come into effect from April 1 next year.

Unison said the bottom three points on the pay scale would still fall below the Living Wage Foundation rate of £10.90 an hour.

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Call for more support as heads' anxiety levels soar

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

Ministers must provide better support for headteachers to "shore up sustainable leadership", experts say after a report revealed their work-related anxiety more than doubled at the peak of the pandemic.

UCL's Institute of Education (IOE) researchers also say their study reveals "shocking" differences in anxiety levels between leaders and classroom teachers, exposing the "additional strain" on heads.

A survey of more than 13,000 teachers and heads shows little difference during the run-up to pandemic between October 2019 and February 2020 when one in four (25 per cent) heads and one in five teachers (20 per cent) were "highly anxious" about work.

But between March 2020 and July 2022, about 35 per cent of heads reported high levels of anxiety during term time – consistently higher than the figure reported by teachers.

This peaked in January last year, when 65 per cent of heads felt anxious about work, compared with 42 per cent of class teachers.

Professor John Jerrim, from the IOE's Social Research Institute and the report's co-author, said the disparity reflected the "additional strain" that "ever-changing government policy" put on leaders, with differences "quite shocking".

The study found fewer deputy and assistant heads wanted to become a head, falling from 56 per cent pre-pandemic to 48 per cent post-pandemic.

Dr Emily Tanner, a programme head at the Nuffield Foundation, which funded the research, said the findings "highlight the need for better support to shore up sustainable leadership".

Schools Week has previously revealed how post-pandemic retention at leadership level has worsened.

Jerrim said it was "vital the government reflected on the guidance and support given to school leaders during difficult periods". He said more attention should also be made to ensure schools could recruit and retain the best heads in future.

INVESTIGATION: ATTENDANCE

'Don't call us ghost children'

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE

Vulnerable families who fear sending their children back into the classroom have railed against the label of "ghost kids", saying they are instead "being ghosted".

Schools Week has spoken to six families in which parents or siblings of pupils have health conditions that mean catching Covid could be fatal.

Their stories reveal how a sharp shift in government policy to all children returning to the classroom – despite Covid still raging – has left families with severe health conditions feeling their needs are not being met.

Some claim they were "quietly encouraged" or felt they had no option but to remove their child from school to be educated at home – or risk a heavy fine.

Latest figures show 1.6 million pupils were still persistently absent last year, with Robert Halfon, the former education select committee chair, describing the pupils who have left school rolls as "ghost children".

So who are they and why are they not in school? Schools Week investigates...

'We're punishing families who have suffered enough'

Lizzy* was anxious about sending her nine-year-old daughter back to school in September 2020 as coronavirus cases began to rise. If she caught the virus, it could leave her without a mother.

Lizzy was one of 2.2 million people told to shield in the first lockdown and classed as "clinically extremely vulnerable". She was diagnosed with blood cancer in 2019.

Following the first lockdown, Lizzy requested that nine-year-old Claire* learn at home instead, a request her school supported. It was classed as authorised leave.

Yet two months later, the school put pressure on Claire to return. Fast-forward to January this year, and the family felt like they had no choice but to de-register Claire from the school roll and move to home education.

"It's illogical and it's cruel and I cannot for the life of me understand how we've ended up in this situation," Lizzy said. "We are rewarding sick children for coming into school, and punishing



"We are punishing families who have suffered enough"

families who have suffered enough from all their illnesses."

Dr Lee-Anne Kohli's two sons have been home-educated since autumn 2020 as her son Peter* has a heart arrhythmia and is designated as clinically extremely vulnerable. This has cost the family more than £5,000 in private tuition.

She claims Harris Church of England Academy, in Warwickshire, suggested she de-register Peter from the school roll or face a fine.

Lee-Anne took Peter, 15, off the roll that month, telling the school it was "primarily due to the advice of his paediatric cardiologist".

A school spokesperson said it took a "compassionate approach" to support pupils returning from long-term absence and had a legal obligation to follow government attendance policies.

Lana Collie-James, 16, has only attended school for a few weeks since September 2020 as her mum Anna has the lung condition hypersensitivity pneumonitis, for which she has to take immunosuppressants.

Lana taught herself for her GCSEs and is doing an extra

year at college to catch up.

"It's a huge stress on both of us, it has been horrific," said Anna. "I think the term ghost kids is quite offensive. They are not ghosts, they know the reasons why most of these children aren't there and it can be addressed easily."

Stacy Langford has spent thousands on her daughter Olivia's home tuition as she claims little work was sent home to her over the past two years from Midfield Primary School, in Bromley, Kent.

Zhoe, her youngest daughter, has tetralogy of Fallot, a congenital heart defect that impacts her lungs.

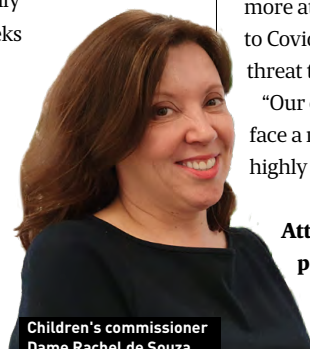
"It's a really unfair situation to be put in when we are going through the worst time of our lives," she said.

Lara Wong, the founder of the Clinically Vulnerable Families group, said it was "outraged more attention is given in schools to headlice than to Covid, although it continues to pose a serious threat to the lives and health of our members".

"Our children are not 'ghosts' but our families do face a real risk of death; we find this terminology highly distasteful."

Attendance shift put schools in tough position

Heads have discretion to authorise absence in "exceptional circumstances".



Children's commissioner
Dame Rachel de Souza

INVESTIGATION: ATTENDANCE

After a legal challenge in 2020, ministers said this could cover families that kept their children at home out of fear for their own health.

But the tone changed last year, when Nadhim Zahawi, then education secretary, made cracking down on school absence one of his top priorities.

His stance caused widening cracks between schools and vulnerable families, with no clear guidance on authorising absences for those who just months earlier had been told they must stay at home.

Tim Marston, a headteacher in Leicester, said: "Throughout the pandemic we were grateful for the way parents dealt with symptoms and kept children off school, but now it's the polar opposite. It's hard to be cross and ask them to flip their expectations on attendance in a 12-month period."

Anna said the family faced a "constant battle" to get work from Glenmoor and Winton Academies, part of United Learning trust in Dorset, and were fined £60 for non-attendance.

But a trust spokesperson told *Schools Week* it followed government guidance "at all times".

Stacy claims that in March Bromley Council went as far as "requesting I take her [Olivia] in for an hour a day so it would appear on the register".

A spokesperson for Springfield Partnership Trust, which runs Midfield, said it worked "collaboratively with the whole family, we involve many different agencies including health professionals".

The council said it would become involved if there was a dispute between families and could "broker a situation that breaks down some of the anxieties that might be preventing a child from attending".

Wong claimed that as schools and councils have been "pressured to increase attendance" some have "quietly encouraged parents to remove children from school rolls".

A survey of 225 families in the support group found 56 per cent had been told to consider withdrawing their child from school. Eighteen per cent did so.

Mark McDonald, a human rights barrister from Furnival Chambers, is representing six vulnerable families who are facing prosecution over non-attendance.

Two cases were unsuccessful with four ongoing.

"What I found stark was the total lack of sympathy from the government, the local authority and courts when it comes to these cases," he said.

Support groups and charities say



Stacy and Olivia Langford

other absent children include those with long Covid, as well as youngsters whose mental health worsened during the pandemic.

Dan Rosenberg, an education lawyer at Simpson Millar, suggested heads could have better used their authorised absence discretion.

"The sad thing will be all of those who fell out of the system who didn't need to. They could have been kept on the roll and within the system while issues could have been worked out during the pandemic."

But Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said "schools are very conscious of the issues they face" and worked "hard to implement a range of protective measures".

Nearly double number of pupils persistently absent

Time-lagged Department for Education figures show 1.6 million pupils (23.5 per cent) were persistently absent across the autumn and spring terms in the past school year. This equates to missing 10 per cent of lessons, or seven days a term. The figure compares with 13 per cent in the autumn of 2020.

More recent data from school management information system Arbor, shared with *Schools Week*, shows the number of pupils missing half their lessons at secondary school has more than doubled to 3.73 per cent, up from 1.68 per cent in 2019. The study is based on the 1,500 schools that used its systems.

Meanwhile, the number of electively home-educated children rose by an estimated 34 per cent during 2020-21, according to an



Anna and Lana

annual survey by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS).

A separate University of Exeter study of nearly 300 parents found the lack of help for pupils missing school led to 7 per cent saying their children were no longer on the school roll.

Researcher Kerrie Lissack said parents wanted to "feel listened to and not blamed" during periods of non-attendance as opposed to "out of sight, out of mind".

Meanwhile, the education charity School-Home Support takes referrals from schools to help pupils back into the classroom. Demand for support - such as meetings, phone calls or visits - has doubled over a year.

'We need a strategy to ensure children are safe in school'

Ministers' current work to improve attendance includes mentoring pilots and more advisers to help councils improve their support.

Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner, says a new live attendance dashboard - which thousands of schools now use - will help "the right actions be taken". She also wants a "consistent unique identifier" to better track attendance.

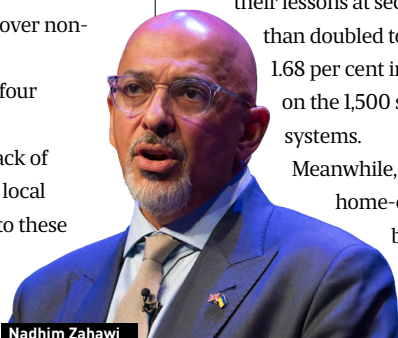
Plans for a national register of children not in school forms part of the schools bill, whose future remains hazy.

But clinically vulnerable families say these policies won't help them. They favour some type of hybrid access to education, HEPA filters in every classroom and long-term investment in ventilation.

A government spokesperson said school was "the best place for children to be and last year we provided 386,000 CO2 monitors to them and other settings, to help improve ventilation, alongside clear guidance".

Schools should do risk assessments for all pupils and have "sensitive conversations with pupils and families about their needs... Off-rolling is illegal and fines for parents should only be used as a last resort."

* Name changed



Nadhim Zahawi

SOLUTIONS: ATTENDANCE

The knock on the door: a simple solution to poor attendance?

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Every morning after registers – come rain, sleet or sun – up to six cars with experienced teachers leave North Shore Academy to go door knocking.

The school, in Stockton-on-Tees, was struggling with around 87 per cent attendance in 2017. Too many children were at home every day and leaders were determined to get kids back in the classroom.

In one year, staff did 4,000 home visits to ensure pupils had the support they need.

When Ofsted visited in July last year, attendance was 94 per cent. The school – ‘requires improvement’ in 2018 – was rated ‘outstanding’ in every category. Seventy per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals.

‘It’s the challenge of breaking a culture’

Paige Leahy, attendance officer at the school, said door knocks focus on those with attendance below 97 per cent, or where there’s no reason for being off school.

Schools Week accompanied Leahy on a drive around this week. Before we left the school, the team were rattling through names to check who was in, calling parents. It was like a military operation.

Our hitlist was ready, so we hit the road. Three of the four door knocks went unanswered. But a note saying they had visited was pushed through the letterbox. If parents do not provide a reason for absence, they get another visit at 11am.

Leahy says it acts as a welfare check to “make sure they are poorly”.

Michael Robson, the head in 2017 who was behind the door-knocking strategy, said the policy is about safeguarding and checking if the family needs support.

But Robson, now executive principal of Northern Education Trust which has run the school since 2012, said there is also “a bit of challenge around knocking on the door repeatedly. “[It’s about] looking at parents and saying ‘I know you’re saying he’s not very well but it’s the fifth time this half term he’s missed a Friday’.

“Some of it was influencing change and a bit of challenge around breaking that culture



Paige Leahy

of children being off when they really ought not to be.”

Home visits are arranged into postcode clusters, saving time.

Trust leads attendance push

The practice is now embedded across NET’s 22 schools, serving some of the most deprived areas in the north.

NET uses a trust-wide attendance dashboard which pulls data straight from management information systems overnight.

This shows real-time attendance patterns for all key groups of pupils. Principals must send a weekly report to the trust’s senior leaders.

NET has set up its own “attendance hub” – backed by government – to share their strategy for free with others.

In return, schools need to commit to revisit their own protocols. It got 250 requests to join, but has capped numbers at 58.

Less scope for smaller schools

But the pilot is only aimed at secondary schools with a “similar context and challenges to North Shore”.

It highlights a potential limitation with the situation – it requires money and, crucially, teacher time to be implemented properly.

NET can afford the investment because it uses lean staffing models based on curriculum-led financial planning. It means even smaller schools across the trust can benefit from the support.

“That’s where the advantage of our small schools being in a large MAT kick in,” Robson said. But it makes such an approach unrealistic for schools on their own or in smaller trusts.



Michael Robson

While the government has hired 13 absence advisers to improve attendance nationally, a *Schools Week* investigation suggests over 600 attendance staff have been slashed from councils since 2010.

North Shore has three staff dedicated to just attendance, and also uses time from other non-teacher roles for the home visits.

The focus can also not let up. The school has already done more than 500 home visits this half-term alone, equating to 3,000 this academic year.

Attendance on the curriculum

Rob Tarn, NET’s chief executive, said other trusts are keen to run similar hubs, but based on their own specialisms to tailor their approach.

One of the schools involved in the hub is Queen Elizabeth Academy, in Warwickshire. It had persistent absence last year of 37 per cent. But this is now 17 per cent.

Beth Gibson, assistant principal, attributes the drop, in part, to their bespoke attendance curriculum which is taught in tutor time.

It translates how attendance could be problematic within college and employment, as well as the link to earnings such as hourly pay.

ANALYSIS: RECRUITMENT

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Teach First misses recruitment target as top graduate pay soars

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

The government's flagship provider for attracting high-flying graduates into teaching has recruited the lowest number of trainees in four years, missing its target by a fifth.

It comes after a post-pandemic employment bounce for top graduates, with some of the UK's leading employers offering starting salaries of £50,000.

Teach First, which admitted to "significant recruitment challenges", is calling on the government to offer a £5,000 recruitment bonus for teachers who work in the most deprived areas "to ensure the profession remains competitive".

Estimates suggest the government will miss its trainee teacher target by a third this year.

Professor John Howson, the chairman of the teacher vacancy website TeachVac, said the Teach First shortfall was "unsurprising", but added it was "especially concerning in regard to the levelling-up agenda".

Teach First trainees work in schools in the most disadvantaged areas where demand is higher than ever.

The charity received 3,500 requests from schools this year, 25 per cent up on the previous record.

As well as its usual summer recruitment round this year, it opened applications again for the autumn under a new trial.

Figures obtained by Schools Week show it recruited 1,394 graduates for initial teaching training (ITT), the smallest cohort since 2018 when 1,234 were recruited.

Of this year's cohort, 122 joined the new autumn institute.

Teach First has a £113 million, six-year government contract to deliver initial teacher training. The recruitment target this year was 1,750.

But the charity said it was "proud" of this year's numbers, "given the significant recruitment challenges the whole sector is facing".

The charity is also operating in a much tougher market. A recent report from High Fliers Research found four top graduate employers offering starting salaries of more than £50,000 this year, while a quarter of the top 100 employers were offering salaries of more than

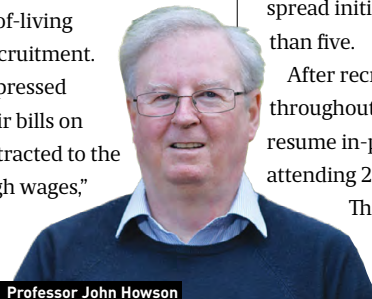


£40,000.

Opportunities at these companies had "recovered well" after Covid - and were expected to increase by a further 15.7 per cent this year.

Qualified teacher salaries outside London start at £28,000, the minimum in London is £34,502. Minimum salaries for unqualified teachers in England and inner London are £19,340 and £24,254. The government has pledged to raise starting salaries to £30,000 next year.

Teach First said the cost-of-living crisis had also impacted recruitment. "Potential recruits have expressed concerns about paying their bills on the lower salary and are attracted to the security of careers with high wages," a spokesperson said.



Professor John Howson

A full breakdown of Teach First recruitment figures, including by subject, is yet to be published.

Jack Worth, the school workforce lead at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), said the figures were "unsurprising", given the recruitment struggles across the sector.

"Factors affecting the attractiveness of teaching, such as the economic context, pay, workload and flexible working are common to all ITT routes, and are key to addressing the current recruitment and retention challenges."

But Howson said if schools in struggling areas were told "we're terribly sorry we can't give you a Teach First trainee this year because we haven't recruited enough", then the net losers are those children who would've got a high-flyer coming in on a well-financed programme."

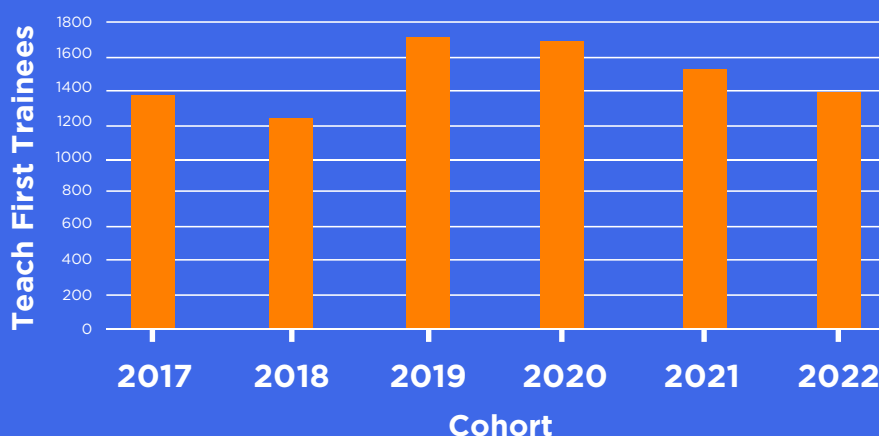
Teach First will consult with schools about the need for future autumn institutes, but will continue with a part-time summer training option to "maximise accessibility".

The part-time course, launched this year, allows trainees with other commitments to spread initial training over nine weeks rather than five.

After recruitment events were taken online throughout the pandemic, it said it would also resume in-person visits to universities this year, attending 270 events in November alone.

The DfE was approached for comment.

Charity recruits fewest trainees in four years



SPEEDREAD: CURRICULUM

The argument behind Oak's move to become a quango

Government intervention to turn Oak into a quango was needed to break the "cycle" of school curriculum weakness and support catch-up and levelling up, ministers have claimed.

The Department for Education has published the business case it made to the Cabinet Office and Treasury to turn Oak into an arms-length curriculum body. Here's what we learned.

1 School curriculum delivery 'weak'

In its business case, the DfE claimed that evidence pointed to "weaknesses in curriculum design and delivery" and "excessive teacher workload associated with curriculum planning".

The 2014 curriculum had been "implemented by teachers with comparatively little practical guidance", with Ofsted finding "serious weaknesses" in its enactment.

"Without government intervention, this business case concludes it is unlikely that this cycle will be broken quickly enough, and the standard of curriculum design and implementation may well remain too low to achieve our wider aims for education recovery and levelling up."

2 Oak must be 'strategically aligned' with government

The DfE considered three options for a "system leader" to improve curriculum delivery – establishing an arms-length body (which was chosen), procuring a provider or delivering the programme from the department.

The government feared schools were "unlikely to buy into" an organisation run by the DfE. Teachers "guard their autonomy from government intervention carefully and are unlikely to buy into a process or set of resources that feels that feels centrally imposed by government".

But setting up a private company would have "likely lead to losing Oak as an asset entirely".

Setting it up as an arms-length body has "the potential to both be seen as 'by the sector for the sector' and independent from government".

But the documents say the quango should be aligned with government policy, "both in terms of the national curriculum and wider related DfE policies...while also maintaining sufficient independence".

3 'Some evidence' of disrupting commercial market ...

Private providers have challenged the plans. The report concluded that although they had "some evidence of an impact on the market, but not for the level of impact they are suggesting."

The British Educational Suppliers Association estimated Oak's impact could be "between 10 per cent and 'upwards of 30 per cent' of the commercial market.

4... but schools' own resources will be 'displaced' first

The market impact assessment said school-created resources "will first be displaced by this intervention".

The government estimates schools and teachers create resources worth about £420 million a year to use themselves. This compares with an estimated £300 million commercial market, which includes revenue generated by schools that sell their own resources.

The DfE says the overall picture is "of a market with little natural growth prospects for high-value, high-quality resources".

This is "largely as a result of embedded teacher planning behaviours, with a perception of tightening school budgets post pandemic as potentially an exacerbating factor".

5 £16m to buy resources (and a £3.2m funding shortfall)

The DfE's chosen option will allow Oak to procure providers to develop its resources.

But the business case shows Oak has set aside just £16 million of its £42.5 million budget to go towards "overall procurement activity" (just over a third).

The spending review also only includes £39.3 million to continue delivering Oak up to 2024-25, leaving a £3.2 million shortfall.

6 Savings on teacher time means Oak 'can break even' ...

The DfE analysed three scenarios to assess the hours Oak would need to save teachers to "break even".

It found if 50 per cent of 402,442 teachers used Oak, they would need to save 2.5 minutes a week for the scheme to break even. If just 10 per cent of 329,271 teachers took it up, they would need to save 15.6 minutes a week.

The DfE said Oak's research estimates that using the platform on average saves 8.4 minutes a week for each teacher.

7... but Oak's team will double in size (and be absorbed by DfE)

The DfE says its proposed delivery model will increase the number of full-time equivalent Oak staff from 39 to 82.6.

But the Cabinet Office and Treasury have told the DfE that Oak's staff "must be fully absorbed within the department's headcount by the end of financial year 2024-25".

This presents a "complex challenge and pressure for the department within the overall headcount and equivalent reductions found elsewhere".

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ►

NEWS: CURRICULUM

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Lessons could be sold on for profit

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

The Oak National Academy will consider allowing private companies to sell its lessons on for profit.

Any move in this direction could put Oak at odds with the Reach Foundation, its former owner, which pledged nobody would profit from the new body.

The organisation, now a government quango, has also said it would restrict its content to UK-based users only to support the “growing curriculum market”, and would signpost “alternative” offers amid a legal row.

The academy this week launched an £8.2 million procurement exercise for thousands of new digital resources

and curriculum materials.

Full curriculum packages would initially be shared on a domestic licence, so any UK school or organisation could use and adapt them for non-commercial use.

However, the organisation said it had received “feedback about the potential benefits of broadening this licence to allow for greater innovation, such as integrating Oak within other providers’ platforms”.

It will consider the “options, opportunities and risks” any such move would have by reviewing the evidence alongside an “independent and expert organisation”.

It is looking at aligning use to the Open Government Licence which allows “anyone to copy, publish,

distribute, transmit and adapt the licensed work, and to use it both commercially and non-commercially”, as long as they acknowledge the source of the work.

Publishers could use “parts of Oak to create textbooks, or ed tech providers integrating Oak lessons into their platforms”.

This is likely to be controversial. It is not clear how the proposal will sit with Reach, which incubated Oak until handing it over to the government in September.

Ed Vainker, the chief executive of Reach, said at the time that “no individual will be able to profit from the activities of the new body”.

Schools Week revealed last year how a privatisation plan proposed by Oak,



in which bosses would have been in line for a £41 million payday, was pulled after the Reach board voiced its discontent.

Oak said Reach would need to approve any future changes to its articles of association – such as allowing commercial organisations to benefit.

Matt Hood, Oak’s chief executive, said the plans “show our determination and commitment to support a diverse and growing market in curriculum resources, which is precisely what teachers want so they have a choice of which resources they use”.

Speedread continued ..

8 Ofsted curriculum focus could drive take-up

The DfE says that as a result of Ofsted’s renewed focus on curriculum, “there may be schools who do not have the capacity to develop teaching resources from scratch and therefore turn to the curriculum body as a starting point”.

“This may therefore be influential in shaping and accelerating the uptake of the service.”

9 Subject ‘hubs’ to be reviewed

The DfE already offers support from subject hubs in maths, computing, English and languages.

But these arrangements “predominantly function as targeted school improvement intervention”. It is “likely there is insufficient curriculum expertise in the school system” to enable the existing model to be scaled up.

Officials are “currently advising ministers about the alignment of this intervention with existing curriculum hubs and related DfE-funded provisions”.

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POLITICS: LABOUR

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Inside the battle to shape the Labour party's education reforms

DONNA FERGUSON

@SCHOOLSWEEK

The fight to shape Labour's education policies has burst into life, with so-called "progressive" educationists and "traditional" teachers battling it out to influence the party's schools manifesto.

Last week, a group of 165 teachers who favour traditional teaching methods and a knowledge-rich curriculum formed the Campaign for Evidence-Informed Teaching (CEIT), in the hope of influencing future policies.

In response, a "broad coalition" of about 300 educationists have set up The Educators Alliance (TEA). The group wants Labour to create "a more diverse education system" with a "wide range of approaches" that "work for all young people", for example by improving access to creative subjects or potentially rethinking the current emphasis on "high-stakes terminal exams".

Both groups have published open letters responding to Lord David Blunkett's Learning and Skills report, which was commissioned by Sir Keir Starmer, the Labour leader, to help to inform the party's manifesto. The report was published last week.

Adam Smith, a primary teacher from south London, criticised the report for not representing teachers' views. He tweeted that anyone who wanted to join a centre-left pressure group to influence Labour's education policy should get in touch and "went out to have a coffee".

In less than 24 hours, the group had gathered 125 members and more than 2,000 followers of its Twitter handle, @CEITeaching.

"The positive support was really nice," Smith says. "But I was also shocked by the accusations. It did not occur to me people would think we were AstroTurf - or some kind of Tory pressure group."

In 2016, the Parents and Teachers for Excellence group was set up, claiming to be a grassroots movement to move the debate from the "elites in Whitehall" and mobilise parents and teachers to make the case for education reform.

But Schools Week later revealed one of its directors was Tory donor Jon Moynihan, a venture capitalist and Vote Leave campaigner.

The group was also orchestrated by policy reformers linked to Michael Gove - drawing



Sir Keir Starmer

parallels with what is known as "AstroTurfing", the practice of masking sponsors of an organisation to push a public relations campaign as a grassroots movement.

Smith believes his members are "mostly" Labour voters who are either teachers or senior leaders. He says they want to be "consulted more actively in the formation stages of policy. We're engaging in this, because this is how democracy is supposed to work, right?"

He found the idea that the group might be receiving external funding laughable: "No, it's not."

The teachers in CEIT understand the importance and the value of a knowledge-rich curriculum and more direct, explicit forms of teaching, he says. "We know these approaches work in our classrooms."

They have united to convince Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary. "We are in a fight for our voice to be heard by the Labour party."

He says education reforms since his time as a pupil have been "hard won... I genuinely believe if you think there is a way to do things that is good, then part of your responsibility as a citizen

is to talk to people about that and try to influence them to agree with you... And to fight for it."

But TEA spokesperson Dr James Mannion, podcast host and director of the teacher training organisation Rethinking Education, says it is not a battle "because what we're trying to do is much bigger than what CEIT is trying to do. And we really welcome their contributions to the debate as one set of voices among many."

He admits that "in a way" his group has "sprung up" in response to CEIT but denies this means there is now a contest between "progs" and "trads" to influence policy. "We're not interested in continuing this tired debate between the so-called traditionalists and progressives - the vast majority of teachers don't identify strongly either way, and lots of people's practices are shared."

He says TEA wants Labour to listen to everyone involved in education - not just teachers - to get a "broader" range of "more representative" views than those expressed by CEIT.

"The system at the moment clearly doesn't work for many young people," he says. But when parents feel their kid is in a school that's at odds with their values, often "there's no other option available".

Blunkett report: the contested policies

Schools should follow a "reformed, creative" curriculum

"Multimodel" assessment, with more use of pupil destination data

One-term sabbaticals for every five years teachers serve

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OPINION: POLITICS



DAVID BLUNKETT

Look past divides to meet challenges of the future

Look past divides to meet challenges of the future

The response to our skills proposals show some are still fighting shadows when the battle for the future of education has moved on, writes David Blunkett

I have never ceased to be amazed at the number of people who, having read a proposal, seem to draw the entirely opposite conclusion to the one set out.

I am grateful, therefore, to those who have read the skills paper published last week and recognised that the remit, given by Keir Starmer to the group I chaired, was specifically on skills. We widened our approach to take account of the major impact the early years and formal schooling has on the choices young people make, and on their future life chances.

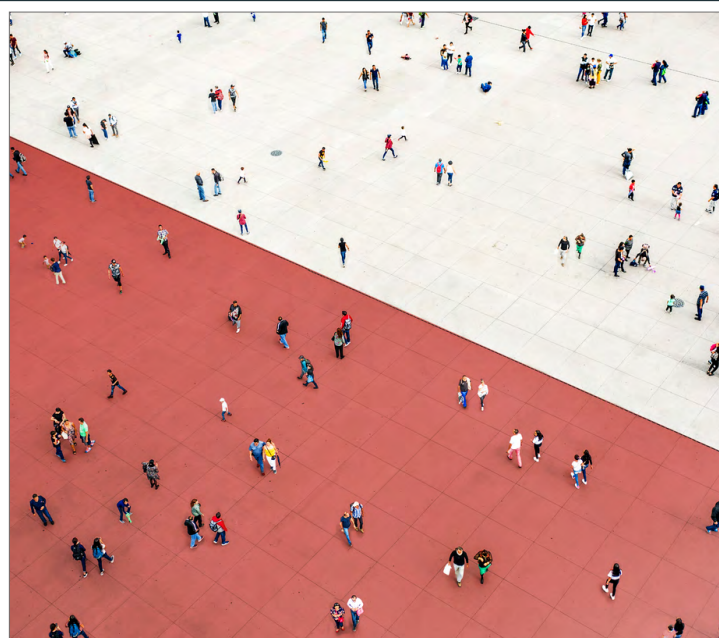
Let me quote directly from the document:

"There should be no conflict between a knowledge-rich curriculum, and a broad and innovative framework which develops the analytical, creative, and therefore entrepreneurial mindset of the employees of the future."

I see no dichotomy between drawing down on this accumulated knowledge, and developing the oracy, teamwork and critical thinking that modern businesses are crying out for. This works

alongside teaching a love of learning for its own sake and personal wellbeing.

This brings me to concerns about references to the school curriculum. We sought to reflect that what children learn, how they learn, and how they apply that learning is not static or caught in a time-war. The development of the curriculum should embrace



and demonstrating their capabilities, did not see that it was their responsibility to nurture youngsters to get a foothold on the employment ladder.

“Curriculum development should not be driven by the whims of ministers

as many experts as possible – and this includes teachers – rather than being driven by the whims of any government minister. Reform should recognise overload, as well as investment in professional development.

Take my own experience. I passed O-level physics. I knew nothing about physics, but I had a brilliant memory and the nature of the one-off exam suited me down to the ground. This is simply not the case for many youngsters. The idea that rethinking assessment will somehow disadvantage the already disadvantaged is, to say the least, highly questionable.

Twenty-five years ago I took on those who, having obtained their jobs by achieving qualifications

One example was a school where only 6 per cent of pupils achieved what, in those days, were five A to C grades at GCSE, but they were extraordinarily good at encouraging singing and marching on the town hall. Of course, developing expression, a love of music, learning where power lies and how to have your voice heard are all important.

But here is an undeniable truth. Unless those young people were able to fully develop their capacity to continue learning, much else of what they absorbed would prove to be elusory.

In *The Learning Age*, which I published in 1999, I spelled out my vision of what education, in its broadest sense, was all about. I

have not resiled from that. But this paper was about learning and skills. The crucial nature of what happens in our school days is a building block and a piece of the jigsaw that I could not ignore in a document that addresses the world of work and progression in work.

If I had not addressed this as a foundation for future learning and skills, I would rightly have been criticised. So let us have a debate about how we transform our education system so that we equip young people to take on the challenges of the world of work, but also to be well-rounded and socially engaged citizens who can thoughtfully debate the great challenges of tomorrow.

Those who believe that we've reached the zenith of our body of knowledge, our capacity to be creative and do things in new ways are simply part of the past and will remain there. For the rest of us, the world of tomorrow can be a daunting and a wonderfully creative challenge. The question for all of us is: "Are your eyes turned to the past, or are they lifted to a vision of the future?"

POLITICS

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Schools ministers jostle for education committee hotseat

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Two former schools ministers and a former council education chair have thrown their hats in the ring to chair the Parliamentary education committee.

Nominations have opened in the race to replace Robert Halfon, who led the committee from 2017 until he was reappointed as a Department for Education minister last week.

Each MP must gather at least 15 signatures from fellow Conservatives. A vote will be held on November 16 if there is more than one candidate.

Here's what the three candidates who have formally declared so far say...


Robin Walker (schools minister, September 2021-June 2022)

Backers include David Davis, Dr Caroline Johnson and Tom Hunt

I made my maiden speech on education and campaigned on skills and schools throughout my time in Parliament.

I am informed enough to hit the ground running, but independent enough to hold ministers to account.

I've always sought to work across the House and respect the devolved administrations - I believe we can learn from different parts of the UK as well as from international comparators.

Alongside continuing Robert Halfon's excellent work on skills, SEN, attendance and levelling up, I want the committee to do more on childcare, safeguarding and the cost pressures facing schools and families.

I would work with all members of the committee to respect their interests, following an evidence-based approach. I would serve on the committee even if not elected chair.

[As schools minister I] presided over the return

to school after the pandemic; co-wrote the white paper including the levelling-up premium and education investment areas; prioritised deprivation in the funding formula and delivered the largest ever cash increase in schools funding;

[I] co-chaired the attendance action alliance bringing together the children's commissioner, schools and councils to tackle severe absence; reformed the national tutoring programme to be schools-led; supported early delivery of manifesto pledge on £30,000 starting salaries for teachers; made preparations for the first successful exam series in three years.


Jonathan Gullis (schools minister, September-October, 2022)

Backers include Boris Johnson, Kit Malthouse and Priti Patel

Robert Halfon has led the committee fantastically since 2017, not being afraid to ask challenging questions, investigate sensitive and difficult topics, and most of all stand up for children up and down our country, ensuring they get the education, skills and support they deserve, helping to level up opportunity everywhere.

As the chair of the education select committee, I would consult with colleagues on inquiries of priority to you and your constituents, delivering on the interests across the House. I will want the committee to use the knowledge and expertise of members from across the House, as well as engaging closely with all-party parliamentary groups (APPGs), to deliver in the national interest.

I believe education is the key to levelling up life chances. If children and families, especially those who are disadvantaged, are not equipped with the knowledge, skills and support they need, then generations will have been failed.

It is vital the next chair has the right blend of

experience on the ground in both the teaching profession and within Parliament, and I hope the above shows I have what it takes.


David Simmonds (former deputy leader and education chair, Hillingdon Borough Council, London)

Backers not yet published

With more than 20 years' experience of leadership of education and children's services at local, regional and national level, I will focus the committee on adding value to policy-making through rigorous use of data to understand how and why our policies succeed, or fail.

I was awarded my CBE for this work, reflecting my involvement in numerous interventions in some of our country's most challenging areas, and for supporting the aspirations of those wanting to succeed even more.

I take particular pride in financial rigour, doing more for our country's children with the same or less money, and improving the efficiency of our public services.

As a party we need to prepare our next big initiative for children and young people, and the select committee has enormous scope to contribute through effective evidence-gathering and supporting colleagues on APPGs and other committees.

Following the IICSA report we will need a particular focus on child protection services, which are an area of particular personal expertise.

I will be writing to all colleagues with further detail but welcome any questions.

According to the Guido Fawkes blog, ex-children's minister Brendan Clarke-Smith and current committee member Caroline Ansell are also putting themselves forward. Both did not respond.



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Profile

DONNA FERGUSON | @SCHOOLSWEEK



‘Social mobility will decline for this generation – poorer children are up against it in a way that is so extreme now’

Lee Elliot Major gave up a dream job to become the UK’s first professor of social mobility. Donna Ferguson finds out why he made the move to academia – and his latest plans to improve the life chances for our poorest pupils

Lee Elliot Major recently confessed to a group of headteachers that he’d just walked past a London train station where he’d slept rough in his youth. “All the heads looked at me aghast,” the UK’s first professor of social mobility recalls. “They hadn’t expected that.”

A former chief executive of the Sutton

Trust, he proudly lists on his CV the OBE he was given in 2019 for services to social mobility, with his many published works and a glittering array of academic honours, appointments and accolades.

But perhaps equally relevant to his job at the University of Exeter – although not listed on his CV – are his experiences as a

comprehensive school drop-out in the 1980s, when he worked as a bin man and a petrol station assistant.

There were nights, back then, when he was “technically homeless”. He was a punk, he says, with “big earrings, eyeliner and blond spiky hair” and frequently clashed with his “quite strict” father. “My dad chucked me out

Feature: Lee Elliot Major



Thinking cap: beret-wearing 18 year old in 1986 while retaking A-levels at Richmond tertiary college in West London

a few times... I would have nowhere to go, and I remember..." he pauses, takes a deep breath ... "him taking the front door key. That was quite a big thing for me. It did feel like I had... no home to speak of."

He comes from a working-class family: his mother worked for the local council, his father was an electronic engineer. "No one in my family had been to university," he says. "There are lots of people in sociology and economics and education, thinking about inequality and social mobility. To me, it definitely is a personal as well as professional passion."

He was always interested in social justice and education was always important. He was so bright that the toughest boys at his local comp "used to be quite proud of me - I remember one of them saying: 'he's going to be a brain surgeon when he grows up.'" Looking back, he thinks he may have been on the spectrum in some way..."I could sit around looking at mathematical equations for hours."

His "very supportive" teachers recognised his potential and pushed him to apply to Cambridge. But instead of making him an offer, the Cambridge dons who interviewed him wrote to his school expressing concern for his wellbeing. "I must have spoken about my personal life... It was quite chaotic."

Shortly after he stopped going to school, left home and managed to get his own place "on social security".

He was working for a builder he had met in the petrol station when, with a friend's support, he got a second shot at university.



London calling: Speaking at London Guildhall in October 2022 warning that London risks becoming an 'exclusive enclave of elites'

'I would describe myself as an 'awkward climber'

"My friend was from a typically middle-class family – dad was an architect, mum was a teacher – and they took me in for a time. That was really critical."

His new "surrogate parents" encouraged him to retake his A-levels and he did well enough to secure a place at Sheffield, graduating with a PhD in theoretical physics six years later.

He is very aware that the "well trodden" university route he took often only enables social mobility for the most academic disadvantaged children, and agrees with Katharine Birbalsingh, head of Michaela School, that attending an elite university is not the only road to success for a young person from an impoverished background.

Future social mobility efforts should focus on making cultures inclusive to all talents, wherever they come from, rather than converting "working-class oiks into middle-class copies", he says. "The big issue facing our society is shrinking opportunities to lead decent lives with affordable homes and good jobs."

Universities need to "up their game" in supporting students from poorer

backgrounds - "not just getting them into university, but supporting them while they're there".

But he also thinks it's outrageous that there is no pupil premium funding in FE to support the poorest pupils who do not go down the university route. "That would be my one funding ask, if I could get extra money," he says, adding that one of the big problems facing the sector is the dominance of university-educated politicians and journalists. "We have very few people in charge who understand or empathise with FE colleges or vocational routes... we should focus on the young people who don't go to university. But I also think there should be more university and FE links than there are at the moment."

He is carrying out policy workshops with the Department of Education to address the "forgotten fifth" - the 20 per cent of young people who leave school without a grade 4 at GCSE in English language and maths. "Providing proper vocational options, as well as academic, is a huge black hole in our education system. And I think one of the reasons why we have so many young people

Feature: Lee Elliot Major

leave without basic maths and English skills is because they are put off by a curriculum that is - and I know this sounds awful - a bit too academic."

For many young people who are more vocational or creative, education in the UK is not as good as it could be.

GCSEs label some children as failures. "What I would have, alongside GCSEs and some vocational offerings, would be every pupil having to pass a National Certificate, which would be more functional skills. So, for example, how do you use maths in everyday life? How do you communicate?" It seems obvious to him that every pupil should leave school with those basic skills.

He left his "dream job" at the Sutton Trust for Exeter in 2019 because he wanted to have more of a direct impact on the practice of teachers and universities, and more influence on the government.

He is full of practical ideas about how social mobility could be improved.

For example, he would like Sure Start centres to be reintroduced "because otherwise, as our research shows, you're always in catch-up mode in the school system, with huge gaps at age 5 and pupils falling behind".

He also wants UCAS to reform personal statements, which he thinks offer middle-class children an unfair advantage, and to see more inclusive teaching. "Schools policy at the moment assumes that if you do good teaching - and that's hard enough in itself - then everyone rises. I don't agree."

Teachers, he says, should have a "really explicit focus" on disadvantaged learners. "That means knowing who they are and understanding their home environment, making sure you're giving them feedback and thinking about what approaches benefit those children in particular."

Like Birbalsingh, who announced last week that the The Social Mobility Commission will investigate which teaching styles work best to boost outcomes for poorer pupils, he thinks one of the most important questions the government needs to answer is: "What is it that schools, that are doing well for disadvantaged children, are doing? Which schools have done well over the past decade and how can we scale up that approach in an inclusive way?"



Widening access: With non-privileged state school students attending one of the Sutton Trust's university summer schools in 2017 as the Trust's first Chief Executive

'It is a personal as well as professional passion'

Persistent absence among disadvantaged pupils also needs to be addressed. "One of our studies showed that 40 per cent of children on free school meals are not coming to school regularly. They're missing at least 10 per cent of sessions. This is a crisis."

He sees it as a legacy of the pandemic, exacerbating educational inequalities that already existed. "Research has estimated that social mobility will decline for this generation... poorer children are up against it in a way that is so extreme now, compared to previous eras."

Yet he admits he has paid for private tutors for his own children. "I don't think you should castigate parents for trying to do what's best for their children," he says, adding that it was a joint decision with his partner. "I am obviously now very middle class... Sometimes I dwell on this a lot: to what extent am I challenging the system myself?"

After the interview, he emails to add: "My hope is that anyone from my sort of background has the chance to fulfil their potential whatever that may be. However, I would describe myself as an 'awkward climber' - detached from my roots and never quite at home where I've ended up. You carry your history with you - I guess I've learned to

be more upfront about who I am as I've got older."

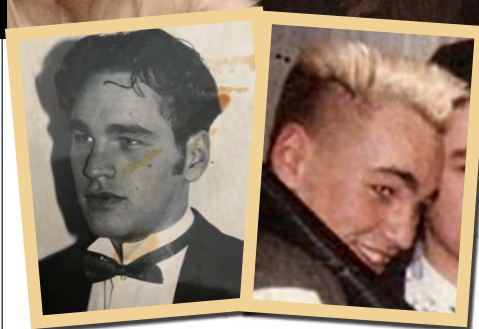
He was a big champion of the National Tutoring Programme. "It was great the government listened. But I do think the actual delivery ... has been a bit of a disaster."

He still thinks tutoring is a good way to address some of the education gaps caused by the pandemic, however. He is feeling particularly optimistic about the impact of a programme at Exeter that trains undergraduates to provide "very high quality" tutoring to disadvantaged 11 and 12-year-olds at local schools.

"We're doing a trial right now. Loads of other universities are interested in it, the government's interested in it. My hope is that we will have a national programme like this, where whichever university campus you go to, there will be an opportunity to do tutoring for local schools."

Tutors could be paid in module credits, or the programme could be funded from university access budgets or pupil premium, he says.

"The challenge for me is to come up with programmes that don't cost that much, because there's not going to be much money around in the next decade."



Opinion

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**ED
DORRELL**
Director, Public First

Westminster whingers are wrong: Less schools policy is good news

The Westminster bubble's hand-wringing over education's fall from political priorities is misplaced, writes Ed Dorrell. There's plenty to be excited about

There is a growing grumble around Westminster and the education policy community that the schools sector isn't getting the attention it deserves from politicians.

There are, broadly, two kinds of whinge, depending on your political persuasion:

1. Labour – resurgent in the polls – has little policy imagination in education, no great ambition and, importantly offers little on the scale of David Blunkett ahead of the 1997 election or Michael Gove before 2010.

2. The Conservatives have been too distracted by Brexit, Covid, the Boris Johnson Moral Bankruptcy and the Liz Truss Car Crash to bother themselves with schools to anything like the same degree as during Gove's great era of reform.

There is a third, come to think of it, that underpins the first two: It is that people/voters/parents/the great unwashed seem to have stopped caring about the state of our schools. It is often pointed out that Ipsos Mori

recently found that just 8 per cent of voters think education should be

passively) noticed something important: that our schools are almost certainly better than ever?

“I'm not sure grumbling stands up under scrutiny

prioritised for intervention. – the lowest the issue has polled since October 1984. We therefore get the absence of policy-making that we deserve, goes the thinking.

James Kirkup, a celebrated Westminster policy wonk (but not an education specialist), took up all three arguments in *The Times* this week with a comment piece that spurred another bout of handwringing. He layered something else on too: the suggestion that because everyone – public and politicians – had stopped paying attention to educational performance, poor kids were being let down by a failing system.

I'm not sure any of this stands up.

Let's take the grumbles in reverse order.

3. Surely, we should be fairly pleased that most people are not deeply concerned about the State Of Our Schools™? Isn't it a sign that after years of political meddling the public is happy with what goes on in the nation's classrooms? Shouldn't we rejoice that they have (however

2. There is some truth in the idea that the Tories have been absent from the field of battle. It is shameful that they backed out of their own catch-up plans for life after Covid and in so doing accepted the learning loss that affected the poorest young people the most.

Nonetheless, 18 months on from this awful decision, one can hardly claim that the Sunak government is not interested in schools. It has just appointed possibly the heaviest-weight junior ministerial team in living memory (step forward Nick Gibb and Robert Halfon). What they will do is far from clear, but surely they'll do "something".

1. It's on this point that I most violently diverge from the Westminster whingeing. I am convinced that Labour, led on education by Bridget Phillipson, is set to radically rethink much of what we understand about the institution of school.

Phillipson and her team have already set out their plans for

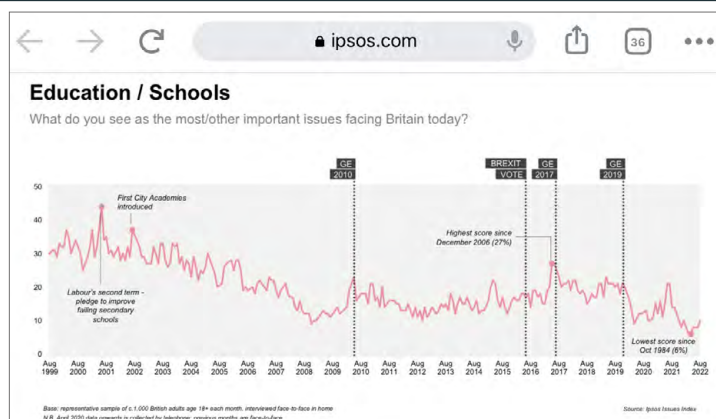
universal breakfast clubs (one of few costed and funded policy announcements at Labour's annual conference) and you would have to be a long way from the jungle drums of Westminster to have missed the fact that there is likely more to come in this space.

Labour has a very clear policy trajectory. It might not excite wonks such as Kirkup, but they want to rebuild the infrastructure that goes around schools rather than interfering again in the classroom or the structure of the system: childcare, Sure Start-style parental support, after-school clubs, extra-curricular activities are all set to become subject to big changes and big innovation from a Phillipson-led DfE.

These interventions will be expensive – and thanks to the Conservatives the cupboard is bare – but it is in these areas that the most educational advances are to be made. Not least because schools are doing a very fine job with teaching and learning.

What is more, my opinion work suggests this is where public appetite for education reform is strongest too – so it's also good politics.

Contrary to the prevailing narrative in SWI, I am certain today is a very exciting time to be thinking about schools policy. Time to stop the grumbling.



Opinion

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Rising costs worsened by short-termism and under-investment have left the SEND system incapable of meeting demand, writes Alex Dale

There is no doubt that the system that supports our most vulnerable children is broken and needs fixing ... fast.

Without swift and definitive action, we are going to hit the bottom. At a time when we are so focused on “levelling up” and on recovery from a global pandemic, it seems crazy that support for our most vulnerable children and families is so badly resourced.

There isn't a consolidated and published picture of high-needs deficits, but we know from recent surveys that the national picture is forecast to be around a £2.4 billion deficit by March 2025.

This is reinforced by the number of local authorities (LAs) that are working with the DfE through its intervention and support programmes – the Safety Valve Programme (20 LAs) and the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme (55 LAs).

This is not pressure at a local level in just a handful of local authorities, but a system-wide failure caused by under-resourcing.

Of course these pressures can be hard to predict, but we have seen them coming for quite some time. In December 2018, the ISOS partnership published research into the pressures on the SEND system that laid out the path we were on. Covid has only exacerbated the challenges.

The level of increased need has been on a rising trajectory since 2010; has increased further since the change in the code of practice in 2014; and even further since 2019. This is evident in the



CLLR ALEX DALE

Chair, f40 and cabinet member for education, Derbyshire County Council

SEND isn't on the precipice - it's tipped over the edge

DfE's own data for education health and care plans (EHCPs).

To put this into local context, one f40 local authority member was

schools are having to meet an unprecedented level of need.

And as mainstream school funding slips into real-terms cuts again in

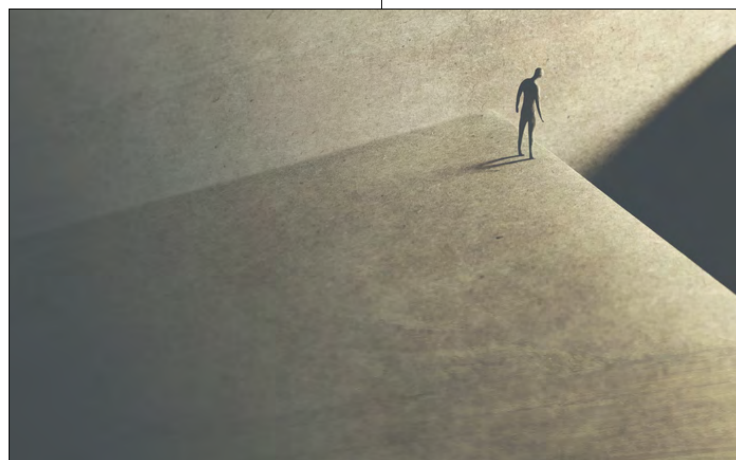
“ We need more special schools now, not in five years

supporting 3,290 EHCPs in January 2018. It's 5,323 today, with a further 923 in process.

This phenomenal rise is not only creating a pressure on high-needs budgets but on schools, where it really matters. Special schools are overflowing and mainstream

2023-24, the resources and staffing to support these children will again reduce. Meanwhile, special school base funding has been at £10,000 a place for about ten years.

During that time, the number of children with SEND has continued to rise. Over half of the children and



young people in special schools have a primary or secondary need of autism. For children in early years specialist settings, the figure is 65 per cent.

In this context, the government's response to the SEND review needs to be finalised and published promptly.

One of its key themes is supporting mainstream inclusion, but to achieve that we must stop cutting mainstream school budgets and invest in mainstream SEND. That means a national funding formula that ensures funding is reaching the schools with most need and targeted, ring-fenced budgets for SEND that reflect schools' contexts and cohorts.

We must also invest in specialist provision. The base funding was woeful, even before this year's inflation, and we need more special schools now, not in five years.

The recent announcement of £2.6 billion of capital funding is welcome but it is nowhere near enough, especially with rising school-build costs. LAs will be submitting bids and the reality is that it's likely to be at least 100 per cent over-subscribed, leaving many authorities to go without.

Yet, going without means more children going into independent special schools, which broadly cost twice as much.

Finally, we need to ensure that local high-need systems can meet children's needs earlier. Too often, support is only available at the point of crisis, not at the point of need.

This has to change – not because it's cheaper, but because children deserve the right support at the right time.

Opinion

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ALICE GREGSON
Executive director,
Forum Strategy

Learning from other sectors can stave off a CEO exodus

Chief executive departure trends in other sectors could soon be mirrored in our own, says Alice Gregson. She offers five insights that could help to retain the people at the top

Trust chief executives do game-changing things. They advocate for their schools, children and communities, generating support and investment. They protect heads and senior leaders from political and policy upheaval, setting direction and mitigating change fatigue. They invest in the right people and resources to maximise support and expertise across schools. They generate a culture of collaboration, ensuring collective, inclusive improvement.

Yet constant crisis leadership, political upheaval and economic pressures are taking a toll. The sector will lose people who bring vast leadership experience and expertise if it doesn't carefully consider retention strategies. And it's not alone.

Korn Ferry found 174 US non-profit and government sector chief executives left their jobs in the first six months of 2022, a 39 per cent jump from the same period in 2021. Crisis leadership and politics were the most cited reasons. This year,

Deloitte found 70 per cent of C-level executives across four countries, including the UK, are considering jobs that better support their wellbeing. Fifty-seven per cent were ready to quit.

“Ultimately, retention is the board's responsibility

A key factor is a growing divide between the reality of the work and the motivation for taking the role. Vlerick Business School surveyed almost 1,000 European chief executives and found their motivations were mainly non-financial, such as achieving progress and the pride of working for the organisation. Our own 2021 #BeingTheCEO report echoed this, with 80 per cent taking the job to make a greater difference to more pupils and communities, and almost one-third attracted by the opportunity to be more strategic.

But the space to focus on long-term strategy and progress appears to be diminishing. CEOs want to position their organisations to attract and retain the best staff and to best serve young people in a changing world. Constant distraction from this threatens retention.

Ultimately, it's the board's

responsibility to develop a retention strategy for its chief executive, and how it goes about that is crucial. Here are five insights from our work with experienced chairs and CEOs across sectors to maximise impact in a challenging context.

Ensure the right fit from the start

A mismatch between the incoming chief executive's and the recruiting board's expectations and understanding of the role can influence an early exit. Robust attraction and recruitment processes support retention, particularly when everyone is clear on the role's purpose and objectives. We recommend using the 'Being The



need support to focus on and invest in longer-term strategy and organisational development, delegating significant aspects of operational leadership to experts around them.

Ensure access to development opportunities

While most CEOs have the skills and attributes to do the role well, it is vital that they keep learning and developing. Access to organisations such as Forum Strategy, which offer peer networks, CPD and coaching, is essential for their ongoing confidence and ability to navigate turbulent times.

Prioritise wellbeing

Boards need to invest if 70 per cent of executives are considering leaving for a role that better supports their wellbeing. Modelling a commitment to wellbeing from the top is key to ensuring it pervades the whole organisation. Boards should lead by example.

We have all experienced first-hand the significant impact of leadership instability and churn. It's imperative we ensure our schools and trusts don't face this in already uncertain times. These five insights will help us to weather the storm.

CEO' template job description (endorsed by the National Governance Association) as a starting point.

Nurture the relationship between CEO and board

Trust, respect and communication are key to ensuring the chief executive has a clear remit and what they need to do the job well. There are times when CEOs need oversight, but also times when they need exemplary support from an experienced board. It is vital to get this balance right.

Create space for strategic focus

Chief executives are mostly recruited with a mandate for organisational development and improvement, but too often find they are deployed as "firefighters", held to account for short-term outcomes rather than strategic leadership. CEOs

Opinion

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DAVID WESTON

Chief executive, Teacher Development Trust

Funding may be squeezed, but you can still sustain CPD

Spending on staff development has slumped, says David Weston, but its crucial role in recruitment, retention and improvement can be safeguarded

In recent analysis, SchoolDash and the Teacher Development Trust found that schools' spending on staff professional development fell more than 40 per cent between 2018 and 2021. But this fall also masks the true amount spent on developing staff in schools.

Most school leaders have felt significant financial pressure, especially in the past year with huge additional costs, particularly around staffing and energy. In the same period expenditure on staffing grew while other budgets such as school maintenance, curriculum resources and administrative supplies fell, so some of this could well be general financial pressures.

But with teachers and support staff becoming increasingly hard to recruit and the volume of trainees falling alarmingly short, a school's professional development offer is one of the few effective levers leaders have left to attract staff, retain them and build capacity and skill in their teams.

Whatever the reason for the stark fall in investment, the fact is that

declared spending on CPD only represents a relatively small part of a school's total expenditure on professional development activities.

According to 2021 figures, the average secondary school has a CPD budget that, if spent only on teachers, would work out as £371 per teacher. But schools are also probably paying for each teacher

“ Professional development remains a powerful asset

to have five INSET days. Taking a typical teacher on an upper-1 pay level and adding the additional cost of their pensions and national insurance contributions, that's already a cost of about £266 per working day, or £1330 for all five INSET days. Roughly, that means the average secondary school's CPD budget per teacher is actually only 20 per cent of the real spend on professional development time and activity. The figures for primary work out very similarly.

And that's without considering the amount of time staff are paid for things such as performance management conversations, leadership of professional development, teaching and learning, or discussions about developing



curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and practice that take place within other whole-staff meetings or subject team meetings.

Realistically, even with the average CPD budget, a school's real spend on professional development is going to be comfortably in excess of £2000 per teacher.

Ultimately, even with CPD budgets under pressure, the most important thing for leaders to think about is how well they're using this huge investment that is mainly in internal

staff time: how well it's planned, how it's structured and how well it's led. The focus can't be just on CPD content, or even its process, but must also be on the culture in the school that research tells us can either act as a barrier to or a driver of retention and development.

Tactically, I'd recommend that leaders consider the following.

- Invest in the quality of leadership, whether maximising take-up of the last fully funded cohorts of the new NPQs, taking advantage of government-funded headteacher coaching or other specialist qualifications in CPD leadership.
- Consider how you're aligning with latest evidence on effective CPD mechanisms by building

capacity for pedagogical (or instructional) coaching and in research-informed teacher enquiry/research. This can ensure that each hour spent in development is more likely to have an impact on standards, morale and retention.

- Consider how you can use the apprenticeship levy to access training for support staff, teachers and leaders. The fantastic SkillsForSchools website from Unison lists a huge number of qualifications and support options for every non-teacher role.
- Consider how you can generate efficiencies from working as a cluster or trust of schools by sharing courses and opportunities.
- Invest in support for a thorough review and benchmarking of how effective your current CPD is compared to a) other schools and b) best practice. You could consider light-touch options such as Dr Sam Sims' Teacher Working Environment Survey or a more comprehensive review with follow-up coaching, such as a diagnostic review.

Professional development remains a powerful asset in recruitment, retention and school improvement. Budgets are squeezed and leaders face difficult choices, but there's no reason to see investment in the workforce decline in quality and effectiveness.

Opinion

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DANIELLE SCRASE

Executive principal and inclusion
school development lead,
LEO Academy Trust

Six tips for equality, diversity and inclusion in the curriculum

Simple steps can make the core educational values of equality, diversity and inclusion part of the fabric of your family of schools, says Danielle Scrase

A multi-academy trust is by nature a community of schools that includes children, parents, carers and staff from different backgrounds who come together with a shared vision for exceptional teaching and learning. Community is therefore a crucial value that underpins its successful running. It enables us to work together and harness different talents and perspectives to achieve the best possible opportunities and outcomes for pupils.

At LEO, community reflects our commitment to embracing and celebrating diversity in all we do. This ensures each member of our trust feels included and represented. As inclusion school development lead, I am often asked how a trust can champion equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across its schools and embed this into teaching and learning. At the heart of our approach lies a practical strategy to build EDI into each of our schools' curriculum. Here are my six top tips to help school leaders ensure inclusion becomes an achievable and sustained goal.

Establish commitment

Embedding a commitment to EDI must stem from the trust culture. This EDI policy should be clearly stated in its mission, vision and values to create a strong and supportive culture of empathy and respect from the top down. For example, this could be a clear yet simple statement: "We are committed to embracing, celebrating and promoting EDI in the curriculum and beyond and supporting staff to achieve this vision".

Complete a curriculum audit

Once your EDI policy is established, it's important to evaluate the curriculum against your agreed measures for success, identify areas for improvement and agree next steps. INSET days provide an ideal opportunity for heads and subject leads to audit curriculum content and review classroom displays and resources, to ensure they reflect the diversity of the school and its community in all subjects.

Get it on the agenda

Appoint an EDI lead within each school who is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the policy in the curriculum and collaborating with colleagues to best support them. These leads can form a working party across the trust who



“ Embedding EDI must stem from the trust culture

can champion EDI and agree action plans and commitment in each school, to ensure consistency and a whole-team approach.

Empower staff with knowledge and resources

Your staff will undoubtedly be committed to honouring the diversity of the trust community in the curriculum. However, for many teachers the challenge sometimes is knowing how to properly instil EDI in the classroom. High-quality CPD is therefore essential to empower staff with the right knowledge and resources.

There are some brilliant free learning resources such as *The Black Curriculum* and *Diversity Role Models* which provide guidance and classroom techniques around topics such as anti-racism, anti-bullying and gender equality.

Create network groups

Establishing network groups that regularly meet to review and contribute to the EDI plan for the curriculum ensures accountability and that the policy is best serving school communities. Ideally, there

will be network groups at pupil, parent, governor and trustee level to ensure everyone's voice is heard.

Inclusive trust opportunities

In addition to a full audit of the curriculum, it's important to consider the inclusivity of wider opportunities, celebrations and awareness dates relevant to each school. In fact, it's a recommendation from the student commission on racial justice, whose 2022 report was published last week.

If one of your schools has a higher proportion of pupils and families from a certain ethnic background or culture, ensure the appropriate celebrations and holidays are respected. This may differ from school to school, so make sure this is regularly checked by EDI leads.

Equality, diversity and inclusion are key values that all schools should be reflecting and celebrating in the curriculum so that each pupil understands that they belong and have a valued place alongside their peers. And it is critical learning for pupils' development into respectful and empathetic global citizens.

THE REVIEW

THE POWER OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS: TRAVERSING THE PRESENT; TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE

Authors: Graham Handscomb and Chris Brown
Publisher: John Catt Educational
Published: June 23
ISBN: 1915261279
Reviewer: Terry Freedman, edtech writer and former head of computing

The idea of professional learning networks, or PLNs, has been around a long time. So what is there to say about them with regard to teachers' professional development and wellbeing? The size and scope of this book provides a succinct answer: plenty.

The authors draw on a wide range of research. What especially impressed me is not only that their findings are bang up to date, drawing lessons from the responses to Covid lockdowns, but that they have also delved into research carried out decades ago. Anyone who believes that old research is no longer relevant will discover this book to be a useful rejoinder.

Handscomb and Brown open with a discussion on the power of networking, making the point that what teachers are able to learn is limited by the kind of networks in which they find themselves. Crucially, there are different types of network, and they provide opportunities to do more than share good practice, however defined.

I suspect that this book won't be on the education secretary's recommended reading list for schools. (Although such a document doesn't yet exist, as far as I know, it surely will come soon given the DfE's predilection for controlling as much as it can get away with.) While the DfE has often encouraged schools or MATs to see themselves as independent of each other, the authors state that "school autonomy will be self-defeating if it is interpreted as functioning in isolation. Instead, autonomy should take the form of freedom and flexibility to work with many partners".

Indeed, the government's "self-improving

school-led system" (SISS) has, far from leading to a reduction in centralised control and enhanced autonomy, does nothing of the sort. Indeed, the government's approach in England favours the establishment of hierarchies and markets, both of which make what Handscomb and Brown argue for harder to achieve.

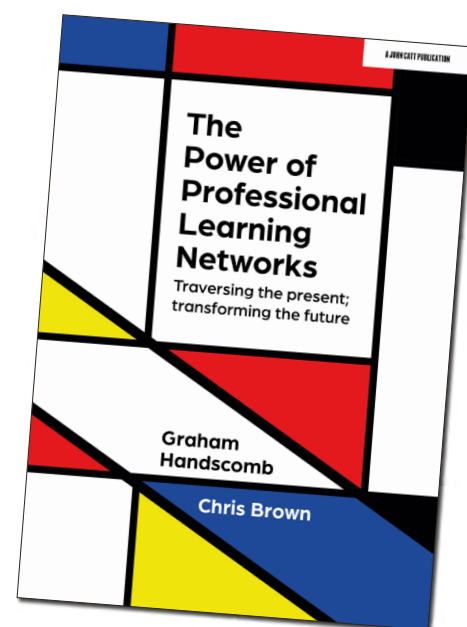
Their preference is for schools to move from external to professional accountability. And, rather damningly for the English model, they draw attention to PISA's findings that collaboration and knowledge-sharing are critical for raising standards in the most successful educational systems.

As might be expected, a well thought-out system of peer review is both powerful and helps to develop a culture of trust. But "peer review cannot be imposed on a group of schools; it must come from their deep desire to be responsible for their own collective improvement and a commitment to put in the time required to achieve this". Beware any top-down government initiative to impose peer review on schools!

The book covers a vast range of types of network, and includes copious case studies. These are not just from schools, but voluntary and other kinds of organisations - with a specific section on Scotland. One concept comes up often: trust.

It is probably not an exaggeration to say that the DfE has lost the trust of teachers. And sadly, in spite of all the proof evident from the Covid response that teachers want to develop their professional skills and do the best by their pupils, it's unclear whether ministers ever

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE



trusted them. According to *The Power of Professional Learning Networks*, this situation is precisely the kind that's most likely to contribute to low rates of teacher retention.

One of the problems with the book is the amount of sometimes overwhelming detail. And I felt it missed two key things: First, a questionnaire or flowchart that would enable senior leaders to have a go at working out what kind of network would best suit their circumstances and needs. Second, although each chapter includes a *Moving forward* section at the end listing what can be achieved and what needs to be done, I was reminded of that old joke:

Motorist to local: "How do I get to such and such a place?"

Local: "Well, I wouldn't start from here."

But rather than a roadmap, this is a tourist brochure of possibilities. And supported by such compelling evidence, that makes it a must-have.

★★★★☆
Rating



Penny Rabiger

Associate, Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality, Leeds Beckett University)

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER CABINET

Wasn't it Sir Tim Brighouse, the former London schools commissioner, who said "accept uncertainty as the norm, and understand that chaos can produce order"? In September we had a new prime minister and education secretary; in October we swore in another prime minister and our sixth education secretary in a year. I'm wondering who the line-up in November might be and where we will be by Christmas.

sara h @lifeatthenest · Oct 25
I've got a milk monitor that's been in post for longer than 6 Secretaries of State for Education. How can they even begin to judge us.

Minister	Start Date	End Date	Duration	Party
Cavlin Williams ^[P]	24 July 2019	15 September 2021	2 years, 53 days	Conservative
Nadhim Zahawi ^[R]	15 September 2021	5 July 2022	9 months and 20 days	Conservative
Michelle Donelan	5 July 2022	7 July 2022	2 days	Conservative
James Cleverly ^[R]	7 July 2022	6 September 2022	1 month and 30 days	Conservative
Ki Malthouse ^[L]	6 September 2022	25 October 2022	1 month and 19 days	Conservative
Gillian Keegan	25 October 2022	Incumbent	0 days*	Conservative

TIME FOR A (CREATIVE AND FORWARD-LOOKING) CHANGE

Twitter kicked off big time at half-term ... as usual. I wouldn't know as I don't get half-term breaks and my timeline is a curated oasis of calm, cat pictures, cakes and

critical race theory.

There was some noise in response to the latest pronouncement from the so-called social mobility tsar, suggesting that a preferred teaching style is the way children from "disadvantaged" backgrounds will break the glass ceiling. The other mic-drop moment was Lord Blunkett's 137-page 'Learning and Skills Report'.

The polarised responses to the report were succinctly summed up by one blogpost entitled 'Whose Evidence is it Anyway?' and by another called Education, Education, Education. As someone who worked in a system that grants a paid sabbatical year to all teachers in their seventh year of service, I think they're definitely on to something there!

NO ORDINARY SCHOOLS

Since we mentioned education's "strictest headteacher", you might be interested in the latest episode of the Rethinking Education podcast, which features a whistlestop tour of three extraordinary schools: Michaela School in north London, often described as the military bootcamp of education; XP School in Doncaster, with its focus on pastoral care, beautiful work and expeditionary learning; and the Self Managed Learning College in Brighton, where the pupils (aged 9-16) do what it says on the tin and manage their own learning full-time.

These three unique settings aside, what is becoming alarmingly ordinary in many schools is the overuse of restraint. An article by practitioners at Studio III entitled *Restraint and Seclusion in Irish and UK Schools* describes the extent of the problem and provides some concrete solutions that will support teachers, parents/carers and students.

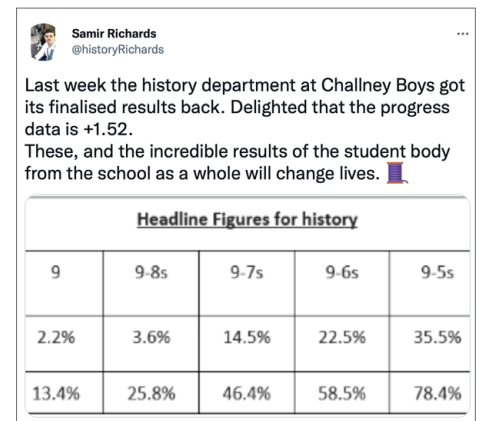
REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Black History Month was a feature in many schools throughout October, and some great resources were circulating again this year. An important item worth noting is the newly published 'Preventing hair discrimination in schools' from the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This has a wealth of explanations,

guidance, case studies, and videos to help schools foster an inclusive environment by ensuring their policies are not unlawfully discriminatory.

The Young Historians Project has produced incredible resources for schools to use year-round, including its *Radical Black Women* series featuring women who have made important contributions for justice and racial equality in Britain over the past century.

It turns out that representation does matter when it's genuinely embedded into the curriculum and staff racial diversity. This thread from Samir Richards shows how factors, including realigning the history curriculum, can have a marked impact on the engagement, progress and outcomes teachers and pupils.



A BLESSING AND A CURSE

And finally, bringing us back to the trials and tribulations of online life, a blog post by Special Needs Jungle details the level of surveillance that parents of children with SEND have uncovered. Several from Bristol reveal that council employees have monitored, collated and assessed their social media posts, accusing them of "campaigning" against the council.

The post outlines the law and guidance that allows local authorities to carry out this sort of surveillance. It gives some great advice on how to navigate social media as a blessing that empowers and informs, but which won't leave you open to undue surveillance when you express your views. Take care, it's a jungle out there!

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



Can the ECF really fix our perpetual retention crisis?

Guest contributor: Becky Allen, co-founder and chief analyst, Teacher Tapp

Schools in England have a problem retaining new teachers. For every 10 who begin their training, three never take a job in a state-funded school and a further one or two leave during their early career.

This creates a profession that is less experienced than in other developed countries and it creates a perpetual teacher recruitment crisis where we must keep stuffing the pipeline with new trainees. It damages the overall quality of teaching that students experience through unnecessarily high exposure to inexperienced staff. Early career retention is a problem worth fixing.

The Early Career Framework (ECF) introduced just over a year ago was the latest attempt to improve the early-career experience. Over the past year, the teacher survey app, Teacher Tapp, and the Gatsby Foundation have been **finding out how it is working**.

Some parts of the ECF are unambiguously good. Giving new teachers a reduced timetable in both years 1 and 2, for example, will reduce stress and exhaustion.

However, the ECF's package of mentoring, training and self-study materials seems to have been less warmly received. Those mentoring these new teachers were happy that the ECF improves knowledge and offers good guidance, but they complain that it adds too much to everyone's workload and can't meet individual needs well.

So, how should the ECF be refined to suit schools better? Our research suggests two modifications would be welcome.

First, review the overlap in content between initial teacher training and the early career framework. Eighty-four per cent of new teachers said they had not learned a great deal that they didn't already know. As teachers, we know that having opportunities to return to ideas is important to support the application of knowledge in the classroom. However, it does seem that there is currently too much repetition



between training and the ECF.

Second, adapt the framework to suit teachers' specialist subject and phase needs.

Teachers are diverse in their classroom lives. Those teaching four-year-olds have different needs to those teaching 14-year-olds. Physics teachers face challenges that are different to drama teachers.

The ECF is currently delivered to 96 per cent of teachers as a one-size-fits-all programme. Half of the respondents to our survey felt it a priority to tailor the programme. Mentors also wanted more specialised professional development to help them to deliver the ECF in their context.

Despite these complaints about workload and lack of specialisation, mentors and senior leaders are generally supportive. The Labour party, which is busily crafting new education policies this week, should note that just one-in-

ten say they would entirely scrap the reforms.

What teachers would like is a much greater role in co-designing early-career provision, alongside the right to adapt existing programmes to suit an individual teacher's needs.

The government had hoped the ECF would improve the retention of early-career teachers through high-quality professional development. Our survey responses suggest that it isn't having much of an effect.

Perhaps it is unrealistic for any professional development framework to substantially alter how manageable teaching is in those early years. Teaching is an unusual profession because we expect our novice professionals to complete the job independently. A professional development programme cannot change the reality of how hard it is for a novice to swim in the deep end from day one.

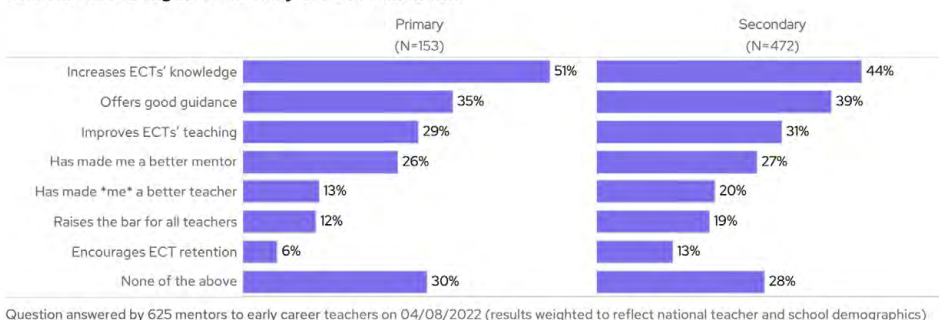
If only we could make swimming in the deep end less of an endurance test by further reducing contact hours for new teachers.

If only we could make the deep end a little shallower by allowing new teachers to start with small group teaching or co-teaching before moving on to leading whole classes.

Alas, both of these approaches to making teachers' early careers more survivable cost an enormous amount. Professional development solutions are appealing because they are cheap(er). So, let's make them the best we can.

And let's accept they may not do much to help new teachers survive.

What are the strengths of the Early Career Framework?



Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

In a new research report on boosting reading levels in secondary schools, Ofsted noted the importance of having "highly-skilled" librarians to help purchase books and give children recommendations.

Of six high-performing schools it visited to inform the research, three had qualified librarians.

All fine and dandy – but the unending austerity imposed on schools has cut away into their ability to provide such services.

A 2019 report commissioned by the Great School Libraries campaign found one in eight schools didn't even have a library.

Meanwhile the soaring energy bills under the current funding crisis mean such provision could be first on the chopping block.

Former schools minister Jonathan Gullis appeared on Channel 4 News today, defending home secretary Suella Braverman on overcrowding at Manston asylum centre.

He then suggested the public "aren't happy" with asylum seekers being moved to hotels, including in his Stoke constituency, where he named a venue set to house 80 people.

It came the day after a pensioner was suspected of throwing petrol bombs at a migrant centre in Kent.

TUESDAY

In more Gullis news, fresh from his 50 day-ministerial stretch, the MP has thrown his hat in the ring to be chair of the Education Committee.

And he has quite the list of backers. Among the MPs who nominated him

include former prime minister Boris Johnson, former home secretary Priti Patel and former business secretary Jacob Rees-Mogg. All the Tory party's finest. LOL

His former boss, ousted education secretary Kit Malthouse, also backed Gullis.

Bigging up his suitability for the role, Gullis mentioned his short spell in government – proudly describing "announcing further reforms to Initial Teacher Training, and funding for bursaries and scholarships to aid teacher recruitment."

Gullis' involvement in the ITT market review – in motion for several years – amounted to sticking his name and a few quotes on a press release announcing which providers had been re-approved.

Meanwhile the government announces bursaries for trainee teachers each year. While many subjects got extra cash this year, it was only because they were cut in previous years – resulting in catastrophic recruitment. Quite the achievements, Jonol

The business case for turning Oak into a government quango was published today. The big spiel from everyone involved in Oak is just how independent from government it will be (despite the education secretary basically choosing the CEO, able to appoint five directors and having to sign off on spending above certain thresholds, amongst other things).

Anyway, the business case also makes clear that Oak must be "continuously strategically aligned with government policy as it develops over time, both in terms of the national curriculum and wider related DfE policies".

For those who would dare to say WiW is all bad news, look away now. By next year, 400 mental health support teams will be working within schools and colleges attended by almost three million pupils in England.

This will increase to more than 500 from spring 2024 – surpassing commitments set out in the 2017 mental health green paper.

What's that we hear you say? It's taken *seven years* to get to this point? And the teams are also mostly dealing with the damage caused by the collapsing children's mental health services – which have left youngest waiting years for vital support? Er yes, but sssh – we were trying to be positive!

WEDNESDAY

In a Commons debate on the contribution of international students to the UK, SNP MP Alyn Smith gave an impassioned speech on those who "so enrich our communities and institutions by their presence – and that is before we get on to the economics".

He also lamented the loss of science and research funding from EU programme Horizon Europe, saying that this summer had seen the cancellation of 115 grants for UK-based scientists.

Later on in the debate, DfE minister Robert Halfon thanked him for "a very thoughtful speech".

"I love what he said about science and technology. I have a picture of President Kennedy on my wall in the Department for Education, because he put a man on the moon, and moved the whole engine of government, universities, and science to achieve that purpose," he added.





Assistant/ Vice Principal

Start date: As and when suitable for the right candidate
Salary: Highly competitive, negotiable depending on experience
Location: Birmingham, Hastings, London & Portsmouth across Primary and Secondary schools
Closing date: Monday 21st November at 9am but expressions of interest will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Ark is a charity that exists to make sure that all children, regardless of their background, have access to a great education and real choices in life. By joining us, you will be joining a network of 39 schools and a team of experts who are working together to overcome some of the biggest challenges in education. Our 2022 exam results saw our students perform better than the national average at every age and stage and we hope to continue to build on this success this year.

We are looking for strong Assistant & Vice Principals to join our network as part of our ambitious senior leadership teams to lead in areas such as curriculum, SEN and teaching & learning in addition to setting the agenda for the school and defining the strategy and future direction.

This would be a great opportunity for an existing Assistant/ Vice Principal who is looking for a new chapter or someone looking to take a step up and develop their career.

We understand the importance of developing and growing our leaders. We know that our schools are only as good as our teachers and leaders. You will have the opportunity to work with some of the best Principals and leaders nationally, as well as access to exceptional training, including nationally recognised qualifications such as NPQSL and NPQH.

If you want to find out more about these speculative vacancies, contact us for an informal, confidential chat. Please send a brief career summary or up-to-date CV to shevonnae.sokoya@arkonline.org.



DID YOU KNOW?



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David Ross Education Trust

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Click here to contact our team





Principal at Vanguard School

Location: Vanguard School (Kennington, Lambeth, SE11 6QH)

Salary: Competitive

Contract: Permanent

Closing date: 9am Monday 21st November

Interview date: Wednesday 30 the November

School Visit: Visits to the school can be arranged and are welcomed.

About the school:

We are a forward-thinking Autism Specific Specialist Free School seeking a new Principal to advance our school in its next stage of development.

This is an exciting opportunity for you to join a dynamic team and be part of the school's journey in establishing excellence in the education of autistic pupils.

The NAS Academies Trust (NASAT) in partnership with Lambeth Local Authority established a special free school (NAS Vanguard School) for autistic pupils. The school opened in January 2020 in fantastic purpose-built facilities. Vanguard school is an extremely popular 11-19 school looking to build a strong reputation and foster local links.

Every child is entitled to an education and every child deserves the best possible developmental opportunities so that they learn more and do more, preparing themselves for life after school. Our autistic pupils learn in happy and safe environments that are able to support their individual needs as autistic learners.

NAS Academies Trust currently includes two other free schools, Church Lawton School & Thames Valley School.

This role will enable you to influence & contribute to the future of the NAS Academies Trust schools.

Who we are looking for:

We are seeking to appoint an outstanding individual who will have a wide range of skills and experience and an evidence-based approach to leadership, who is looking to work in an ambitious and rewarding environment.

This is an exciting opportunity for a passionate and inspirational leader within specialist education to shape the future direction of the school and lead the way in transforming the lives of young people on the autism spectrum and develop a true community school which is linked with community groups, parents, local authorities, and other schools in the region.

What we can offer you

In addition to a competitive salary, the following benefits are offered:

- Cycle scheme.
- 24/7 employee assistance programme - a confidential support programme designed to help you deal with personal and professional problems.
- Headspace membership - Headspace is a global leader in mindfulness and meditation through its app and online content.
- Occupational sick pay.
- A range of discounts from hundreds of retailers and hotels.
- Salary Finance - Our charity partner offers Salary Finance loans as a financial wellbeing benefit for our staff.
- Eyecare vouchers - employees who need glasses to use computer screens.
- Pension.

How to apply

- To apply for this role please complete the online application form which can be accessed [HERE](#).
- When completing the supporting statement, please refer to the job description and person specification and highlight any information that shows your suitability for the role

We adhere to all the necessary safeguarding checks as outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022, including checking ID documents on all site visits (entry will not be allowed without this), all pre-employment vetting checks must include; references from previous employers, an enhanced DBS with barred list check, a section 128 check and a check on the Teaching Regulation Agency.

We are an equal opportunities employer.

Starting 1st January 2023 or Easter 2023



Principal

Location: Rosedale Primary School

Grade: Leadership Scale 15 - 21 (£59,581 - £69,031 – Pay award pending)

Responsible to: CEO, Deputy CEO/COO, Director of Primary Education, Trust Directors, School Governors

The Directors of Exceed Learning Partnership are looking to appoint an outstanding strategic leader who will inspire our pupils and empower our staff to continue to strive for the very best education. This is a great opportunity for an exceptional individual to join a highly successful and outstanding team. Taking accountability and responsibility for academy performance and with a commitment to creating optimum educational opportunities for all pupils across the organisation.

The ideal candidate will have:

- A record of outstanding and inspirational strategic leadership
- A strong background in Teaching and Learning
- The drive and commitment to improving the life chances of all pupils at Rosedale Primary School
- A proven track record of accelerated pupil progress and raised standards
- Strong literacy and numeracy skills
- Excellent organisational skills
- Experience of working with children with a range of needs
- Good understanding of the importance of transition into all phases.
- A good communicator with excellent interpersonal skills
- A team player who contributes to whole academy and trust improvement.

The Trust will offer:

- Excellent career development working alongside a CEO and Director of Primary Education who are passionate about education, teaching & learning
- Talented and hard-working professional colleagues who are committed to children's success across the curriculum
- The most up to date research and opportunities to influence national policy.
- Wonderful pupils and parents who support the school in all its' aspirations.
- Lots of fun and inspiration to achieve your very best!

Further information including Recruitment Pack and Application Form please visit the Trust Website <https://www.exceedlearningpartnership.co.uk/vacancies/> or by contacting the Trust office

Email: admin@exceedlearningpartnership.com

Telephone Number 01709 805175

Closing date for applications: Monday 28th November 2022 – 12pm

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**.